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A Biblical Approach to Establishing Marital Intimacy

Part II: God in the Marriage Motif in Scripture

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Marriage was designed to be a lifelong relationship of intimacy between a husband and a wife. The Designer and Model for this relationship is God. Man was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) with a personality which could function morally, socially and purposefully. Scripture uses two different ways in depicting God as a model for intimacy. First, the recorded activities of the persons of the Trinity as they relate to each other provide examples of selfless behavior for social relationships. Secondly, writers of Scripture impart revelation about God through the use of the marriage motif. In the OT, the prophets present Israel as the wife (Isa 50:1; 54:4-6; Jer 3:20) or bride (Isa 62:5; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:16-20) and Jehovah as the husband who has entered into a marriage covenant with His people (Jer 3:20; Ezek 16; Hos 2; Isa 62:4). In the NT, Christ is called a bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20; John 3:29; Matt 25:1-13). Paul portrays Christ as related to the Church which is a pure bride (II Cor 11:2). In Ephesians 5:22-23, Paul draws an analogy between Christ and the Church on the one hand, and the Christian husband and wife on the other. The Apostle John concludes Scripture with the marriage metaphor (Rev 19:6-9; 21:2, 9-11).

Studying about God in the marriage motif involves passages describing God in anthropomorphic language. An anthropomorphic expression is an expression which is used to explain some function or characteristic of God by using terms descriptive of human elements. Three terms are used to identify this type of expression. First, whenever deity is represented with human feelings, it is called anthropopathism. Secondly, Yamauchi has coined the word,

anthropopraxism, which means the representation of deity with the activities of humanity.¹ Thirdly, "anthropomorphism" can be used in a general way to include all the ideas of human form, feelings and function. Fowler asserts:

Every effort to interpret an anthropomorphism should be an exciting experience, and that is exactly God's purpose for revealing Himself pictographically as opposed to propositionally: in order that man might not only learn something about Him, but that he might be affected by that very learning process. Anthropomorphisms differ from other modes of revelation in that its pedagogical purpose is both provocative and informational. Indeed, it is instructional by being provocative.²

To properly interpret the anthropomorphisms used of God in the marriage motif, a person needs to study the context of the usage and to keep in mind that anthropomorphisms usually relate to some relative attribute(s) of the divine nature of God rather than to His absolute essence.

God in the Marriage Motif of the Prophets

The office of the prophet was established by God (Deut 18:9-22) to give divine communication to Israel, God's chosen people, who had entered into covenant with God at Sinai (Exod 19-20, 24; Deut 5). Most of their ministries involved calling the king (Deut 17:14-20) and/or the children of Israel back to the law of God which Moses presented to them. This included reminders of God's covenant agreements which the people were breaking. Of the writing prophets, five appear to use the marriage motif to call the people back to covenant faithfulness from spiritual idolatry and adultery. They are Hosea (760-712 BC), Isaiah (739-681 BC), Jeremiah (627-575 BC), Ezekiel (593-560 BC) and Malachi (435-415 BC).

All of these men ministered in days of apostasy in Israel. Hosea protested against the Baal worship of the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah in his early ministry faced an idolatrous realm under Ahaz. Jeremiah held to God's truth in spite of false prophets who counseled to withstand the Babylonians who finally carried them away captive. Ezekiel was the prophet in captivity with Judah while

she was away from God's place of worship for seventy years. Malachi lived in a time of hypocrisy in religion when the people were asking, "Where is the God of justice?" As Moses (Deut 32:4), these true heirs of the faith of Israel called the people back to God whose ways are judgment, justice, righteousness and truth.³

These prophets portray God as the husband who covenanted with Israel in the wilderness and who manifested commendable qualities toward her (Hos 6:7; 8:1). The husband-wife or marriage motif is the most common figure used of God's relationship with His people.⁴ Edmond Jacob points out,

Just as in marriage the wife becomes the property of her husband who has purchased her for money, Yahweh has taken possession of the people, like a faithful husband he assures them fertility and prosperity; the wife owes obedience and faithfulness, her infidelity would be a refusal to acknowledge the grace of election. Marriage is in effect an election before being a covenant and that, much more than Israelite law, gave the husband the right to repudiate his wife.⁵

The marriage motif stressed the authority of the husband in conjunction with the traits of love, kindness, mercy and concern. It also emphasized love as longsuffering, ownership by the husband (Hos 3:1-2, cf 1 Cor 6:20), the marriage bond's limitation to one mate, the legality of the relationship, and the strength of the marriage bond (cf Hosea's patience and undying devotion).⁶ It is fitting that the prophets used this motif to stress the covenant idea. Mendenhall states, "A covenant was more than alliance: it was the intermingling and identification of one life with another."⁷

Qualities of the covenant-keeping God

The OT presents the qualities of the covenant-keeping God as faithfulness, love, compassion, righteousness, justice, holiness, knowledge, truthfulness and jealousy. These same qualities were expected in Israel, the wife.

Faithfulness (*hesed*). The word *hesed* is variously translated "faithfulness," "lovingkindness," "covenant love," "loyalty" and "loyal lovingkindness." The basic concept of the Hebrew *hesed* is to denote that attitude of loyalty and faithfulness which both parties to a covenant should observe towards each other.⁸ The basic ingredients of *hesed* are "reciprocity, mutual assistance, sincerity, friendliness,

brotherliness, duty, loyalty and love."⁹ In concluding a comprehensive study of this word, Glueck states:

The *hesed* of God, while it is not to be identified with His grace, is still based upon the latter, insofar as the relationship between God and people, structured by Him as a covenantal relationship, was effected by electing Israel through an act of grace. The significance of *hesed* can be rendered by "loyalty," "mutual aid" or "reciprocal love."¹⁰

An illustration of God's *hesed* is contained in Exodus 34:6-7:

The Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness (*hesed*) for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin: yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

Thus *hesed*, a quality which describes God as the husband and which should describe Israel as the wife, signifies "loyal lovingkindness."

Love ('ahab). The word *'ahab* is "equivalent to the English to love in the sense of having a strong emotional attachment to and desire either to possess or to be in the presence of the object."¹¹ "The intensity of the meaning ranges from God's infinite affection for his people to the carnal appetites of a lazy glutton."¹² Love in this sense desires the very best for the object of love. It is the type of love described in Deuteronomy 4:37: "Because He loved (*'ahab*) your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power" (cf Deut 7:7, 8). Snaith sees this love of God for Israel as an unconditioned sovereign love.¹³ It is an elective love rather than covenant love (*hesed*).

Compassion (raham). *Raham* means a deep and tender feeling of compassion, such as is aroused by the sight of weakness or suffering in those that are dear to us or in need of our help.¹⁴ The root idea of *raham* refers to deep love anchored in some natural relationship. "In the Piel it is used for the deep inward feeling we know variously as compassion, pity, mercy."¹⁵ The plural noun form

is translated "bowels," "compassion," "mercies." This use corresponds to the Greek *splanchnizomai* word group which means "bowels," "affections" or "compassion." Jesus' caring, emotional response is set forth both by this word and by *agape* (love). Whenever Jesus is described in the NT as "having compassion," the occasion is often the turning point in someone's life.¹⁶ *Raham* shows the affectionate, caring relationship God has with his "wife" or "children" (Ps 103:13; Mic 7:19).

Righteousness (tsadeq). The root idea of *tsadeq* is conformity to a norm. The standard or moral norm in the OT is the nature and will of God. The OT has two ways of picturing God as acting righteously.

First, "he will judge the world in righteousness" (Ps 9:8; 96:13; 98:9). As moral judge, God hates wickedness (Ps 45:7). His acts of judgment thus are expressions of his intrinsic righteousness. Second, we find in the OT the realization that our righteous God is also a Savior (Isa 45:21). The psalmist cries, Deliver me in your righteousness (Ps 31:1; cf 119:40). God's saving acts are viewed as being in total harmony with his righteousness.¹⁷

In His covenant relationship with Israel, God will act out of His righteousness. "The great promise of Hosea 2:19 (2:21, Heb.) places righteousness as the first quality of the people whom Jehovah will eventually betroth to Himself."¹⁸ Hosea 2:19-20 reads:

And I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In loving kindness and in compassion, And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the Lord.

Justice (shaphat). The primary sense of *shaphat* is to exercise the process of government. Since ancient people did not normally distinguish between the various branches and functions of government, this word means more than "to judge" in the judicial, governmental aspect. It can mean "to act as a ruler"; "to judge civil, domestic, and religious cases"; "to vindicate, to condemn" and "to punish" plus other meanings of judicial-executive import.¹⁹ Koehler and Baumgartner say that the root word means "to settle a cause" or "to keep a man to his right."²⁰ Underlying the entire covenant arrangement with law and ordinance is the fact of the legal right of

the individual as a member of the covenant community. Israel acted improperly in her duty to be just toward Jehovah; thereby causing Jehovah to exercise His justice upon them. As Amos pleaded with Israel to have justice run down as waters and righteousness as a perennial stream (5:24); only then would God's justice for Israel be fully expressed in her private and public life as God's wife.

Holiness (qadash). The root meaning of the word is "to be holy," "to withhold from profane use," "to be treated with special care," or "fallen to the sanctuary's share."²¹ Although "holiness" represents moral and spiritual qualities, its basic idea is one of "position or relationship as existing between God and some person or thing consecrated to Him."²² That which was consecrated to God was to be reserved for His use forever. As God's covenant wife (Ezek 16:32, 60), Israel was to be holy unto the Lord. In Deuteronomy 7:6 Israel was told "you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." When Israel was set apart or separated unto God at Sinai, she was to observe the ritual and moral aspects of obedience to God by maintaining a life of holiness.

With holiness displayed in God's moral perfection and faithful commitment to good, God always exercises judgment on those who abandon the way of goodness for the way of sin. Isaiah declares to sinful Israel, "But the Lord of hosts will be exalted in Judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness" (Isa 5:16). Thus, holiness is required of Israel in her marriage to the holy God.

Knowledge (yada'). The range of *yada'* includes all kinds of knowledge gained through the senses.²³ One of the glaring deficiencies of Israel as the covenant people was their failure "to know" Jehovah and His ways. Hosea condemns Israel for this very reason (4:1, 6):

Listen to the word of God, O sons of Israel, For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

To correct this, Israel as a repentant harlot must return to a loving husband who forgives.

Reliable, truthful, faithful ('aman). This word has the idea of "certainty," "steadfastness," "reliable" or "trustworthy." A person who is true to his word can be relied upon because his word and his deed agree. Thus Deuteronomy 7:9 describes God as "the faithful God who keeps His covenant . . . with those who love Him and keep His commandments." This is exactly why the prophets praise God and at the same time exhort Israel as an immoral wife to repent and return (Hosea, Jer 2; Ezek 16). God as a husband who has covenanted with a wife (Mal 2:14-16) is trustworthy and speaks the truth. He expects the same of His wife.

Jealousy (qana'). Jealousy is a very strong emotion or passionate desire whereby some quality or possession of the object is desired by the person. The word *qana'* could be translated "zeal." *Qana'* can have either positive or negative connotations. Negatively, zeal for another's property is envy. Positively, on the other hand, zeal for one's own property is jealousy. Thus the word can be used in both positive and negative senses depending on the context in which it is found. Concerning the positive connotation, one writer states:

The strong emotion represented by *qana* can be viewed positively as a high level of commitment when it describes the feeling of a person for something that is right by his or her own.²⁴

The central meaning of the word *qana'* relates to jealousy in the marriage relationship. In the marriage setting, it has the sense of intense love which will show itself in zealous activity to retain the mate. Jealousy in marriage is used in the OT to describe the relationship between God and Israel. At the very beginning of the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai, God announced "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5). God's jealousy for His people reveals itself in anger which results in acts of judgment to bring Israel, the wife, back into a right relationship (Ezek 16:38, 42).

God's jealousy when it was offended issued in just retribution, but when it was stirred by His grace, it resulted in eternal love.²⁵ Isaiah 42:13 describes God in His zeal against idolatry and spiritual adultery: "The Lord will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a

war cry. He will prevail against His enemies." "In man's relation to God, the act of zeal is more positively viewed as the act of the advancement of God and His glory over against substitutes."²⁶ Richards writes:

Neither God nor humans are cold, computerlike beings. Persons have emotions as well as intellect and will, and often these emotions are strong. Jealousy or zeal, is one of the stronger emotions.

God's jealousy, although it issues in punishment as well as blessing, is viewed as something both righteous and good. In general, human jealousy is viewed with suspicion. Our emotions are too often tainted by the sin that twists human personalities. But we can experience strong emotional commitments to what is good, as well as strong emotional desires for what is not our own.²⁷

Jealousy for one's own marriage in a positive regard for one's mate will result in zeal displayed in activities to bring back the straying mate. Such is the model of God in the book of Hosea. After Israel says, "I will go back to my first husband," God replaces his judgments upon her with allurements of kindly speaking and giving of gifts (2:14). God's holy nature always causes Him to do right with His emotion of jealousy. Mates whose wives or husbands are involved in sinful behavior which could wreck the marriage need to follow God's model in the expression of their emotion of jealousy.

Prophetic Uses of the Marriage Motif

Hosea's Usage. The prophet Hosea ministered in the northern kingdom, Israel (760-712 BC) during the last wicked years of the ten tribes. Even though all of the kings of Israel were wicked, the lands of Judah and Israel were experiencing prosperity. Religiously, it was a time when people substituted outward form for inward reality. Political alliances introduced and promoted the corruptions of Syrian and Phoenician idolatry, based in a fertility cult. The cultic practice was chiefly associated with religiously sanctioned immorality portraying the sexual union of Baal and Asherah by its worshippers with cultic prostitutes for the purpose of insuring the fertility of the land. The people departed from their covenant with Jehovah and worshipped Baal and Asherah (Hos 3:4; 10:1-2) on high places contrary to God's commands (Exod 20:24; Deut 12:5). Israel's

society became characterized by a sharp contrast between luxurious living and abject poverty, by robbery, oppression, falsehood, adultery, murder and military despotism, by political unrest, rebellion, anarchy, and idolatry.

Against this historical setting, God told Hosea to take "a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms." By so doing a significant ethical question is raised. Did God command Hosea to marry a harlot? The answer is "No!" The best explanation for the interpretation of this command is to take a literal, proleptic approach. That is, when Hosea married Gomer, she was not a harlot, but later became one after having their three children. God knew this would happen because of His omniscience. Hosea's marriage experience with an unfaithful wife became a picture of God and unfaithful Israel who had broken the covenant and had resorted to spiritual adultery and idolatry. Hosea begins to grasp God's loyal lovingkindness and zeal when he is told to go after Gomer in love to get her back (3:7). Hosea buys her for the price of a common slave and restores her to her home. God uses the analogy of Hosea's marriage to show Israel that failure to follow her heavenly husband by pursuing other gods is equivalent to fornication and adultery (2, 4-14).

The parallels between God's marriage and Hosea's marriage are clear: (1) Both Hosea and Jehovah sought out their wives and began their marriages with joy and bright hopes for the future (1:3; 9:10; 11:1; 13:4-5). (2) Both Gomer and Israel entered the marriage covenant of their own free will (Hos 1:2-3; Exod 19:8). (3) Both Gomer and Israel spurned the love of their husbands and went after other lovers (3:1; 2:2, 5, 7, 10, 13). (4) Both Hosea and Jehovah demonstrate love for their wives after they had been unfaithful (3:1). (5) Both husbands, after they recovered their wives, isolated them from the enticements that had previously ensnared them (3:3-4).

Some writers propose a sixth parallel in the birth and naming of Hosea's third child, Lo Ammi ("not my people"). They see this as a reference to an illegitimate child (1:9). In Hosea 5:7 Jehovah states that Israel has dealt treacherously with him because "they have borne illegitimate children."²⁸ This understanding is questionable, since the text appears to show the three children's births occurred before Gomer became unfaithful. These parallels as well as Jehovah's comparisons to sexual unfaithfulness show that the

theology of Hosea's book is based on the marriage motif which illustrates Israel's breakage of the covenant with God at Sinai.

The behavior of Jehovah and His instructions to Hosea concerning conduct with his unfaithful wife are exemplary for Christian marriages with similar problems. (1) As the jealous God (Exod 20:5; 34:14), Jehovah reveals His zeal from His deep, loyal love (*hesed*) by stating the truth about Israel's sin (covenant-breaking by adultery) and about what she needs to do about it (2:2, 8, 13; 4:1-2). (2) He endeavors to cut her off from her present sinful way (2:3-7). Feinberg writes,

The prophet thus in vivid unmistakable language outlines the curse and blight of Israel's disobedience; nakedness, wasteness, hunger, thirst, shame, sadness, loneliness, and desolation will be her sad portion.²⁹

God's purpose is that she might remember, reason, and return (Hos 2:7). While God was doing this, He was acting according to His nature of holiness, righteousness, justice and loyal lovingkindness. (3) Jehovah takes back the gifts to Israel that He gave her at the covenant ceremony. Israel wanted no part of His gifts of the law and His presence among them, but she wanted the land of Canaan with the promise of productivity and prosperity. God, however, removes these with famine and political unrest (Hos 2:9-12; 7:16; 9:2). (4) God sets out to win back the love of Israel. The word in Hosea 2:14 which is translated "allure" is *pathah* which means "to persuade with words," "to seduce," "to entice."³⁰ The root idea of the verb is "to be open." Jehovah woos Israel back with loving words and gives hope. He says that when she returns, she will call Him "husband" and not "my Lord." This shows "affection" and not domination in the relationship. God as husband gives Himself to Israel following her repentance and evidence of having forsaken all other lovers (Hos 3:3). (5) God promises a renewal of the covenant and a betrothing forever in righteousness (*tsadeq*) and judgment (*shaphat*) and loyal lovingkindness (*hesed*) and compassion (*raham*) (Hos 2:19). This refers to God's treatment of repentant Israel as a new virgin who marries God forever (Hos 14:4). This grace and forgiveness which God gives as though nothing has happened is truly exemplary for couples with marriage problems. God's loyal love and zealous activities to correct the sin problem in the marriage is the model for Hosea in correcting his own marriage problem. Hosea's

use of the marriage motif in his message to Israel was certainly preached from a heart of love and understanding because of his personal experience in his marriage. Mason observes:

Once again, we see marriage as the most intimate barometer of spiritual life: alienation within marriage is symptomatic of the deepest alienation of all, that of a people from themselves and from their God, while married love is held up as the image of God's love and faithfulness.³¹

Isaiah's Usage. The prophet Isaiah began his prophetic ministry in the last year of King Uzziah (Isa 6). Isaiah was a married man whose wife was called a prophetess (Isa 8:3). They had two sons: Maher-shalal-hash-baz which means "hastening to the spoil" and Shear-jashub which means "a remnant shall return." The names of the sons speak of Assyria's mad lust for the conquest of Judah and of God's promise to bring a remnant back from captivity.

Isaiah prophesied in a time of material prosperity and spiritual laxity. The good kings of Judah tried to get rid of idolatrous worship among the people, but Ahaz and Manasseh advanced it. Isaiah was a man of culture and may have had a blood relationship to the royal line, which would account for his easy access to the royal court. Isaiah warned against political alliances and exhorted Judah to trust in Jehovah.

Isaiah uses the marriage motif in his writings (Isa 49:18-20; 50:1-2; 54:1-10; 57:3, 8; 62:1-5; 66:7-11). The marriage imagery of Isaiah accords with Hosea's. Isaiah 50:1-2a reads:

Thus says the Lord, "Where is the certificate of divorce, By which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away. Why was there no man when I came? When I called, why was there none to answer?"

Here the prophet uses the marriage motif along with the father-son motif. The departure of Israel and her children was caused by their sin. Ridderbos declares:

The image of the certificate of divorce suggests, in addition, that the bond between the Lord and Israel was not totally severed. He has not completely let go of her even though Zion might believe this (49:14).³²

God makes it clear to the unfaithful wife that it is her sin which is spoiling the marriage. Hope is held out by God's call and power to ransom. In Isaiah 54:4-8, God addresses Israel as her husband. She is encouraged to return to Him because of His qualities of power, holiness, compassion and everlasting lovingkindness (*hesed*). God woos her with words of encouragement: "Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; neither feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; But you will forget the shame of your youth. And the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more" (54:4). In Isaiah 54:7-8, God "forsook" her because of her sin. Yet, as Redeemer, He gathers her with great compassion and lovingkindness. In Isaiah 57:3, 8 God calls the idolaters of the land "sons of a sorceress" and "offspring of adulterers and prostitutes." Young writes, "To commit adultery with a friend of the husband is wicked; to do so with an enemy who would destroy the husband is the height of abandoned wickedness."³³

The joy of the Lord over Israel His bride in the latter days is revealed by Isaiah:

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 (62:4).

Shaw says, "How like a lover, to call the prostitute a virgin! That shows the extent of God's forgiveness and restoration."³⁴ This passage gives hope and speaks of restored intimacy after repentance and forgiveness. Isaiah uses the marriage motif with the same meaning as Hosea, but uses it for illustration, rather than as the theme of his entire book.

Jeremiah's Usage. Jeremiah began to prophesy in the reign of King Josiah and saw the people of Judah go into the Babylonian captivity. Following the death of righteous King Josiah, Israel was ruled by wicked kings until she was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was left in the land with a few poor Jews who later slew the Babylonian governor and fled in fear to Egypt forcing Jeremiah to go with them.

In Jeremiah's use of the marriage motif, he illustrates Israel's and Judah's idolatries and spiritual adulteries (Jer 2:1-4, 21-25, 32-33; 3:1-25; 13:22-27; 18:13-15; 31:3-4, 22). In chapter two, the prophet reminds the people how far they have departed from the Lord. God recalls the love of Israel's covenant vows and her obedience and holiness (2:2-3). Feinberg writes,

Warmth, love, and purity marked her first relationship with her covenant God. Apart from the golden-calf incident (Exod 32:1-29), Israel's failures in the wilderness came from lack of faith rather than outright apostasy.³⁵

Verse two mentions Israel's marriage with God as starting out with loyal love (*hesed*). However, in spite of God's gifts and blessings, she becomes immoral. In Jeremiah 2:32-33, God asks if a virgin bride can forget her wedding attire and proceeds to condemn Israel not only for being spiritually unfaithful, but also for teaching wicked women her ways.

The entire third chapter of Jeremiah is filled with concepts of the marriage motif. God asks if a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and marries another, does she return? According to the law this was condemned, still God invites Israel to return to Him, revealing his longsuffering and grace beyond the law. In Jeremiah 3:8, God gives Israel a "writ of divorce" after her many adulteries. This "writ of divorce" is also explained as a metaphor describing the captivity for Israel (cf Deut 24:1-3). God is condemning not only Israel, but also Judah for their covenant unfaithfulness (3:10). God's love is revealed in a call for sinful Israel to return or repent and come back to her husband for He will be gracious and not be angry forever (3:12). With the return, God promises the gifts of godly leaders, a united people, and a fruitful land (3:15-19). In Jeremiah 18:13-15 God asks, "Has anyone ever heard of anything like the virgin of Israel who forsook her God?" The final marriage metaphor appears in the revelation of the new covenant (Jer 31:3-4). God declares that He loved (*'ahab*) Israel with an everlasting love and has drawn her with loyal lovingkindness (*hesed*). This appearance of God's elective love and covenant love in the context of a new covenant certainly should have given hope to an unfaithful wife. Once again, Jeremiah like Hosea stresses the firmness, faithfulness, zealousness and compassion associated with God's love.

Ezekiel's Usage. Ezekiel was a priest who was exiled apparently in the second phase of the Babylonian captivity (II Kgs 24:13f). Ezekiel uses more symbols and allegory in his writing than most of the prophets.

The use of the marriage motif by Ezekiel is limited to chapters 16 and 23. In chapter 16, God tells Ezekiel to cause Jerusalem (the capital of Judah which represents her) to know her abominations. In dealing with an unfaithful wife, God reacts in righteousness to get her back. (1) He reveals her ingratitude by rehearsing His goodness and gifts. It causes her to remember the "good times" as compared to the reaping which comes from sin (16:3-15). (2) He reminds her of her broken marriage covenant (16:8, 59). (3) He describes her sinful activities and attitudes: ingratitude, pride, covenant-breaking, harlotries, idolatry, the sacrifice of children to pagan gods, failure to profit from God's judgment on Israel for harlotry, and the construction of pagan worship places (16:3-59). (4) God in righteous, jealous anger allowed her to reap the fruits of the sin she had sown (16:27, 37-43, 58-59). (5) He addresses her as an "adulteress wife who takes strangers instead of her husband" (16:32). (6) He exhorts her to hear "the word of the Lord" (16:35). (7) He holds out hope that His fury, jealousy and anger will depart (16:42). (8) He gives hope that the judgment of captivity will end (16:53). (9) He promises to remember her as she was before these sins and to establish an everlasting covenant with her (16:60, 62). (10) God promises that Judah will be given her sisters as daughters and that she would "know" that God is Lord. (11) God's loving faithful activities, his forgiveness, his new covenant and her guilt would be remembered by Judah so that she would not talk of her past sin, but of God's grace. (12) God provides atonement for Judah's sins (16:63). Blackwood points out that "this passage is the longest sustained expression of hope that we have yet encountered in Ezekiel's prophecy."³⁶

Ezekiel 23 contains a narrative about two sisters, Aholah and Aholibah, who were married and became adulteresses. These two sisters are married to Jehovah. This chapter, unlike chapter 16, does not hold out hope. It stresses God's reactions to the sins of the two rebellious sisters. (1) He confronts Judah and Israel with their patterns of immorality (23:2-21). (2) He reminds them that they belonged to Him (23:5, 35). (3) He allows her sinful lovers to behave sinfully with them, permitting the sinner to reap what she has

sown (Ezek 23:9-10, 23:35; 45-49). (4) God is moved by righteous jealousy in allowing others to punish the unfaithful persons (23:25). (5) God's mind becomes alienated from them because of their perpetual sins (23:18). (6) God's reason for allowing Israel and Judah to reap the bitter fruit of their sin is that they might know Him. This was their only hope. By recognizing not only the ultimate source of their judgment but also God's purpose to bring them back to covenant love, they would repent and return.

Ezekiel along with Isaiah and Jeremiah uses the marriage motif only to illustrate God's covenant relation with His people. These prophets, unlike Hosea, use the motif in a few verses or chapters. The righteous behavior of God as the husband serves as a model for attitudes, emotions and actions in marriage and also provides a model for marriage partners whose mates are unfaithful.

Malachi's Usage. The prophet Malachi is the last of the prophets, beginning with Moses, who for a thousand years proclaimed God's message to God's people. When Malachi wrote, one hundred years had passed since the Jews had returned from their captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem. After the construction of the walls and temple under Nehemiah, the people, though cured of idolatry, had become indifferent and spiritually lethargic. They began to ask questions such as: Does God love Israel? Where is justice? Is it profitable to serve God? Where is the God of judgment? Where is the promise of God's kingdom? Accordingly, Malachi preached about degeneracy in the priests' service, inferior sacrifices, tithes and offerings, and divorce and mixed marriages.

Malachi makes two indirect references to God and the marriage motif. First, in Malachi 1:2-3, the people ask how the Lord had loved them. God's reply is that He loved Jacob, but hated Esau. This love for Jacob refers to God's elective love (*'ahab*). The second passage dealing with marriage is 2:14-16. At this point the prophet explains why God is not accepting the people's offerings at the altar. The people have been dealing badly with their mates and divorcing them. Malachi reminds them (1) of God's omniscience, (2) that marriage is by covenant with one's wife and companion for life, (3) that God hates divorce, (4) that a godly seed comes from permanent, loving marriages of believers, and (5) that one's attitude and actions must be according to God's revelation. Although Malachi does not directly deal with the marriage motif, he does teach of God's elective love of Israel and of God's revelation that

marriage is a permanent arrangement by covenant. These truths should have reminded Israel of God's elective love which resulted in her covenant at Sinai. God's displeasure with divorce should have reminded them of its manifestation in the history of Israel and the accounts of the prophets who used the marriage motif. God, the creator and model for marriage, reveals in Malachi the permanency and closeness which He expects in marriage.

God in the Marriage Motif of the New Testament

In the NT use of the marriage motif, Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is the wife. Richardson explains that "the metaphor of Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as His bride is, of course, based upon the OT prophetic image of Israel as the spouse of Yahweh. . ."³⁷ Foulkes also asserts:

There is, of course, an Old Testament background to this in the way that the prophets regarded the Lord as Husband of His people, entering into a marriage covenant with them, and loving them with steadfast love, even when, because of their idolatry, they were like an unfaithful wife who had committed adultery. . .³⁸

The NT marriage motif is used in connection with the kingdom or the marriage of Christ and the Church except in John 2:1-2 and Hebrews 13:4. Jesus used the imagery of the bridegroom and the wedding feast in some of His parables (Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-10; cf 9:14-15). Peter also uses it to discuss the submission of the Christian (I Pet 2:11-3:12). He talks of submission to civic authorities, of Christian slaves to their masters and of Christian wives to their lost husbands. In I Peter 2:21-23, Christ is held up as the pattern for suffering Christians who were to submit to their authority figures as He "had committed Himself to him that judges righteously." Here Christ is an example of submission in suffering even as a Christian slave or a Christian wife should do. In this example, Christ is a model in the general context for the wife's role as a subordinate to authority. The Apostle John writes of Jesus' attendance at a wedding and closes his writings with the marriage supper of the Lamb, the coming of the bridegroom, and the appearing of the bride in all her glory as the holy city (Rev 19:7-17; 21:1ff; 22:17). The only significant behavioral parallel to human marriage, besides the

wife belonging to the bridegroom (Rev 21:9), is the fact that the wife is adorned in white linen for her husband (Rev 19:8). The Apostle Paul is the only NT writer who develops the parallel between the love of Christ and His bride and the love of human husbands and wives (Eph 5:22-33). Baker writes:

In the context of the whole marriage relationship it is the self-giving sacrificial love of Christ for his body, the Church, which is to show the way for husbands to love their wives as their own bodies and which will elicit the wife's loving response of loyalty and respect for her husband as her head (in the Lord). Warm cherishing, tender care and nurture--the measure of this self-giving, outgoing love is sacrifice for the sake of the person loved. Only such a love will bring the cleansing, holy beauty, perfecting and wholeness of character to any spouse or couple which is God's will in the mysterious one-flesh union of marriage (Eph 5: 22-33).³⁹

The passage divides into the subject matter of Christ's sovereignty (22-24), Christ's love (25-27), and Christ's unity with His bride (28-33). Patterns for married couples from the model of Christ and His Church are: (1) loving, selfless leadership by the husband (5:23, 25, 28, 33), (2) loyal, respectful submission to the husband by the wife (5:22, 24, 33), (3) loving behavior by the husband to edify the wife (5:27-29), and (4) separation from blood relationships to function in unity as a Christian couple. Christian couples who follow these patterns will experience satisfying marital intimacy.

Summary

As in the OT with God appearing as the husband in the marriage motif, so in the NT, Christ appears as the husband. Thus, in the entire Bible, God presents Himself as a righteous model for the marriage relationship. Behavior patterns which have been discovered in studying God in the marriage motif in the Bible are: (1) Allow the energy from the emotion of jealousy to display itself in zeal to make the marriage right. (2) State the truth about sin in the marriage and what needs to be done to correct it. (3) Faithful mates should try to keep mates from sinful ways. (4) Privileges and blessings are taken away while the mate is living unfaithfully. (5) Set the goal of winning back an unfaithful partner by giving hope and loving words which encourage repentance and return. (6) While

trying to win back an unfaithful mate, one can recall the good times and desired, shared goals. (7) The mate should forgive and accept back with love the repentant mate. (8) A renewal of the marriage vows between a couple where one has returned from unfaithfulness would be very meaningful. (9) The energy from the emotion of righteous anger (Eph 4:26) should be directed at solving the marriage problem. (10) A mate should express emotional delight in the returned mate. (11) An unfaithful mate is allowed to reap some of the sin sown to get him/her to repent. (12) The unfaithful mate is exhorted to hear the Word of the Lord. (13) It is fitting to keep the promise to forgive by not ever bringing up the sin of the past. (14) The gratitude of forgiveness and the memories of past hardships in sin in the mind of the repentant should cause the person to speak of God's grace not of past sins. (15) Divorce should not be an option for the righteous. (16) Love in marriage should be loyal, longsuffering and selfless. (17) All marriages should be based on a covenant before the Lord. (18) Husbands are to be loving leaders of respectful, submissive wives.

The marriage motif in Scripture holds God as the Model for social relationships. A study of the Model has provided patterns of behavior for Christian couples to follow. These patterns of behavior which lead to marital intimacy are mirrored elsewhere in the Scriptures. They are given as commands and commendations for marital intimacy which will be presented in the next article.

Editor's Note: Part III: Commands and Commendations, the third of four parts, will appear in the Fall 1989 issue.

Notes

¹ Edwin M Yamauchi, "Anthropomorphism in Ancient Religions" *BibSac* (1968) 125:29-44

² Sam W Fowler, "Visual Anthropomorphic Revelation of God" (ThD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978) 28-29

³ R Laird Harris, "The Prophets: Spokesmen for God" *Moody Monthly* (1965) 51

⁴ In addition to the husband-wife motif, the prophets used the God-people theme (Gen 12:2; Exod 19:5; Hos 4:1, 6), the father-son theme (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1; Ezek 20:35-38), the owner-vineyard theme (Isa 5:1-2; Hos 9:10; 10:1), the potter-clay theme (Jer 18:1-8; Isa 29:16; 64:8), and the shepherd-flock theme (Isa 63:11; Hos 11:1-4). The reality and the strength of the covenant are given in these patterns and analogies. Each pattern is a given social relationship applied in spiritual spheres.

⁵ Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) 202

⁶ Robert W Benton, "Spiritual and Moral Conditions of the Covenant People in the Time of Hosea" (ThD dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1968) 55-60

⁷ George E Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition" *BibArch* (1954) 17:51

⁸ Norman H Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964) 99

⁹ Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967) 55

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 102

¹¹ W E Vine, Merrill F Unger, and William White, Jr, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 230

¹² Laird R Harris, Gleason L Archer, Jr, and Bruce K Waltke, eds *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) 1:14

¹³ Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas*, 134

¹⁴ Robert B Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1897) 108

¹⁵ Harris, *TWOT*, 2:839-840

¹⁶ Lawrence O Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 180

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 533

¹⁸ Benton, "Spiritual and Moral Conditions," 82

¹⁹ Harris, *TWOT*, 947-948

²⁰ Ludwig Koehler, and Walter Baumgartner, eds *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 1002-1003

²¹ *Ibid*, 825

²² Girdlestone, *Synonyms*, 175

²³ Richards, *Expository Dictionary*, 382; forms of this root appear almost 950 times in the OT and are used of God's knowledge of man (Gen 18:19; Deut 34:10), used to express acquaintance with a person (Gen 29:5; Exod 1:8), used for sexual intercourse between a man and a woman (Gen 4:1; 19:8) and between men (Gen 19:5), used of one's relation to the divine whether other gods (Deut 13:3, 7, 14) or with Jehovah (1 Sam 2:12; 3:7) and in contexts describing the skill of hunting (Gen 25:27), learning (Isa 29:11-13), lamentation (Amos 5:16), sailing (2 Chr 8:18) and playing an instrument (1 Sam 16:16); cf page 602.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 358

²⁵ Harris, *TWOT*, 802

²⁶ Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, 203

²⁷ Richards, *Expository Dictionary*, 359

²⁸ Allan P Brown, "The Theology of Hosea" (PhD dissertation, BJU, 1975) 89

²⁹ Charles L Feinberg, *Hosea: God's Love for Israel* (New York: American Board of Missions To The Jews, n d) 23

³⁰ Harris, *TWOT*, 2:742

³¹ Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1985) 106

³² J Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, translated by John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 447

³³ E J Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 3:404

³⁴ Luci Shaw, "Jehovah: Lover and Husband," *His* (1979) 4

³⁵ Charles L Feinberg, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 32

³⁶ Andrew W Blackwood, Jr, *Ezekiel: Prophecy of Hope* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965) 112

³⁷ Alan Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) 257

³⁸ Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 156

³⁹ John P Baker, "Biblical Attitudes to Romantic Love," *TB* (1984) 35:115