

# PASSOVER and the BRIDE of Christ

**Most Bible Students are aware that God was Married to Israel. It is also Well Established that Christ will Marry the Church. The Question is, Did He ever Formally Propose Marriage to His Beloved Institution?**

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It may seem odd to couple together two terms that seem to occupy Testamental extremes, one being predominantly an Old Covenant association, and the other, not only New Covenant, but Millennial Age. Few are remotely aware of the profound involvement between these two institutions: Passover, and Christ's Bride, and until the summer of 1996, myself included. The matrix between these two, of course, is the Paschal Lamb of God,<sup>1</sup> who is the affianced Husband of the Bride!

If you don't know how and when and under what circumstances Christ first proposed marriage to the Church, and with what words He did so, you need to read through this article.

It was one of those days, like during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when my boss, a retired Army Colonel, came bounding down the stairs from his office, exclaiming almost gleefully, "*Well, it looks like war with the Soviets!*" Being a recent high school grad, in the Vietnam War Era, facing the draft, this got my full attention. It was right at that exquisite moment just before Khrushchev blinked. I remember his exact words and just where I was at the time! Similarly, a few months later, hearing that President Kennedy had been shot, I remember exactly where I was, and the associates that were with me on break there at work, rather vividly.

Like these, at another profound moment, in the summer of 1996, I was listening to a segment of the radio broadcast "*Focus on the Family*" in the car. They had on a guest speaker, Ray Vander Laan a Bible teacher, who had studied at a Jewish

College in Jerusalem in his youth. His topic that day was how that the Scriptures have, contained within them, vignettes of Jewish Culture of the first century, many of them rather subliminal, that we, as twentieth century Christians would not normally perceive. His first example caused another one of those "I remember exactly where I was" moments! The thing is, the speaker may not have realized the full implications of what he was saying. But, for some reason, his comments caused lights to come on all through my consciousness. He provided that cognitive spark that opened up a whole new area of awareness, that I want you to share.

The True Passover, as Christ presented it<sup>2</sup> and as He fulfilled it, is profoundly essential to the emerging Bride of Christ. If that attainment is your quest, you'll want to know what this connection is!

The following is a partial transcript of that segment aired on the radio broadcast: *Focus on the Family*. Dr. James Dobson introduced "Ray Vander Laan, a teacher for 19 years at the High School level, currently the religion instructor at Holland Christian School in Michigan, and who had studied Jewish education in both the United States and in Israel, including Yeshiva University in New York and American Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem. He is getting his PHD now ... Here's Ray Vander Laan to begin."....."*I'd like to take this chance to share a few thoughts with you today. God put something very different in my life when I was about 19. I had a chance to go to Israel and study, and when I was there, I discovered that there was an element in my own Christian background that had been somewhat lacking. I began to discover that if you put the Bible back into its*

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. 5:23-27 "*Christ is head of the Church; and He is the Savior of the body... Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of the water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, ... but that it should be Holy and without blemish.*"

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<sup>2</sup> My article, "*The Passover of the Exodus*" deals with the apparent timing discrepancy between the Passover of the Jews and that of early Christian practice.

*Jewish setting, ( it's a Jewish book, written by Jewish people, to Jewish people, initially at least ), it suddenly comes alive in new and different ways. Now that's not to say it's not for Gentiles, or that it doesn't have a timeless message, of course it does! It's to say that it has an additional nuance of meaning that can be found if you look at the Bible in the setting in which God placed it. I call it thinking Hebrew, and I've been involved in my career as a teacher for many years, trying to understand what does it mean, if we put the Bible back into that setting? I would like to share a couple thoughts coming out of that context with you.*

*I remember very clearly sitting in an Orthodox Jewish classroom, listening to a Jewish man lecture, a brilliant Jewish individual, not a Christian, and he was describing the marriage customs of the first century Jewish people in the land of Israel. I sat there as a Christian, not Jewish, I'm Gentile, Dutch no less, and I'm sitting in the classroom, and I'm listening to this Orthodox Jew describe marriage. And he described how a young man would reach marrying age, and the young man and his father would pick out a family in the land of Israel that had a daughter, a Godly family that had a daughter, that would be an appropriate wife. ...And the young man and his father would go to the young girl's house and they would sit and negotiate the bride price, because the loss of a daughter was an enormous loss. When they'd arrived at the price that was to be paid for this young girl, 14, 15, 16 years of age, the young man would then ask her to marry him, but he did it in a very Jewish way.*

*The young man's father would take a flask of wine. He would pour a cup of wine and hand it to his son. The son would then turn to the young woman, and with all the solemnity of an oath before Almighty God Himself, that young man would take that cup of wine and say to that young woman, "**This cup is a new covenant in my blood, which I offer to you.**" In other words, "I love you. I'll be your faithful husband. Will you be my bride?"*

*And tears came to my eyes as I recognized Jesus at the last Supper with His collection of Jewish disciples, who knew the Passover liturgy since they were old enough to think. Suddenly in the middle*

*of the liturgy, after the third cup, completely out of place, Jesus, on His way to pay the bride price with His own blood, turns to those disciples and says to them in the language of the culture, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood". I love you, Will you be my bride?*

*And every single time you sit in your fellowship or your community in your Church, and your Elder, your Pastor, or whoever leads the Service, turns to you and offers you the cup, Jesus, in the language of the culture says to you, "I love you", and the only way I can describe the depths and the passion of that love is to say, "Will you be my wife?"*

This element in the presentation of Christ's last physical Passover conveys a subliminal message not apparent to those unfamiliar with the culture of that era, but which, no doubt, came across to those in the Upper Room. (Then, its not being obvious to all may have been intentional, as we'll see.)

Actually, there is a little more to the ceremony than Mr. Vander Laan presents, but it was this broadcast that first made me aware of the significance of the presentation of that cup in the manner in which it was. The Jewish marriage proposal ceremony was conducted as he relates, but the ceremony carries further. In presenting the cup, **if** the young girl accepted the young man's proposal of marriage, she would take the cup from him and drink of it. To seal their betrothal, the young man would then take back the cup from her and he would drink of it himself!

Jesus Christ, our Passover, formally presented the New Covenant to His Bride, at Passover, in the format of a first century Jewish marriage proposal. But, He pointedly **declined** to drink of that cup just then, as the Biblical narrative specifically states! At that point in the ceremony where He, as the prospective bridegroom, would have partaken of the cup Himself, He made a rather startling statement, that He **would not** drink of it from that day onward, until He drank of it new, with them, in the Kingdom! This mention suggests that the disciples understood the significance, because after each of them had partaken of it, as He asked them to, at the time the cup was passed back to Him, at that very moment in time when He would be **expected** to drink of it, He announced that He would not!

(But He did say that He **would** drink of it, and exactly when He would!)

Two things we need to note: First, their mention of this detail suggests that they understood that this new liturgy was borrowed from a formal proposal of marriage, and that His partaking of that cup at that time would have **sealed** that betrothal. (It does not say there why He didn't partake, though there was an important reason!) Second, later that evening, He said, "*The cup which the Father gave me, shall I not drink it?*" These details, woven into the New Testament narrative years later suggest they **knew** that He was here proposing marriage to His Bride: Not only including them, but many others to follow. That's why He deferred drinking of that cup until the establishment of the Kingdom!<sup>3</sup> So that additional numbers could also be added to the Bride! That opportunity remains open until that day when He partakes of that cup anew, with them, Himself.<sup>4</sup> That occasion will conclude the current opportunity and seal the number. Beyond that time, it will no longer be possible to become a part of the Bride of Christ! Those called into the Family who are not receptive of the Passover invitation, or who come after<sup>5</sup> that great Passover in the Kingdom, will be included, but NOT as part of the Bride!

Does all of this suggest that observing the Passover reaffirms our commitment to be a part of the Bride of Christ? Taking the consideration a step further, Is our observance of the Passover and our re-commitment essential for us to remain included in the Bride of Christ? Is the typical Communion service, observed weekly, or monthly, or quarterly, as some do, the same as observing the annual Passover? On what basis would we conclude that Passover is not incumbent upon all true Christians? After all, He

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<sup>3</sup> This consideration offers proof that the Kingdom of God, as He considered it, was to be established only at His return. If it is already in existence, when did He and they partake of that cup together as He said? Further, if He did partake of that cup already, then the opportunity for others to become added to the Bride would have long since been closed! Their presence at this later occasion also suggests a resurrection.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 14:23-25 Luke 22:18 Matthew 26:29 "*But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom.*" This spoken just at that moment in time when they would have expected that He would have!

<sup>5</sup> See my articles on the *Millennial Kingdom* and *The Hope of Last Great Day* for further explanation of the other harvest.

gave specific instructions to keep it. "*This do in remembrance of me.*" The Apostle Paul, years later, specifically instructed us to keep the Passover, "*Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast.*"<sup>6</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:7), and gave specific instructions on how to keep it, in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor.11:23-29. Here we have a clear New Testament instruction to keep the feast of Passover, yet few choose to comply! It is not an observance that is suspended between the last pre-crucifixion evening and the Kingdom occasion. No church suggests that! Paul wouldn't have said, "*For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do shew the Lord's death til He come.*" if he didn't expect they would be observing it on a regular ongoing basis!

No, the Passover is every bit a New Covenant institution! Christ personally re-instituted its true observance, instructed that we keep it a perpetual memorial, then inspired the Apostle Paul decades later to issue instructions **to** keep it, then to repeat the instructions as to how to keep it, observing both its external essentials, but not without the proper internal essential, a 'worthy' spiritual state!<sup>7</sup>

The early Church understood. It wasn't until the fourth century that apostate christianity succeeded in substantially eliminating Passover observance in the Church by force! The 'quarto-deciman controversy', the observance of the fourteenth day of the first month, became pointedly excluded from orthodox Christianity in favor of the later Easter tradition. Anyone not familiar with this issue should review its place in Church history. The polarization against its observance, more than three centuries after Christ, is well documented! Likely, it was what Jesus wanted! Passover wasn't intended to be for everyone. We should note that the statement, "*Many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matt.22:14) was made in the context of marriage! Is there a 'chosen inner circle' who will comprise the Bride of Christ, who keep it? Think about that!

Now, also contained within this subliminal picture is another illustration, that warrants our notice,

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the Jewish Passover observance is not the same as the New Testament observance, neither in timing or symbology. My article *The Passover of the Exodus* verifies Christ's accuracy in deference to orthodox tradition!

<sup>7</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:29

because, as we'll see, the new inter-relationship between these two young people illustrates something very profound with respect to the existence of and the comparison between the two covenants: The Old and the New.

First, presenting the New Covenant in this context, illustrates something we need to comprehend. Too many are quick to disregard completely all Old Covenant proscriptions in favor of the New.

Think about this more deeply. Consider what those two young people would have thought regarding the Old Covenant. That covenant, under which each lived as individuals, set prohibitions against murder, theft, adultery, lust, idolatry, disrespect of parents, among others. In coming into this 'NEW' covenant, would all of those disappear in favor of only those being made individually and personally between just themselves? In other words, would all requirements imposed upon them in society be abolished in favor of a whole new set of requirements? The flaws in that logic should be obvious.

No, all of the moral standards under which they functioned as citizens in their culture would have remained, just as before. What was 'new' were the commitments now being made between themselves which still involved the same standards! Those same standards were now elevated to a higher degree of application. Breaking any of those standards, such as adultery, murder or theft, against each other became infinitely more offensive than ever before, because they were entering into a relationship that involved mutual devotion and trust!

If a man were to steal from his wife, it'd be the same crime as if from any stranger, except for the higher level of commitment and trust involved within a betrothed or married state. Upon entering a 'new covenant', fidelity and trust between these two individuals makes the moral standard infinitely more personal. Compliance with the moral standards of the society, between themselves, becomes elevated to a matter of the heart, and any infraction thereafter is magnified to a more serious offence.

It wasn't a matter of scrapping the old moral code in favor of a new one. It was a re-incorporation of those former standards to a higher intra-personal commitment level than before! As singles, the covenant's moral standards applied generally

toward all in that society. As betrothed individuals, those **same** standards become all the more obligatory, as the 'new' covenant bound the two to one another, it becoming an even higher - level offence should any of those standards be violated with respect to each other!

The New Covenant did not abolish the Old, it elevated it <sup>8</sup> to a new inter-personal commitment level, being now made also a matter of the heart, not just rote performance out of fear of punishment. Those same laws still applied, only to a much higher degree, between the covenant makers!

That inference is also apparent in the perfectly consistent illustration Jesus chose to use when first introducing the New Covenant to His prospective Bride: Spiritual Israel: "*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, <sup>9</sup>... But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;*" (Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Hebrews 8:8-10) This latter New Testament reference, being verbatim with the other one, demonstrates their perceptions of God's Law being made a matter of the heart hadn't changed one iota even three decades after it was first proposed!

This is the prior-perception the disciples there in the Upper Room, at that most significant Passover, would have had toward a New Covenant. It would not have occurred to them that the New abolished the Law, but rather, that it internalized it, making their commitment to it all the more deeply personal

The thoughtful illustration Jesus specifically chose to use in formally presenting the New Covenant to His Church, His prospective Bride, for the first time, solidly reinforced that perception. **Ω**

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<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 42:21 "...He will magnify the Law and make it honorable." Honor figures heavily into the marital covenant!

<sup>9</sup> Notice that he involved the idea of a marriage in the Old Testament announcement of the New Covenant! This prior marriage also was based on God's Moral Laws!