

Roles in the Jewish Wedding Party

When we interpret passages which touch on the subject of marriage, we must be careful to distinguish the different roles within the wedding party. There is a groom and a bride, but they are not alone in the marriage party. There are additional men and women who attend the wedding party. If we fail to appreciate these different roles, we confuse those *attending* the bride with the bride herself (e.g., Mtt. [Mat. 25:1-13](#)). Since the role of the bride and groom are fairly obvious, here we will mention some of the related members of the bridal party. The **OT** describes several different roles in courtship and marriage. In the Song of Solomon, we find repeated mention of *virgins* who are not the bride (The Shulamite): “Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, Your name *is* ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you” (Sos. [Sos. 1:3](#)). Even though the virgins are not the bride, they still love The Beloved (cf. Mtt. [Mat. 15:1-13](#)). The song also mentions *daughters of Jerusalem* who are friends of the Shulamite who also seek The Beloved (Sos. [Sos. 2:7](#); [Sos. 5:8](#); [Sos. 6:1](#)). The Beloved has companions who desire to look upon The Shulamite (Sos. [Sos. 5:1](#); [Sos. 6:13](#); [Sos. 8:13](#)). Even though the relationship is between The Shulamite and The Beloved, other persons on the sideline also express interest in the relationship between The Shulamite and The Beloved. The psalmist records a kingly wedding which involves both the Queen (bride) and King (groom), but also includes her companions, called *virgins*: “Kings’ daughters *are* among Your honorable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. . . She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; the virgins, her companions who follow her shall be brought to You” (Ps. [Ps. 45:9-14](#)). Not everyone at a wedding occupies the role of the groom or bride. The **NT** also mentions relationships within the wedding party other than the bride and groom. When John the Baptist’s disciples come to him complaining about Jesus’ rise in popularity, John observes: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” (John [John 3:29](#)). From John’s response, we learn several important facts: (1) Christ is a bridegroom; (2) Christ has a bride (those who were coming to Him); (3) John is not of the bride, but is the *friend of the bridegroom*.¹ Elsewhere, Jesus referred to his disciples as “friends of the bridegroom” (literally: *sons of the bride chamber*, Mtt. [Mat. 9:15](#); Mark [Mark 2:19](#); Luke [Luke 5:34](#)). The differences among roles within the bridal party is most evident in the [parable](#) of the foolish virgins (Mtt. [Mat. 25:1-13](#)). When reading the parable, we need to ask two related questions: (1) is this parable about polygamy? (2) if not, where is the bride? Mention is made of ten virgins and one bridegroom. The virgins are not to be married—they *attend* the wedding party. Notably absent in the parable is any mention of the bride. And where do the wise virgins go? “And while they [the foolish virgins] went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (Mtt. [Mat. 25:10](#)). *Wedding* is [γάμος](#) [gamous], plural, which generally denotes the *wedding feast*: “Josephus distinguishes in *Antiquities* 14, 467f between [γάμος](#) [gamos] =wedding [singular] and [γάμοι](#) [gamoï] =wedding celebration [plural]. But for ‘marriage’ he sometimes uses the singular, sometimes the plural.”² These virgins are not waiting for the bridegroom in order *to get married*, but *to attend the wedding feast*.³ The groom already has a bride who is not mentioned in the parable. We believe these distinctions are significant and indicate that the coming of the groom for the virgins is at His Second Coming which follows upon the marriage of the Lamb described here. The virgins do not marry, but attend the marriage feast which follows. The context also supports this view:

This parable as well as the next one deals with the Jews in the tribulation period. This is seen from various facts. The context favors this view . . . The subject being discussed is the end time, the final years before the kingdom is established. At this time the church will be absent from the earth.⁴

In summary, there are different roles within the wedding analogy found within Scripture. Not everyone who will be in the kingdom of God is the bride. This is evident from the distinctions found within Scripture. It is also evident because

the marriage of the Lamb takes place in heaven prior to Christ's Second Coming—when some saints are still on the earth below and many of the saints in heaven have not yet been resurrected to receive their glorified bodies.

Just as the Bridegroom comes not alone, but with attendants, companions, and a long train of rejoicing ones who make up his party, the whole of whom together are called the Bridegroom's coming, whilst, strictly speaking, there is a wide difference between him and those with him; so it is on the side of the Bride. She has her companions and attendants too,—“virgins which follow her.” They make up her company and train. In coming to wed her the Bridegroom comes also into near and close relation to them. To a blessed degree they share the Bride's honours. . . [but] the Bride has relations to the Bridegroom which belong to her alone.⁵

Having established that not all believers are the Lamb's bride, who is the bride?

Notes

¹ “John was martyred before the Church was formed, hence he comes in as one, perhaps the most honoured, of the guests at the marriage supper.”—Walter Scott, [*Exposition of The Revelation*](#) (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), Rev. 19:9.

² Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 151.

³ The KJV and NKJV have “wedding” in Mtt. [Mat. 22:1-14](#) and [Mat. 25:1-13](#), whereas the NASB has “wedding feast.” The Greek word is [γαμους](#) [gamous] (plural) which generally indicates the wedding banquet. The plural form implies the banquet or celebration (as opposed to a smaller, potentially private ceremony)..

⁴ Stanley D. Toussaint, [*Behold The King: A Study of Matthew*](#) (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 283.

⁵ J. A. Seiss, [*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 427.