

PREPARATION OF THE BRIDE

PART 10

"THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB"

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COME, AND HIS WIFE HATH MADE HERSELF READY. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: FOR THE FINE LINEN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF 'THE SAINTS. And he saith unto me, Write, BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE CALLED UNTO THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Rev. 19:7-9).

As we read these lines, the reality of it all is almost more than we are able to comprehend. "THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COME..."; that is, the appointed time for the Lamb and His beloved to be fully united as one is come... AND "HIS WIFE HAS PREPARED HERSELF FOR THE OCCASION". The phrase used here, "IS COME", is very enlightening. It is the Greek verb "ERCHOMAI", and is in the present indicative tense. What this simply means is that the subject under consideration is even now in the process of coming; it is coming to pass; it is transpiring before our very eyes. It is not to be looked upon as just a future event, something to occur 'in the sweet bye-and-bye", but as a glorious reality that can presently be experienced. Wondrous as it might seem to us now, THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS AT THIS TIME IN THE VERY ACT OF COMING; to a certain degree it has already been experienced by some, it now is by others, and it shall yet be by many more. The reality of it is just as true today, to those who are partaking of it, as it shall be ten thousand years from now (it shall only intensify)! And though we readily concede that there shall be a glorious climatic act that shall "seal" the bonds of holy matrimony between the Bridegroom and His fully matured, many-membered bride (composed of saints from every age) on the morn of the third millennial "day", nevertheless, we attest to the fact that before this will ever occur, there must first be an individual experiencing of this union within each and every member. CHRIST MUST ENTER INTO THEM, AND REVEAL HIMSELF TO THEM IN A VERY PRIVATE AND PERSONAL WAY... AND THEY MUST EXPERIENTIALLY COME TO FREELY OPEN THEIR INNERMOST BEINGS TO HIM AS WELL! This is clearly confirmed in Scripture, seeing that the analogy of marriage is used in reference to describe both our present relationship with Christ, as well as our future one: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, AS UNTO THE LORD. For the husband is the head of the wife, EVEN AS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. AND HE IS THE SAVIOUR OF THE BODY... this is a great mystery: but I SPEAK CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH" (see Eph. 5:22-33)! The use of the verb "IS", and not "SHALL BE" plainly indicates that He is presently referred to as our Husband, "the Saviour of the body"! This is true in a corporate sense, and this is true

individually. However, as Jesus said that "the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (the marginal reference says, "with outward shew"), but rather, "is within you" (Lk. 17:20-21), even so is the marriage. It is not an external event. Only as the Spirit gives us "seeing eyes" will we perceive it. It is one of the activities that occurs within the Kingdom, the result of our being brought into this special relationship with Christ. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son..." (Matt. 22:1). It is first of all an inward work, a deeply personal work, a penetrating work being wrought by the Spirit in those who have purposed to "follow on to know the Lord". It refers to those times of close communion and intimacy between Lover and His beloved, when everything else has faded out of sight. And yet, it is an occurrence transpiring "before the face of all people"! Many have imagined the Marriage of the Lamb to take place away out yonder on some dim and distant location, far removed from planet earth, with it's problems, troubles, and woes; but this is not the case. Our example from ancient Hebrew custom shows that from the time that the bridegroom comes and receives his waiting bride unto himself, their every activity is done amidst thronging masses of people. Most commonly in the darkness of night, the bridegroom makes his appearance when his bride would least expect him. As he approaches her father's house, followed by a growing procession of friends, musicians, and singers, his presence is preceded with the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh"! When once the bride has gone out to meet him, and he has taken her by the hand, the first place he leads her to is the "huppah", or bridal canopy, where the marriage contract is read publicly. This open pavillion has no side curtains, affording the utmost visibility, and is oftentimes pitched in either the marketplace, or some other familiar area of the city, so that the maximum number of people can witness the event. After the reading of the covenant, the bridegroom then takes his bride to the "numphon", or nuptial chamber, where "the two become one", and the marriage is consummated. Though they close the door behind them, even then they are surrounded by a vast multitude of witnesses; for the entire wedding party anxiously abides in a waiting room. The friend of the bridegroom, or as the Israelites would call him, the "shoshben", stands just outside the door, himself patiently waiting, listening for some sound of jubilant confirmation that union has occurred! When once the enraptured voice of the bridegroom is heard, the friend of the bridegroom gives signal to the entourage, and then the festivities resume! For the next seven days (generally), there is a great marriage feast that has been prepared in honor of them; and their "honeymoon" is spent both in the numphon, where their love is continually intimated and intensified, and in periodic appearances at the supper, mingling among and socializing with their guests. Be it known that from beginning to end, they are compassed about with family, friends, neighbors, loved ones, and yes, even strangers; testifying to all that though this union is a sacred act, shared only by bridegroom and bride in "the secret place" that he has prepared, it is nevertheless accomplished amidst familiar surroundings, amidst the common, day-to-day affairs of life, against the backdrop of ordinary events and settings. Except on rare occasions, the newly-wedded couple seldom even leaves their home town. They are incorporated into society, and are expected to make their contribution to the betterment of the community.

Beloved, in just the same way, as we are being "yoked together" with the Lord, we are learning that it does not matter what our outward surroundings are. All that matters is that

we are with Him; that we yield ourselves to Him, that we acknowledge Him in all our ways, that our minds are stayed on Him! It is not necessary for Christ to physically remove us from the world, and it's many distractions, in order for us to be joined in conscious union with Him. We can know Him NOW! We can be in a crowded shopping mall, a busy intersection, a noisy factory, a congested airport terminal, etc., etc., pressed in on every side, seemingly "hedged about" in an otherwise high-stress situation, with no easy way out... and still experience a glorious sense of peace and passion and intimacy with Christ that passes all understanding! We can be under intense pressure from the enemy (natural and / or spiritual), or even be placed in a calamitous situation (faced with natural disaster, physical illness, etc.), dangerously compassed about on the right hand, and on the left... and be "caught-up" (if we are allowed to use that term) into a realm of rapturous love, of heavenly glory and ecstasy, where we are only aware of His Presence... and we respond only to Him!

May we say here that while it is a glorious thing to be able to find a quiet place where we can periodically retreat with the Lord, to collect ourselves, and concentrate on Him (and we certainly do encourage this as often as one can), we know that with everyone, it is not always possible. With the many demands, responsibilities, and unexpected interruptions in life, to develop a chronic dependency on a routine prayer-time can be very disappointing, indeed! (This is a point with which the enemy has had great success in condemning folks. He seeks to convince us that our worthiness is based on works; that prayer is a duty; and if we have not satisfactorily "performed" according to some preconceived set of expectations, he robs us of "the JOY of our salvation", whenever we do have opportunity to come before the Lord!) Of a truth, the way most of our hectic and haphazard schedules go sometimes (totally out of our control), if we were bound to "touching God" only during specific times of the day, or only in designated places of prayer, then "we of all men would be most miserable"! Again, we want to say that to purposely separate ourselves, and earnestly seek the Lord in solitude is a commendable thing (as long as we maintain a proper attitude toward it). Jesus did give us examples of this (Matt. 14:23; 26:30-45; also 6:6). Thank God, however... when we cannot come aside in the natural, or when we must make critical decisions, and we don't have time to go into a lengthy session of prayer over the matter, we need not feel condemned; more and more we are awakening to His Imminence. We are discovering that our Bridegroom will come to us in the middle of "the night"; when we least expect Him, He will meet us right where we are, right when we need Him most! (All that is required of us is that we willingly and readily "go out to meet Him" when He comes; that we "come aside" in our attention, from the confusion of "Babylon", from whatever we are involved with, and fully acknowledge Him)!

What we are describing is not some heightened state of self-consciousness, nor some strange form of "New Age" eastern mysticism, where we simply withdraw from our environment into ourselves (or worse yet, into some demon spirit)... but rather, where we become totally engrossed in a God-consciousness! We are becoming increasingly aware of His ever-abiding Presence; not only in our prayer closets, but in public, as well. "And, lo, I am with you ALWAYS, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20)! As often as our heavenly Bridegroom reveals Himself to us, and we are absorbed into Him, our

consciousness of the world around us just seems to fade away; our awareness of our adversary begins to blur; and it's as if we are translated from one place to another, without our feet ever having to leave the ground! We are learning that we can be in a room full of people, alive with much activity and commotion, and yet experience what it is to be shut up with our Lord! It matters not whether we be in the most elaborate of settings, or the poorest of conditions... as long as we are "in His Presence, (there is) fullness of JOY"! As we awaken to this fact, physical surroundings have little bearing on us; whether abased or abounding, whether in the prison or in the palace, "everywhere and in all things", we are content in whatever state we are in (Phil. 4:11-13)! **AND BELOVED, THIS IS HEAVEN TO US!**

Every phase of our perfecting, with it's own unique revelations of Christ, and it's rare ability to draw us unto Christ, brings us that much closer to the full acknowledgement and reality of this. To the degree we have been willing to lose our independence, to take on His Name, to surrender our "single life", and set our affections on Him alone, we are experiencing intimacy in His Presence. **MORE AND MORE, HE IS JOINING US TO HIMSELF; WE ARE PROGRESSIVELY BEING "WED" TO THE FULLNESS OF HIS SPIRIT BY THE POWER OF GOD!** Those who have experienced even a moment in "the Secret Place of the Most High" need not that any should convince them of this; they know this to be **A PRESENT REALITY!** And for them, **THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COMING TO PASS!**

Having said this, there is still that deep longing within us to abide evermore in His Presence; to enter into a lasting and permanent relationship with Him, and go no more out. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psa. 42:1). No matter how many times we have been privileged to meet with Him in His glory-chambers, it is never enough. For so long we have had periodic "times of refreshing which come from the Presence of the Lord" (and we thank God for every one of them); brief interludes when He has visited us by His Spirit, and consciously manifested Himself to us; but now our hearts yearn for more. **WE MUST HAVE ALL OF HIM; HIS SPIRIT MUST DESCEND AND REMAIN!** There is a powerful witness in our spirits that there is more to this marital experience; yea, much more than we have ever known! We are weary of moving in and out of the Spirit; of flowing in the anointing one minute, and walking after the flesh the next; of speaking by the Spirit to one group of people, and to the next, speaking words of carnality, criticism, or vanity. What an utter frustration this has been! Therefore, we earnestly desire to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth", to remain by His side, to "abide under the shadow of the Almighty" perpetually. This aspiration is captivating our hearts, is provoking us to "forsake all others", and is causing us to count all else "but dung", **THAT WE MAY KNOW HIM IN EVER-INCREASING MEASURES.** Nothing else will satisfy!

(By sharing these meditations on the bridal relationship, there are some who may misunderstand our intentions. We are in no wise trying to show preference to it above our other relationships with Christ; and we are not contesting "sonship" with "bridship"! We would agree with the wise words of J. Preston Eby on this matter:

"When God created man male and female in His image, He revealed that He is Himself male and female in His attributes and nature. In spiritual maturity we enter into relationship with God in each of the facets of His nature. We may truly become the bride of Christ and the sons of the Father, and many other things as well. Can we not see by this that brideship bespeaks the spiritually feminine relationship of intimate love and reverent submission to Christ, whereas sonship embodies the spiritually masculine characteristics of strength, authority, power, and dominion to rule and reign over all things. Let us never become so over-balanced in our zeal to become sons of God that we despise the marvelous reality of brideship! The simple but sublime truth is that **THE WAY TO SONSHIP IS BRIDESHIP!** Your relationship to Christ as a bride will forerun your relationship to the Father as a son" ---end quote).

TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST

What a comfort it is to know that Christ desires this ONENESS with us, even beyond what we at this time can comprehend. This is evident by the fact that "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). Though we have read these Scriptures many times before, still we are staggered by such a simple truth! While we were in our unregenerate state, the weakness and limitation of the flesh; when there was nothing attractive about us at all; when we were totally unlovely, and unattractive, and unclean, "polluted in our own blood" (Ezek. 16), and disinterested in having anything to do with Him at all, He saw through it all, and beheld something worth redeeming (Matt. 13:44). As a matter of fact, He paid a price that far exceeded our perceived value, in order to demonstrate "His great love wherewith He loved us". **HE WANTED US TO UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT WE ARE TO HIM!** Because He could see beyond the filth of our flesh, the vile corruption buried within our hearts, He purchased us with His own blood! He could envision what we had the potential of becoming (with a little help from the Spirit), and so, "for the JOY that was set before Him (He) endured the cross..." (Heb. 12:2). He went so far as to lay down His own life... **SIMPLY BECAUSE OF LOVE!**

Seeing that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13), He was not at all deceived about our inner condition (expecting us to be something we were not); nor was He deluded into thinking that in time we would somehow sanctify ourselves by works of righteousness (He had already proven the fallacy of that line of reasoning during the old covenant), As a matter of fact, He was not disappointed with us in any way; **HE KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT US BEFORE HE EVER CALLED US OUT OF THE WORLD!** Has that truth ever fully registered on us?

He knew our every attraction, our every inclination, our every weakness, and our every strength. He was totally aware of our lack, our imperfections. Just as surely as Hosea knew of Gomer's, He knew of our harlotrous tendencies, before we ever manifested them. Therefore, He fully understood the work that would be necessary to "create in us a clean heart", to form a virginal purity in our nature; and He knew it to be a work that He alone could perform! "...Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; **THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY IT AND CLEANSE IT WITH THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE**

WORD, THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT IT TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27)! From beginning to end, this is His undertaking... it is He who initially loved us; it is He who is sanctifying and cleansing us of all spots and blemishes; it is He who is "ironing out" all the wrinkles; and it is He who shall finally present us to Himself in radiant glory! We are learning the supreme lesson that nothing we can do of ourselves can make us worthy of so great an honor; for our acceptance is totally in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6)!

By saying this, we are not in any way suggesting that we are free of moral or spiritual accountability. Quite the contrary! Many have made this false assumption, and in doing so have given license to all manner of iniquity, and excesses of every sort (God's method for our overcoming sin is not in legalizing it for us; rather, it is by quickening His ability within us, and raising us above the temptation)! But as we have already stated, our spiritual progress depends on the degree of our submission to the Spirit... and our level of maturity is measured by our willingness to cooperate with His dealings. And until we "measure up", we will not be qualified to fully be called His bride (Rev. 21:15-17). The point that we would make is that there is a place IN HIM available to us NOW, where there is absolutely no condemnation; no sense of inadequacy; no thought of deficiency; and no questioning the wise decisions of our Husband, wherever He may lead us! It is a place before His Throne, referred to in Rev. 4:6 as "the sea of glass" (see Part 6, "Preparation for Presentation", pages 10-11, for more on this); and in chapter 14, it is called "Mt. Sion", where those who stand with the Lamb have Father's Name (His divine nature) "written in their foreheads" (the view from atop Zion's heights is incredible)! It is a place where all is calm and peaceful, where there is perfect clarity in all things, and in every direction "as clear as crystal". It is a place where there is no confusion or indecisiveness at all. This place is commonly known as "THE MIND OF CHRIST" (I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5)! Seeing that "IN HIM dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), we are experientially finding that 1'we are complete IN HIM" (verse 10)! This is more than just a doctrine; this is A LIVING REALITY! He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places IN CHRIST" (Eph. 1:3), in order that we might come "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13); what more could we possibly need?

Interestingly enough, the word BRIDE in Hebrew is "kallah", and according to Young's Analytical Concordance means, "THE COMPLETE OR PERFECTED ONE". She is one who has found her completion or perfection in her spouse. Though in times past she may have been conscious of her shortcomings, now, they are overshadowed by his perfections. Therefore, she no longer lives to please herself, in a vain attempt to find completion or satisfaction apart from him, but simply to complement her companion, to become an help meet for him. Her all-consuming passion, her overwhelming desire is to be all that he desires in a bride. During the espousal, she increasingly purposed to submit to whatever was necessary to attain unto this status, to fulfill this role. No sacrifice was too great, no pain was too much to bear, to become his unblemished bride. And as a result, at the appointed time, the two became one, in thought, in action, in interest, in purpose. He is everything she needs, and she becomes everything he desires! She is

"complete in Him"; and in turn, she becomes "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23)! Hallelujah! What perfect harmony! (Reflecting back to the first article in this series, "All Things fit into the Pattern", you recall that the name Gomer means "COMPLETION", and her mother's name, "DIBLEAM", means, "TWO CAKES PRESSED TOGETHER"! How wonderful this is to see... that though she was a harlot when Hosea first took her as his wife, her prophetic destiny was revealed in her name! She was ordained to be pressed into a state of fullness and completion)!

As we have endeavored to point out in the course of these messages, Christ's highest desire is to have a comparable bride; one who has developed in character and expression, so much that she is able to feel His heart, that she is able to stand with Him on "the sea of glass, mingled with fire" (Rev. 15:2); and who is mature enough to reproduce His image and likeness in the earth (Rev. 12). As said the Shulamite in Solomon's Song, "I am my Beloved's, and HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME" (7:10), we can confidently proclaim the same: HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME! No matter how things may seem, we have this assurance... HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME! No matter how deserted we may feel at times, abandoned to the will of our enemies, we know that HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME! No matter how much the devil magnifies our past failures, and accuses us before our God, of this we are positive... HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME! "I am black... but COMELY", was the Shulamite's reply. There was no denying what she had been; but she knew THE DIRECTION OF HIS AFFECTION... and this gave her PEACE! Likewise, whatever our Lord does, He does it with us in mind, as the center of His interest, as "the apple of His eye"; for "His banner over me is LOVE" (2:4)! If only we could fathom the great depth of His love for us, we would readily see that He will move heaven and earth to bring us into vital union with Himself! Since He is always abreast of our true spiritual state, He knows precisely what must come our way to perfect us; and with this in mind, we can place our total trust and confidence in Him! He will never allow anything to happen in our lives that would do us more harm than good, because HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME! We know that in our darkest hour, when we have come to the end of our strength, He will come again, and receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we might be also (John 14:3). Why? Because HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME! Praise God!

A MARRIAGE IN MEGIDDO

Because of the many misconceptions concerning the Marriage of the Lamb, where it takes place, and what it spiritually symbolizes, in times past we have failed to understand all that it entails. It's announcement comes immediately following that of Babylon's fall in Revelation, chapters 17-18; and includes ALL OF THE EVENTS RECORDED THEREAFTER. Everything that happens, from the time that the word initially goes forth, proclaiming, "THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COME" (19:7), until finally, the Lamb's bride is seen "descending down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (Rev. 21:10-11), is but part and parcel of this awesome event! However, unless we clearly see this, we may misunderstand the manner in which our Bridegroom comes to us!

One thing is sure... once Christ begins to dethrone and cast down the harlotrous spirit of Babylon in us, He will not stop until He has thoroughly accomplished His objective. It may be painful to the flesh, as He thrusts His glistening Sword time and again into our souls, and burns the "great whore" with the fires of divine judgment, but He will deliver us from her independent ways, her rebellious suggestions, and her adulterous attitudes, that He may present us to Himself as a pure, virginal bride in spotless splendor! And though we may feel wounded in the process, we must learn to wait on the Lord in quiet, trusting PATIENCE. For it is as we patiently endure tribulation, trials, and testings, that we possess our souls (Lk. 21:19)! When the work is complete, we shall agree with our brother Paul that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18)!

As we have previously mentioned in other parts of this series, He will employ whatever means necessary, according to His own discretion and judgment, to produce this intended result. What may escape one form of His dealings (i.e. "the opening of the seals", "the pouring out of the vials", etc.) will certainly resurface later to be dealt with in another form. Over and over we are roiled and processed, as He makes our external circumstances align and correspond with the internal, in order to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend". But in the end, however, we shall see that He causes ALL THINGS FIT INTO A PATTERN FOR GOOD. He will bring us to our appointed "Waterloo"; to our intended "crisis" point; to a place where every rebel force within us has surfaced, is thoroughly dealt with, and we are totally and completely and absolutely surrendered unto Him. Then He will reign over all OUR earth, as "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"! When that has occurred in our lives, we will not have to testify that He is Lord of all; the evidence will speak for itself!

Much to the amazement of our natural minds, God has chosen this place called "Armageddon" for the final events to transpire, and for the marriage to be consummated (Rev. 16:16). It is to here that He directs the "nations", beckoning them by an open invitation to gather themselves together (Zech. 14:2; Joel 3:2,11; Rev. 16:14). By doing so, He draws everything out into the open, and every ill-intentioned enemy of our souls out of hiding, that "in righteousness He (might) judge and make war" (19:11)! This is all according to divine design... with our good in mind!

The name "Armageddon", used only once in the New Testament, is very appropriate. It comes from a combination of two Hebrew words, "Har-Megiddon", or simply, "the mountains of Megiddo". It refers historically to the Hill of Megiddo on the south side of the valley of Megiddo, or Estraelon, southeast of Mt. Carmel (II Chron. 35:22; Zech. 12:11). It served as a gateway to the Carmel mountains, as a main thoroughfare between Asia and Africa, and was strategically positioned between the Euphrates and the Nile. It was famous for being a place where many battles have been fought throughout past ages, commonly recognized by all people as a region of conflict and confrontation. As we examine this closer, however, we find that the root word for "Har" means, "TO LOOM UP; i.e. a mountain", while the word "Megiddo" (# 4023) means "RENDEZVOUS". Its primary root (# 1413) means, "TO CROWD; also TO GASH (AS IF BY PRESSING INTO); ASSEMBLE (selves by troops), GATHER (selves together)". How clear the Lord

makes this for our understanding! For it is here at our spiritual "Armageddon", at a point where our circumstances unavoidably "LOOM UP" before us, where we are seemingly left vulnerable by the "drying up" of the river Euphrates (the removing of all natural restraints), and our enemies (both within and without) are invited to "crowd in" and "gather themselves" around us, that the Lord has chosen to make His power known! This is the appointed place of rendezvous, the point where two ways meet; the "valley of decision" (Joel 3:9-18) which He has ordained, where "the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice; He hath bid His guests" (Zeph. 1:7-8)! And it is here, in this place of extreme pressure and opposition, of hardships and difficulties, that He has purposed for us to be PRESSED TOGETHER into a perfect state of ONENESS AND COMPLETENESS IN HIM!

In an earlier writing (Part 8, "Processing for Peace"), we touched on the thought that in order for Christ to fully establish His Kingdom within us, He must have our undivided attention, and the total surrender of our wills. He must subdue "the kings of the earth", that is, THE RULING FORCES OF OUR WILLS, that there would be nothing within us that would ever challenge His rule and authority. In other words, He must "capture their crowns", so to speak, and take possession of their kingdoms! You see, beloved, it is one thing to say with our mouths, "NEVERTHELESS, NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS THOU WILT"; but quite another for this to be the settled and unwavering and unequivocal state of our being! It is for this reason, therefore, that the Lord dries up the waters of the Euphrates, "that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (16:12). He gives them opportunity to come forth, to express themselves, to declare their true inclinations, to show whether they will submissively "cast their crowns at His feet", or whether they will attempt to make war with the Lamb!

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It is here, in the familiar setting of Armageddon, during "the dark night of the soul", that the Lord reveals Himself to us in glorious ways. Initially, we may feel completely overwhelmed; totally helpless in the surrounding darkness; but as we follow Him out of all that we have previously found lodging and protection in (our condition of independence), He leads us to His Pavillion! Though He has "removed the curtains", so to speak, and we are exposed to the gaze of all around us, compassed about by many hostile forces that would gladly devour us, we come to know CHRIST AS OUR COVERING! He surrounds us with His Presence, and shelters us from above! He is all the protection we need (Psa. 91)!

Secondly, as we come to acknowledge Him in this capacity, "casting all of our care upon Him", trusting Him without reservations, we discover that we have entered into "the Secret Place of the Most High"... into a place of intimacy and union and oneness with Him! We are thus privileged to partake of spiritual "communion" with Him... to "eat His flesh, and drink His blood" (John 6:53-58)! This suggests a deep and vital bonding relationship; WE IN HIM, AND HE IN US! It is here that we become oblivious to our surroundings, to the threat of opposition and strife! We become totally enraptured IN HIM!

As a result of our "entering into our chambers, and hiding ourselves for the moment" (Isa. 26:20), the Lord comes out of His place (verse 21)! And what is the purpose of this? Why, to deal in judgment with all that would possibly interrupt our union, of course! He emerges from His chambers, dressed in battle array!

We see that immediately following the announcement that "THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS COME", we read that THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED, and Christ is seen riding upon "a white horse" (symbolic of kingly power, prestige, and great authority), crowned "with many crowns" (the "spoils" from previous conquests), clothed with "a vesture dipped in blood" (the result of much warfare), and "a sharp sword" proceeding out of His mouth, that with it He should "smite the nations" (Rev. 19:9-16)! His determination should be self-explanatory; He is going forth "conquering, and to conquer"!

Subsequently, the declaration is made to the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, "COME AND GATHER YOURSELVES TOGETHER UNTO THE SUPPER OF THE

GREAT GOD..." (VERSE 17)! Now, in case you were expecting fried chicken, pork chops, apple pie, etc. to be served at the marriage supper, think again! For in the next verse we read part of the menu: "... that ye might eat THE FLESH of kings, and THE FLESH of captains, and THE FLESH of mighty men, and THE FLESH of horses, and of them that sit on them, and THE FLESH OF ALL MEN, both free and bond, both small and great"! (Sound appetizing? Certainly not to the carnal mind)! Notice the key word that opens our understanding to this passage: "THE FLESH"! So that's it! This whole scene speaks of the consumption determined upon the fleshly aspirations of the will of man, the carnal concerns and characteristics of his beastly, Adamic nature! It refers to the swallowing up of every fleshly interest and ambition found in the will of man, so that only that which is pure, and conformed to God's will, might remain! For surely, "the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness" (Isa. 10:22-23; 28:22)!

We would point out that God's intention is not to destroy man's will, else He would have never given him the option of choice in the first place. Rather, it is to redirect it, if need be, so that it gives it's endorsement and strength to a virginal relationship with Christ! This is clearly revealed by the fact that in the preceding chapters, these same "kings of the earth", whose "flesh" had previously been consumed, are seen entering into "the New Jerusalem", bringing their glory and honor into it (Rev. 21:24)! This bespeaks a conformance to, and compliance with a pure, undefiled relationship with the Lamb! Praise God! Having no more "flesh" to motivate them, or draw them away into committing "fornication" with the old "harlot", they surrender their wills to supporting "the Holy City"!

There is another aspect to the type of "food" provided at the marriage supper. This is revealed in the Gospels. You recall when Jesus, being urged by His disciples to eat, replied, "I HAVE MEAT TO EAT THAT YE KNOW NOT OF". As they reasoned among themselves whether someone had brought Him meat without their knowledge, He spake thus: "*MY MEAT IS TO DO THE WILL OF HIM THAT SENT HE, AND TO FINISH HIS WORK*" (John 4:32-34)! TO DO THE WILL OF THE FATHER! TO FINISH HIS WORK! This is the kind of "meat" our Father provides!

Beloved, it is only as our wills have been subdued, "slain by the Sword which proceedeth out of His mouth", and our fleshly interests have been consumed, that we are able to partake of this "meat" of DOING HIS WILL. And what wonderful provisions these are for the spiritual man; what heavenly delights! Truly, "the half of it has never been told"! Praise His holy Name!

Throughout the entire ordeal, as we learn to respond to Him in a positive manner, there is a two-fold operation of the Spirit: the first, of wounding, smiting, and destroying... and the other, of healing, binding up, and restoring! This glorious truth is found in the oft-quoted passage, "BE STILL, and know that I am God" (Psa. 46:10). The word "STILL"... "RAPHAH" in Hebrew, means, "to slacken:-- consume, fail, (be) faint, wax feeble, forsake, let alone, be still, or weaken". However, it's primary root word is "RAPHA", which means, "to mend (by stitching), i.e. to cure:--(cause to) heal, repair, or thoroughly make whole". When we apply this to our subject, the wisdom of God shines forth! For it

is as we are brought to a state of slackness; when we feel consumed; when we become faint, feeble, left alone, or weakened in our own human strength or ability, that we should rejoice! It is then that the Lord arises, our enemies are scattered, and He begins the healing process! Praise God! After the wounding has served it's purpose, causing us to turn to Him with our whole hearts, in due season He tenderly binds us up! Therefore, we are encouraged by these words: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he HATH TORN, and He WILL HEAL ("RAPHA") us; He HATH SMITTEN, and He WILL BIND us up. AFTER TWO DAYS He will revive us: IN THE THIRD DAY, He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord..." (Hosea 6:1-3)!

While there is so much more we could share along these lines, we will close for now. Though we have basically focused our studies toward the personal application of this subject, we know of course that there shall be a corporate fulfillment, as well. What we have endeavored to show, however, are PRINCIPLES IN THE PROCESS OF PURIFICATION. Our God is preparing a people, the likes of which this world has never seen; a people arrayed "in fine linen, clean and white"... who are righteous, even as He is righteous! He is arranging the circumstances in their lives even now to accomplish this grand purpose! And though we are thoroughly convinced that times of tremendous roilings and persecution are still ahead for the saints, it shall be said of them, "these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14)! Glory to God! Then, in deed and in truth, THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB WILL HAVE FULLY COME; AND HIS WIFE WILL HAVE MADE HERSELF READY!

PRAISE THE LORD!