

# The Bridegroom and the Bride



## The Position of the Church and Israel

Ab Klein Haneveld



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# 1. Preface

*Is the church the bride of Christ or not?*

This is the question that inspired the study presented in the following pages. It was with some hesitation that I set myself the task of writing a study on this subject. Not because its outcome is so uncertain, but because practice shows that there is indeed a kind of taboo on this subject. More than once I have been saddened to find that the answer to the above question is often accompanied by strong emotions and rarely based on Scripture. The idea that the church is the bride of Christ seems in many cases to be the starting point when reading and studying the Bible. Especially in the explanation of certain types, such as Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Ruth, this view is assumed without any scriptural evidence. And this is not the way it should be. As soon as we open the Scriptures, we should be ready to question our assumptions and test them against the inspired word of God. These pages have been written only for believers who are prepared to do so.

In this study, I have deliberately limited myself to those issues that are directly related to the question posed. Perhaps this leaves many questions unanswered. Questions about the relationship between the old and the new covenant. About the Mosaic Law. About typology. But I thought it better not to complicate the issue of the bride and the bridegroom any more than it already is because of all the human feelings and emotions. Let us simply open the Scriptures, first the Old Testament and then the New Testament, so that the Lord can lead us into all truth by His word and by His Spirit. To build up our faith. But above all, to the glory of His great name.

## 2. Israel and the Old Covenant

When Israel became a nation through the exodus from Egypt, the Lord entered into a covenant with the people that became the basis of their national existence. This covenant was the covenant of the Law. On the one hand, the "Law of Moses", as it is often called in Scripture, governed the whole of Israelite society. On the other hand, it primarily regulated the relationship between the Lord and Israel as a people. It should be clear to those "who know the law" (Romans 7 : 1) that the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel established by the law was nothing more and nothing less than a marriage. In other words, the dispensation of the Law was the administration of a marriage! The "old covenant" of the law bound Israel as a nation to the Lord. This is of practical theological significance because a marriage has only two parties, of different sexes. A marriage binds these two parties, of course, but it also excludes all others! The marriage aspects of the Mosaic covenant (to name just one) play a dominant role in Scripture!

First, the identity of the husband is established. Already when the Lord appears to Moses and Moses asks Him about His identity, the Lord introduces Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And when asked His name, the answer is: "I WILL BE" or "I AM", which is a variant of the name known as "Jehovah" or "Yahweh". It is by this name that the Lord continually reveals Himself to Israel. In our English translations of the Bible, this proper name is almost always rendered as "Lord". But the many hundreds of times Scripture speaks of "the Lord your God", the original Hebrew text gives "Jehovah your God". And the expression "the name of the Lord" stands for "the name of Jehovah". All that matters is that the correct name is recorded on the marriage certificate. And whenever the Lord made Himself known to Israel and its prophets by that name, Israel was reminded of the name on the marriage certificate. After all, it begins with:

### **Exodus 20 : 2**

- 2 I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Not only the identity of the bridegroom but also that of the bride is established. It is the people who were led out of Egypt and redeemed by "Jehovah their God". As is customary to this day, the official record gives the bride's place of birth: Egypt. This people, born and redeemed out of Egypt, was Israel, the bride of Jehovah. The marriage began in the usual way with betrothal:

## **Jeremiah 2:2**

- 2 Thus says the Lord: I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

So Israel went in betrothal to the feast in the desert. The feast of which the Lord had spoken to Pharaoh by the mouth of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 5 : 1; 10 : 9). Which feast? The wedding, of course, which was the official confirmation of their marriage at Sinai. In this, the husband presented the marriage contract to his wife. Was she ready? Did she agree to the terms and conditions? Her 'yes' is recorded four times in Scripture:

## **Exodus 24:7**

- 8 [...] "All that the Lord (*Jehovah*) has said we will do, and be obedient". (See also Exodus 19 : 8; 24 : 3; Deuteronomy 5 : 27)

This is where they got married! This is also what the Lord speaks about through Ezekiel. He recounts the birth of Israel out of Egypt and the love the Lord had for Israel. This led to the conclusion of the marriage:

## **Ezekiel 16:7,8**

- 7 "I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. *Your* breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you *were* naked and bare.
- 8 When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time *was* the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God.

The Lord swore, He made a promise. He made a covenant with Israel. He made Israel His own. That the covenant mentioned here was indeed the covenant of the Law, is the thrust of the words of another prophet:

## **Jeremiah 31:32**

- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord (*Jehovah*).

The same prophet calls:

### **Jeremiah 3 : 14**

14 Return, O backsliding children, says the Lord (*Jehovah*); for I am married to you [...].

This is a clear reference to the Mosaic covenant in which the Lord and Israel were united in marriage as bridegroom and bride.

Where there is marriage, there is a married home! The current debate about ownership of Palestine is completely unnecessary for the believer. After all, it is the land into which Israel followed the Lord. It is the land where the Lord dwelt in the midst of Israel on the condition of obedience to the husband! Therefore, Palestine or Canaan is not the property of Israel, but of the Lord Himself:

### **Leviticus 25 : 23**

23 The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land *is* Mine; for you *are* strangers and sojourners with Me.

That is what the law says. It is in the marriage contract. The land, the matrimonial home, is at the disposal of the wife and that is why it is called "the land of Israel". But it is the husband's property! That is why Isaiah 14 : 2 expressly speaks of "the land of the Lord". Hosea 9 : 3 speaks of "the Lord's land". Joel 2 : 18 speaks of "His land". 2 Chronicles 7 : 20 and Joel 1 : 6 and 3 : 2 speak of "My land". Psalm 85 : 1 speaks of "Your land". Jeremiah 11 : 15 speaks of "My house". And in all these scriptures, Israel's right to the land is at issue!

According to the law, this right of Israel was based on her obedience to the Lord, her husband, the owner of the house. (See e.g. 2 Chronicles 7 : 19-20) Together they would live in Canaan. The Lord and Israel. The Lord in Israel.

Living together and intimacy are the hallmarks of marriage. But faithfulness is also essential in a marriage! Hence, the first article of the marriage certificate reads:

### **Exodus 20 : 2, 3, 5**

- 2 I *am* the Lord (*Jehovah*) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
- 3 You shall have no other gods before Me.
- 5 You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord (*Jehovah*) your God, *am* a jealous God [...].

The Lord demanded faithfulness from His wife, He expected above all that she would not serve other gods, other men. Even before Israel had stepped over

the threshold of the marital home, the Lord warned them not to associate with the Gentiles still living there, nor to serve their gods. The warning that He is "a jealous God" is emphatically repeated!

**Exodus 34 : 10-12, 14**

- 10 [...] Behold, I make a covenant [...].
- 11 Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.
- 12 Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going [...],
- 14 for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

The Lord Himself would drive out and defeat Israel's enemies. That was part of His function as husband. Israel is therefore warned not to make any kind of covenant with other nations. For such a covenant would automatically be a covenant with the gods of those nations! Such a covenant by Israel with other gods could not possibly be interpreted by the God of Israel as anything other than adultery, fornication and unfaithfulness! Surely such a covenant would be a denial of the covenant and thus of the marriage between the Lord and Israel! Therefore, to serve other gods is not just a deviation from certain religious ideas, it is downright fornication. "Playing the harlot with their gods" (Exodus 34 : 15) is not just an idle phrase! It is bitter reality. It sums up the history of Israel under the old covenant. The dispensation of the marriage between the Lord and Israel. What overwhelming sorrow echoes in the words of the Lord when He Himself describes the behaviour of His wife. First, in Ezekiel 16, we find the words already quoted, describing the initial love between Him and Israel, culminating in the following statement:

**Ezekiel 16 : 8**

- 8 "[...] Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," [...].

Then we are told of the blessed consequences of this for Israel, among others:

**Ezekiel 16 : 13, 14**

- 13 [...] You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty.
- 14 Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it *was* perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord God.



Israel, the woman, not only became a kingdom (she succeeded to royalty), but was also "exceedingly beautiful", at least according to her husband! This was because of the glory that the Lord had given her. After all, woman is the glory of man. (1 Corinthians 11 : 7) Well, Israel's glory and beauty were actually the glory and beauty of the Lord Himself. They were the blessings Israel received from the Lord through the covenant of marriage.

But what was the result of Israel's beauty? We let her husband speak:

**Ezekiel 16 : 15**

15 But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who *would* have it.

It is the Lord's sad observation that Israel, who had received from Him all that made her attractive, used these attractions to offer herself to any casual passer-by:

**Ezekiel 16 : 25**

25 You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry.

The gifts, which Israel had received from her husband, were squandered on other nations, other gods, in short, on other men:

**Ezekiel 16 : 17-19**

17 You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them.

18 [...] You set My oil and My incense before them.

19 Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey *which* I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was, says the Lord God.

Does it not pierce our hearts to hear the Lord complain about His own wife?

**Ezekiel 16 : 32-35**

32 *You are* an adulterous wife, *who* takes strangers instead of her husband.

33 Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you

from all around for your harlotry.

- 34 You are the opposite of *other* women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite.
- 35 Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord!

Under these circumstances, the question is justified as to how long this untenable situation should continue. How long is the old covenant valid? How long will the marriage last? The answer to this question is controversial from the outset. Not because the Bible does not give a clear answer, but because human theological and ethical traditions often prevail over Scripture itself. But there can be no doubt that the old covenant has meanwhile been dissolved! Or, to look at it from the other side: The marriage between the Lord and Israel is now a thing of the past. In order to explore this further, we must first establish from Scripture how long a marriage actually lasts. Until when does the law apply? Now the strange thing is that there are actually four different answers to this question. And all four are equally biblical. The first answer is based on the great ideal:

**Matthew 19 : 4-6**

- 4 [...] "Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning 'made them male and female,'
- 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?
- 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

These words of the Lord Jesus Himself confirm that marriage is an ordinance of the Creator and that it was not and is not meant to be dissolved. Therefore, the ideal of marriage is that it should last forever. And if everything were ideal, no one would object! That is the first answer.

But on the basis of the same scripture, we come to another possibility. What God has joined together turns out to be separable. This may not be the intention, but it is certainly a possibility. And even a legitimate one! For just as the conclusion of a marriage is regulated by law, so is its breaking up a legal matter! But before we ask when it happens, we need to know how it happens. And that brings us to the remaining three answers to the question of the duration of this marriage.

According to the words of the Lord already quoted, the essence of marriage is that there is communion. Communion on many different levels. It will be clear that this communion can be partly regulated by the law, but it is not at all brought about by the law. Whatever kind of communion we are talking about, it is created by the spouses themselves! This clearly means that marriage is not primarily a legal matter, but a social one. In other words, a marriage is shaped by the way the two partners live. When they have intercourse, when they live together, we can speak of a marriage! That does not change the fact that this marriage should be regulated by law, but that is not the point here. The point is that a marriage is created by communion and is then maintained by communion. That is why fidelity is essential in marriage. For as soon as one of the spouses has intercourse with another, communion with the spouse is broken. And when the communion is broken, the marriage is broken. Infidelity is not only the opposite of faithfulness, but also and above all the end of faithfulness. Infidelity is therefore essentially the end of a marriage. Applied to the Lord and Israel, it means that Israel itself ended this marriage by serving other gods! And this is exactly what Scripture teaches:

**Jeremiah 31:32**

32 [...] the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.

This verse speaks of the old covenant made at the time of the exodus from Egypt. It speaks of the covenant of marriage. And of this covenant the Lord says here that she, Israel the woman, has broken it. Even though He had married her, even though He had promised her eternal faithfulness, Israel had the audacity to destroy this covenant, much to the chagrin of her Lord. It seems superfluous to point out that the destruction of this covenant is the same as the destruction of this marriage! The destruction of something is the end of something! The only question that can be asked here is: When did Israel terminate this marriage? The answer can only be: When she committed fornication and adultery! So the second answer to the question of the length of a marriage is: A marriage lasts until one of the parties becomes unfaithful.

But if a marriage is regulated and administered by law, then its annulment must also be officially regulated by law! If we think of marriage in a very idealistic way, as merely a living together in community based on a mutual pledge of fidelity, then it is terminated by the infidelity of one of the parties. If, on the other hand, we regard marriage with equal right as a legal and administrative matter, then it is terminated as soon as the legal regulation for it comes into force! This regulation reads:

**Deuteronomy 24:1**

- 1 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house [...].

What is special about this article of the law is not that divorce is authorised and regulated by law, but the grounds on which it is granted. "Grounds" in the plural, because two 'conditions' are mentioned! The first ground for divorce is that the husband has found "some uncleanness" in his wife. In an allusion to Deuteronomy 24, the Lord says by the mouth of the prophet:

**Jeremiah 3:1**

- 1 [...] But you have played the harlot with many lovers [...].

So there is no doubt about the nature of her "uncleanness". But the wife's infidelity is not a sufficient reason for divorce! This is what the law says:

**Deuteronomy 24:1**

- 1 [...] and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her [...].

The wife's infidelity does not oblige the husband to officially send her away with a certificate of divorce. He can also forgive her! If she finds "favour in his eyes", the husband will not send his unfaithful wife away! So divorce depends partly on the will of the husband. Indeed, this is clear from the Lord's own unequivocal comments on the subject. After pointing out that marriage is meant to last forever, the Pharisees ask Him:

**Matthew 19:7,8**

- 7 [...] Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?
- 8 He said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

In these words of the Lord, the motive for divorce is not the unfaithful wife, but the heart of the husband! So the Mosaic law is not designed to deal with the problem of the adulterous wife, but with the problem of the husband's "hardness of heart". It is the phenomenon of the man's inability to give grace to his wife. If he is unwilling or unable to forgive his wife, he is obliged to send her away or leave her with a certificate of divorce, which is an acceptable and logical arrangement for anyone who is prepared to think about it without preju-

dice. But be that as it may, this arrangement is contained in the law governing the marriage arrangements between the Lord and Israel. It is therefore almost self-evident that this law was indeed applied to this relationship. For the Lord did indeed send His wife away with a certificate of divorce. It should be noted, however, that this certificate of divorce was apparently only given to one part of Israel, namely the kingdom of the ten tribes! This part of the kingdom and people of Israel was finally sent away in 721 BC and taken into captivity by the Assyrians, from which they have not yet returned! This is what the Lord says:

**Jeremiah 3:6,7**

- 6 [...] Have you seen what backsliding Israel (*the ten tribes*) has done? She has gone up on every high mountain [...] and there played the harlot.
- 7 And I said, after she had done all these *things*, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return [...].

Having found "some uncleanness" in Israel, the Lord first called her to repentance. At first she found grace in His eyes! But Israel did not repent. And then grace really ceases! Then, according to the law, there is nothing left but the certificate of divorce.

**Jeremiah 3:8**

- 8 Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

God officially divorced the ten tribes of Israel. But immediately we are told that Judah, the remaining two tribes, also went the same way. However, they were not sent away with a certificate of divorce, because they had officially repented and thus found grace first:

**Jeremiah 3:10**

- 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says the Lord.

We see in these scriptures that the marriage covenant of Deuteronomy 24 : 1 was applied to Israel in both ways. In the case of adultery by the wife, there were two possibilities. One was that the wife would find favour in the eyes of the husband, who would therefore not issue a certificate of divorce. This principle was applied to Judah, the kingdom of the two tribes. The other possibility was that the wife did not (any longer) find grace in the eyes of the husband. In

this case, the husband was obliged to send his wife away permanently with a certificate of divorce. This principle was applied to the ten tribes who were sent into exile from which they have never returned. And this is the third answer. Marriage lasts until legal divorce!

There is no doubt that marriage in general should last forever. But this assumes that the spouses will live forever! But this ideal is no longer real, because human beings by nature do not live forever. This brings us to the fourth answer to the question of the duration of marriage under the old covenant. The answer is that marriage lasts "until death do us part".

### **Romans 7:1-3**

- 1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?
- 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband.
- 3 [...] so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

The law speaks only of the living. The effect of the law ends with death. After the death of the husband, the wife is free from her marriage vows to him. And strange as it may sound: The deceased husband is free from his marriage vows to his wife! The concept of fidelity then becomes completely meaningless. For death, by definition, is the absence of communion! Therefore, the law cannot bind the living to the dead or vice versa! The apostle Paul quotes these verses specifically in relation to the subject we are discussing. His argument in these chapters of the letter to the Romans focuses on the end of the dispensation of the law. The final and lawful end of the marriage between the Lord and Israel. The apostle's argument leaves nothing to be desired in terms of clarity. If the husband is dead, the wife is free! The Man to whom Israel had sworn allegiance died a humiliating death on the cross of Calvary. And one of the many consequences of this for Israel is that it sets her free from the law. For the law cannot bind her to a dead man! The marriage between the Lord and Israel has thus come to a definitive end! And just as there came a time in the history of Israel when this marriage was created and the law came into effect, so there came a time when all this came to an end. The Man had died, the woman, as a widow, was free from the law and from the Man! This is what the apostle is saying in these verses. Clear words on a very simple matter! And that was the fourth answer to the question about the duration of marriage under the old covenant. It lasts until death intervenes.

So Scripture gives four answers to the question of the length of marriage:

- 1. It should last forever.**
- 2. It ends essentially in the case of unfaithfulness.**
- 3. It ends officially with the certificate of divorce.**
- 4. It ends by death.**

The last three of these possibilities all applied to the marriage relationship between the Lord and Israel under the old covenant. So there were three ways in which that marriage ended. But strange as it may seem, the first answer will nevertheless apply. The word of God clearly speaks of a marriage between the Lord and Israel which, according to the original ideal, will last forever. But this marriage no longer falls under the old covenant, but under the new covenant.

### 3. Israel and the New Covenant

The easiest way to understand something of the meaning of the new covenant is, of course, to study the relevant Scriptures. The best known one can be found in the prophecies of Jeremiah:

#### **Jeremiah 31 : 31-34**

- 31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -
- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.
- 33 But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.
- 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

As we study these verses about the announcement of a new covenant, we can add the following ten observations:

1. The new covenant is announced over "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah". When Israel and Judah are mentioned side by side in this way, they are designations for the ten and the two tribes. The name "Israel" stands for the kingdom of the ten tribes which perished in the Assyrian captivity because of its fornication. The old covenant with the ten tribes, as we have seen, was finally terminated by the certificate of divorce.

In addition, the name "Judah" stands for the two tribes whose descendants we know by the name "Jews". The old covenant of the law with the two tribes was not ended by the certificate of divorce, but by the death of the Lord. By the death of the husband. So, although the old covenant with Israel and Judah ended in different ways, a new covenant will be made with both.

2. This new covenant is "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the



land of Egypt". The new covenant announced here is contrasted with an old covenant. This old covenant is the covenant of the law of Moses, which was made at the time of the liberation from Egypt. This means, in the first place, that the old covenant of the law must give way to the new. In other words, the new covenant will have to replace the old! So when the new covenant comes into effect, the old covenant must be abolished. On a legal basis, of course! This is the comment that the letter to the Hebrews makes on this passage of Scripture:

**Hebrews 8:13**

13 In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (*See also Hebrews 8 : 7-12*)

Secondly, it means that the new covenant will apply to Israel just like the old covenant did. If we study this passage alone, we conclude that the new covenant was promised to all twelve tribes of Israel. Thirdly, it means that when the new covenant comes into effect, Israel will be delivered from exile, just as it was under the old covenant!

3. The phrase "My covenant which they broke" is clear enough. When Scripture teaches that the Lord Himself put an end to the old covenant by the certificate of divorce and by His death, this is only a confirmation of the fact that Israel had already destroyed that covenant by her unfaithfulness.

4. Here it is said of the old covenant that the Lord had married Israel by it. Now, when a new covenant is announced to replace the old one, it means that the previous marriage has ended and a new one is being established. Let's get the facts straight. The old covenant was given by the Lord, it applied to Israel, and it was a marriage according to Scripture. The new covenant is to replace the old, it is given by the Lord, it applies to Israel. So the conclusion is that this new covenant is also a marriage covenant between the Lord and Israel!

5. The new covenant is then said to be made "after those days [...]". "Those days" are obviously the days of the old covenant, which was to disappear. Now it is clear that the old covenant was finally abolished by the death of the Lord Jesus, so that the new covenant could not come into effect before the crucifixion of the Lord! This truth explains the curious phenomenon that the Lord so often during His life admonished His disciples not to speak of what they had seen or heard, whereas they were allowed to do so and did so after His resurrection. After all, those days were about preaching a new covenant and the restoration of Israel as a nation. But this new covenant and national restora-

tion were only possible after the death and resurrection of the Lord Himself who had come:

**Galatians 4:4,5**

- 4 [...] under the law,
- 5 to redeem those who were under the law [...].

For the old covenant had to be legally terminated before the new one could replace it.

6. With "the house of Israel" the Lord would make a new covenant "after those days". In contrast to verse 31, verse 33 no longer speaks separately of "the house of Judah", but only of "the house of Israel". This means that the name "Israel" is no longer limited to the ten tribes, but is applied universally to all twelve tribes, to the whole of Israel. From this we can conclude that under the new covenant the two tribes of the Jews will be reunited with the ten tribes that were taken into Assyrian captivity. They will thus form one nation again under the new covenant.

7. The law of the old covenant was written on stone tablets. It was engraved in stone "black and white" and was given to and imposed on Israel, the bride. That is why Scripture calls the law a yoke. Israel was burdened with a law that she could not possibly keep. The law contained God's standards and was therefore alien to natural man. Of the new covenant, however, it is said that the Lord will not impose it but will "put it in their minds". It will not be written on tablets of stone, but "on their hearts". This means that the new covenant is not an imposed yoke, but rather one that corresponds to the very nature of those who participate in it. This is not because God has lowered His standards. No, it is because they are different people. For the natural man obviously does not have this law in his mind. So it is not about the natural man, it is about born-again people. They have received new life in Christ through faith and are therefore free from the old covenant and have become partakers of the new.

8. The statement "I will be their God and they shall be My people" is used here in connection with the new covenant. But it is derived from the old covenant! For it begins in the preamble with: "I am the Lord your God, who [...]". In the old covenant, the Lord was already the God and husband of Israel. The same is said here of the new covenant. The Lord will again be the God and husband of Israel. And Israel will be God's people. Under the old covenant, the Lord had already said to Israel:

**Exodus 19:5,6**

- 5 [...] if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant,

- then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people [...].
- 6 And you shall be to Me [...] a holy nation. [...]

The new covenant confirms this old promise. The Lord will again be the God of Israel and Israel will again be God's people. Under the old covenant this was the formulation of a marriage relationship. The same is true under the new covenant.

9. Under the new covenant, Israel will know the Lord. From the least of them to the greatest of them. This does not mean that Israel will become a nation of theologians. No, it means that Israel, as the wife, will have communion with her husband. The Hebrew word used here for "to know" is not merely an expression of intellectual knowledge, but of communion. "To know someone" in the language of the Bible is the same as "to have intercourse with". "Adam knew Eve, his wife," says Scripture. In the same way, Israel will know her Lord. She will have communion with Him. Of course, this was also to be the case under the old covenant. The Lord wanted to have communion with Israel. But the same chapter teaches that Israel was never willing:

**Jeremiah 31:21, 22**

- 21 [...] Turn back, o virgin of Israel [...].
- 22 How long will you gad about, o you backsliding daughter?  
For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth - a woman  
shall encompass a man.

Israel shied away. Israel was reluctant. Israel did not want to encompass her husband. So in Scripture, the woman Jezebel - whose name literally means "without cohabitation" or "untouched" - is a type of Israel under the old covenant! But the Lord promised to create something new here, namely that the woman would encompass the man. We are also told that this woman is Israel. And the identity of the Man is gradually becoming clear. So Israel will know her Lord. She will have communion with Him. Not so much by a change of heart, but by a creative act of the Lord Himself. This is what verse 22 says. Only after being born again will Israel enter into this communion with the Lord. Then she will come to know Him. She must first become a new creation in order to be placed under the new covenant.

10. This also explains the next point. That point is that the Lord will no longer remember the iniquity and sins of Israel because He has forgiven them. But the forgiveness of sins is only for those who turn to the Lord in faith. For:

**Romans 4:5**

- 5 [...] to him who does not work (under the law) but believes

on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Faith is accounted for righteousness. When Israel's sins are forgiven and their iniquities are no longer remembered, then we are dealing with a true believing, born again Israel. An Israel that has become a new creation. An Israel that will encompass her husband. In short, an Israel that has become a partaker of the promised new covenant.

This comprehensive exposition in Jeremiah 31 is, of course, confirmed in other Scriptures. First, we find an announcement of the new covenant in the same chapter in which the Lord personally addressed His then adulterous wife:

**Ezekiel 16 : 60-62**

- 60 Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.
- 61 [...] but not because of My covenant with you.
- 62 And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord (*Jehovah*).

In these words, the Lord promised that in the future He would remember the covenant He made with Israel in the days of her "youth". And instead of the old covenant of Sinai, the Lord would make a new covenant with Israel, this time expressly eternal. This whole chapter focuses on Israel as the woman under the old covenant which had been broken. Now, when we are talking about a new covenant that will be everlasting, we are, of course, again talking about a marriage. An eternal marriage. And who is the bride now?

A few chapters later (Ezekiel 37) we first find a prophecy of the future conversion and rebirth of Israel, followed by a prophecy of the reunion of the ten and the two tribes. This reunion of Israel and Judah is also mentioned in Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 50 : 4, 5**

- 4 [...] The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; [...]
- 5 [...] *saying*, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord *in* a perpetual covenant [...].'

These things are very much in line with what we have seen in Jeremiah 31. Here in Ezekiel 37, this double prophecy concludes with the words:

**Ezekiel 37:26,27**

- 26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; [...] I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.
- 27 [...] indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The new covenant is called here "an everlasting covenant" as well as "a covenant of peace". For it is the covenant on which the coming kingdom of peace will be based, starting with Israel. It is the kingdom of peace with Jesus Christ, the Son of David, as its king, whose name is mentioned in this context in this chapter.

These verses also say that the Lord will dwell in the midst of Israel. In other words, Israel will encompass and surround the Lord. These are terms that express the marital community. That is why it is explicitly said that the Lord will call Israel "My people" (ammi) again! Israel will once again be God's people as it was under the old covenant. And who is the bride now?

In turn, when the prophet Isaiah prophesies about the new covenant, we find exactly the same thoughts repeated here. Again, the new covenant is contrasted with the old. But in remembering the past, the prophet says to Israel:

**Isaiah 54:4-6**

- 4 "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore.
- 5 For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel [...].
- 6 For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused," says your God.

These words refer to the future meeting between the Lord and Israel on the Mount of Olives. (See Isaiah 53) Israel has every reason to be ashamed of her unfaithfulness when she is confronted by the husband "of her youth". But already here the Lord announces that two things will no longer be remembered: First, the shame of her youth. This obviously refers to her unfaithfulness and the subsequent divorce which was pronounced against a part of Israel: It is the setting aside of the ten tribes. Secondly, the reproach of her widowhood is no longer considered. In fact, today's Judaism, as descended from the two tribes under the name of Judah, is widowed by "the death of the Lord".

After all, it was this death that ended the marriage of the old covenant. But these things will be forgotten, because Israel will have become a new creation at the time of this meeting. Israel will be reborn. Israel will have become God's people again. And who is the Maker?

**Isaiah 54:5**

5 [...] your Maker is your husband [...].

Israel's Maker is Israel's husband! He who made Israel in the past was then Israel's husband. And He who in the future will gather Israel again from all nations and make her again His people is again Israel's husband. He will call again to Israel who was a "woman forsaken", a woman once sent away by her husband with a certificate of divorce. A woman who has been rejected. The Lord will call again to his "wife of youth" to make a new covenant with her. A "covenant of peace", (Isaiah 54 : 10) an "everlasting covenant". (Isaiah 55 : 3) A peaceful marriage, an everlasting marriage. And who is the bride now?

## 4. A New Marriage

As we have seen, Scripture always presents the new covenant as replacing the old. This often gives the strong impression that the new covenant is in fact a restoration of the old. This is definitely not the case. The Mosaic law was finally fulfilled and ended by the death and resurrection of Christ, so it is inconceivable that it could be restored. The marriage of the old covenant was also definitively ended in the same way. And does not the old covenant itself say that such a terminated marriage cannot or should not be restored? For the record: A marriage dissolved by death simply cannot be restored. But one terminated by a decree of divorce could be restored. But the Mosaic law forbids it. According to this law, the only ground for divorce is adultery. In other words, a husband can send his wife away after "she has married another man". After that, the law says:

### **Deuteronomy 24:4**

- 4 *Then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land [...].*

So a legally broken marriage can and should never be restored under this law! To do so would "bring sin on the land". This last remark can only be explained when we realise that this legislation was primarily concerned with the marriage between the Lord and Israel. That marriage would be terminated on legitimate grounds by the certificate of divorce, after which restoration of that same marriage would be impossible. Some use this article of the law to argue that Israel could never be the bride in the future. Of course, this sounds quite logical, but then what do we do with all the Scriptures already quoted above? The difficulty here lies only in our own poor use of language. For convenience, we sometimes speak of a restoration of this broken marriage, but Scripture does not do this. The old marriage is not being restored, but an entirely new one is being established. Note: a different marriage with a different bridegroom and a different bride! For what Scripture teaches is that the first bridegroom died on the cross of Calvary and then rose from the dead as the first-fruits of a new creation. In the same way, Scripture teaches that Israel - before becoming the bride in the future - will die in order to be reborn. Both the bride and the bridegroom have gone through the process of death and resurrection. In one sense they have remained the same. But in another sense, they have become completely new through regeneration. They have both become a new generation through this process. And that is why Scripture does not speak of a restored marriage, but of a new marriage! The apostle Paul, as one of those

"who know the law" (Romans 7 : 1), was well aware of this principle. Writing to believers among the Jews, he argues:

**Romans 7:3,4**

- 3 [...] but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.
- 4 Therefore, my brethren, you **also** have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead [...].

Not only the Lord, but also the believing Israelite died and rose from the dead by being reborn. The purpose of this, according to the apostle, is for the believing Israelite to be united with the risen Christ in the new covenant! The point now is to see that both parties are in fact a whole new generation.

This also explains the curious phenomenon that the prophet Hosea had to marry a "wife of harlotry" a second time, whom he bought in the marketplace. (Hosea 3 : 1, 2) No one now denies that this second wife of Hosea was the same as his first wife Gomer. (Hosea 1 : 2, 3) Hosea's first marriage, as a type of the relationship between the Lord and Israel, suffered shipwreck and ended in divorce. But it was restored. And although no one doubts this fact, the name of this second wife is not mentioned. It was Gomer, but it does not say so! For the typological explanation of this story, we need to know that the Lord's new marriage will not be with the same, but with a born-again Israel.

And with that we have also explained a linguistic problem. The Hebrew word "kallah" is actually translated by two different English words. It occurs 34 times in Scripture, where it is translated seventeen times as "daughter-in-law", but also seventeen times as "bride/spouse"! So, according to the dictionary, the word has two different meanings. The point, however, is that these are not two different meanings, but that "bride/spouse" and "daughter-in-law" are essentially identical concepts. A little reflection on these two words teaches us that the difference between the two is only generational. "My daughter-in-law" is "my son's bride/spouse". So the Bible does not seem to make a clear distinction between my bride/spouse and my son's bride/spouse. They are referred to by the same word! This can only be explained if we see that it is not a matter of human things, but of Divine things! For the "bride of the Lord" is the same as the "bride of His son". (His daughter-in-law) This explanation of the Hebrew word also proves that the bride of the old covenant is identical to the bride of the new covenant. In both cases, of course, it is Israel.



It will not surprise you to learn that "chathan", Hebrew for "bridegroom", is also translated as "father-in-law" or "son-in-law". It is important to remember that the suffix "-in-law" refers to in-laws or relatives by marriage. Starting with the bride in the youngest generation, the father-in-law is now the father of the groom. Father and son are considered the same! And starting with the bride in the oldest generation, the son-in-law is the groom's son. As father and son, they are called by the same word. Is it not striking to see that even the language of the Bible confirms that we are dealing with two generations? Not of human marriage, of course, but of the Lord's marriage! The bride is equal to the bride of the son, and the bridegroom is equal to the bridegroom of the daughter.

When we see that Israel was Jehovah's bride under the old covenant, the Hebrew word for "bride" alone teaches us that the wife of the new covenant must also be Israel. For the bride of the father is the same as the bride of the son. Both are "kallah".

This little Hebrew word is also used as a verb. It means "to end", "to finish" or "to fulfil". This is because it comes from the root "kol", which means "all" or "end". This in turn establishes that when the bride finally appears, it will be forever and ever. Then, after all, there will be an end! A completion. A fulfilment. So the new covenant is the fulfilment of the old. Therefore it is also an everlasting covenant. And the kingdom based on this covenant of peace is therefore an eternal kingdom of peace! It is also true that "the bride, the Lamb's wife" will be presented at the end of salvation history. But we find this in the New Testament.

## 5. A New Jerusalem

As we continue our study in the New Testament, we should realise that the Old Testament speaks only of a believing and regenerated Israel as the bride. The bride of the wedding celebrated at the coming into effect of the new covenant promised to Israel on condition of repentance! The identity of the bridegroom is not in doubt. He is the promised Messiah of Israel. The promised Christ of Israel. Of course, to know what the New Testament teaches about the bride in this sense, we have to look up all the New Testament passages where the word "bride" occurs. It seems like a lot, but it is quick work. The first mention of a bride is in the words of John the Baptist:

### **John 3:29**

29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom [...].

By "bridegroom" he obviously means the Lord Jesus. John calls himself "the friend of the bridegroom" in this verse. There is no mention of who the bride is. Why should it be? The identity of the bride is known! The bride would be the believing and regenerated Israel. But the Israel of his day was yet to die. The axe is laid to the root of the tree. The root of the fig tree. John knew that he would not live to see the rebirth of Israel in his lifetime, so he does not count himself as part of the bride. He is only "the friend of the bridegroom".

The second time a bride is mentioned in the New Testament is in ... Revelation! Well, yes. Nowhere in the epistles is the bride ever mentioned. Not in Paul's, not even in those of the other apostles like Peter or James. And the Lord Himself never mentioned the bride. It is only in the last book of the Bible, at the fulfilment and completion (kallah) of Scripture and salvation history, that the bride is mentioned again:

### **Revelation 18:23**

23 [...] the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you (*the city Babylon*) anymore [...].

I cite this verse only for the sake of completeness. For whatever its meaning, it has nothing to do with the union of the Lord and Israel, or that of the Lord and the church. It is about Babylon and not Jerusalem. If the bride and bridegroom here are really metaphorical, it is about the union of state and religion, of which Babylon has always been the type and proponent.

### **Revelation 21:2, 9, 10**

2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming

down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

9 [...] "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

10 [...] and [he] showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem [...].

These verses are the third and fourth times the word "bride" is used in the New Testament. They are also the only two verses that say who or what the bride is. Let us be clear about this. These are not carefully chosen verses to support a particular theology or personal opinion. There are simply no other scriptures that speak of the bride. There are only these two in the New Testament. And they are superfluous in explaining who that bride is. It is the New Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the name of "the city of David". It is the city where the dynasty of David is established. Where the throne of David should be. It is first and foremost the throne over Israel. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. And so, in both the Old Testament and Revelation, Jerusalem is the representative of Israel. This New Jerusalem is seen here in a vision as it appears on the new earth. On a new creation! It is a reborn earth. A reborn Israel. And therefore, also a reborn city. A city that has become a new creation. And like every new creation, it appears in place of the old. Like every new creation, it is brought into being by the Creator Himself. This Jerusalem replaces the old Jerusalem built by human hands on an old creation under the old covenant. This New Jerusalem is built by the Creator Himself; it therefore comes "down out of heaven" and descends on a new creation and under the new covenant. The new marriage covenant between the Lord and Israel. All this fits perfectly with what we read in the Old Testament prophecies about this new covenant. Here we find the bride (kallah). Here we find the completion (kallah) of salvation history. This is what the expectation of this world should be focused on. On the coming of this new creation. On the appearance of the bridegroom and the bride. That is why this last book of the Bible uses this word for the fifth and last time in the New Testament:

#### **Revelation 22:17**

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

The presentation of the bride, in the form of the New Jerusalem, will take place after the thousand years and the disappearance of the old earth and the old heavens. (See Revelation 20 : 7-15) This is in keeping with the Biblical custom of presenting the bride only after the marriage. Here, without further explanation, I must appeal to the knowledge of prophecy. When Israel comes to faith and is born again, the Lord will reveal Himself to them to establish His promised kingdom over them and then over all the other nations. As we have seen,

this will take place on the basis of the new covenant, which will come into effect when Israel comes to faith. This is what the prophets proclaimed. Now the Bible teaches that after Christ's return there will first be a period of a thousand years during which the new covenant will be in force and Christ will therefore reign. Only after these thousand years will the old earth disappear to make way for the new creation, on which the New Jerusalem will descend. So there will be a period of at least a thousand years between the making of the new covenant with Israel and the presentation of the bride. This period can be nothing other than the wedding. This millennial kingdom of Christ in Israel falls under the new covenant, but precedes the presentation of the bride. So it is the wedding! And that is why only the announcement of the beginning of the wedding is mentioned, when Christ has just assumed his kingship. For when His reign begins, the marriage begins! This fact is expressed in the following verse:

**Revelation 19:6,7**

- 6 And I heard [a voice] [...] saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!
- 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.'

The beginning of Christ's reign in Jerusalem over the nations is the beginning of the marriage. So the wedding, like the bridegroom and the bride, is on earth and will last for a thousand years. These seventh thousand years of salvation history are actually a Sabbath. And as every Jew should know, every Sabbath is a wedding. At the beginning of the Sabbath, in an Orthodox synagogue, people sing in Hebrew:

*"Come, my Friend, to meet the Bride;  
let us welcome the Sabbath. [...]  
Come in peace (!), thou crown of thy husband,  
with rejoicing and with cheerfulness,  
in the midst of the faithful of the chosen people:  
come, O bride; come, O bride."*

(From: The Hirsch Siddur: The Order of Prayers for the Whole Year by Samson Raphael Hirsch.)

After this wedding, after this millennial sabbath, there will be a revelation of the bride who has become the wife. Now, we have already found this in Revelation 21.

## 6. The Church and the New Covenant

Our study of the relationship between the Lord and Israel, as regulated by the old and new covenant respectively, would end here were it not for the fact that the position of the New Testament church is often seen as that of the bride. The prophecies of the coming "marriage of the Lamb" are then considered to apply to the church and are therefore applied to it. The practical implication of this assumption is that the church takes on the position of a young woman preparing to meet her bridegroom. No doubt this is a view that appeals to many because of its romantic character. But where do we find such things taught in the letters to the churches? As we have said, there is absolutely no mention of the bride, while the idea that the believer should somehow prepare himself for an encounter with Christ is contrary to Paul's teaching. His God-inspired letters teach that as believers we have had an encounter with Christ and have lived in communion with Christ ever since. If this is true, then there is no way that the church can be the bride, for communion is reserved for the married woman, not for someone hoping to become one at some future time! So the doctrine that the church would be the bride of the Lamb is at the same time a denial of the communion we as Christians already have with Christ now. And this is not just a theory, but a very practical reality. The question is: Do we have communion with Christ now, or do we, as believers, only have it in the future, on the occasion of Christ's return? It is a question whose answer certainly has a direct bearing on our daily lives as believers.

Now it is easy to see that the doctrine of the church as the bride is not based on direct biblical confirmation. Where it is defended, it is derived from the very explicit biblical teaching that the church is the body of Christ. We find this mentioned some twenty-four times in the New Testament! But in practice, people often find it difficult to distinguish the body of the Man from His bride or wife. How is this possible? Well, simply because all the theologising down through the ages has created a labyrinth from which few can find their way out. In short, it comes down to the fact that people have learned that the church has replaced Israel, which was set aside by God at that time. This is why the church is often called "spiritual Israel". A term which is not as unbiblical as it seems, were it not for the fact that people have left no place in theology for natural Israel alongside "spiritual Israel"! Natural Israel is thus definitively explained away in order to attribute most of the prophecies and all the promises concerning Israel to the church! And since it is beyond doubt that the Bible recognises a believing Israel as the bride, it is believed that these prophecies cannot apply to a rejected Israel, and so they are attributed to the church, which is said to have replaced Israel. And so the church became the bride! In short, the bride is Israel and Israel is only the church.

Of course, there is a grain of truth in this view. But it can only exist thanks to a complete explaining away of natural Israel. The strange thing is that this doctrine of the church as the bride is preached almost exclusively by those who expect the second coming of Christ to establish His millennial kingdom. The remarkable thing is that the doctrine of a millennium refers precisely to natural Israel. And if we have room for natural Israel in our future expectation, then of course Israel will be the bride. Are we to take the prophecies literally? Should we believe in a restoration of Israel and the throne of David? Then we must be consistent and believe in Israel as the bride of the Lamb. The Lamb who stands as if slain, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. (See Revelation 5 : 5, 6) The Messiah of Israel.

But what is this grain of truth? How, then, does one come to attribute the promises for Israel to the church? The question is not, of course, why this teaching appeals to so many people. No, the question is about the biblical basis for the teaching that the "bridehood" of Israel is attributed to the church. To a certain extent this basis is indeed there. For who was the first to apply the prophecies concerning Israel and the new covenant to the church? It was "our beloved brother Paul", with whom the apostle Peter had so much trouble. (2 Peter 3 : 15, 16) So theologians who "spiritualise" prophecies are in good company. But I fear that most have not understood much of Paul's method of explaining prophecy. Here, of course, I am touching on a subject on which we cannot easily exhaust ourselves, because it is so fundamental to the understanding of the position of the church. Even and especially in relation to Israel. Nevertheless, I will try to explain Paul's method. Again, I must appeal to existing scriptural knowledge.

In the Old Testament, we have seen how the coming of the new covenant is linked to the coming of the Messiah and the conversion of Israel. This coming of the Christ and its consequences are very aptly summed up in three points by the pen of John:

**John 1:10-12**

- 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.
- 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
- 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God [...].

The meaning of verse 10 is clear. The Lord came into the world He had made, but it did not want to know Him. Creation did not want to have communion with its Creator. Verse 11 says that the Lord came to His own. He came to His

people. He came to His "wife of youth". But she too refused to have communion with Him. Not only before His death, but also after His resurrection. We find this history mentioned in the Acts of the apostles. This means that the announced new covenant could not come into effect because of the unbelief of the one to whom it was promised. Again, the new covenant was never promised to anything or anyone other than Israel. And this on the basis of faith! We have already discussed this. The question now is: What about those who have come to believe? For it was not Israel, but some Israelites and even Gentiles who came to faith. And this is confirmed in verse 12. As many as received Him have become children of God.

Now the latter is by no means unknown, but I am now concerned with its implications. What was promised was that all Israel would be brought under the new covenant through her rebirth, making her the bride of a new marriage. But not all Israel came to faith, only a few. What would happen to them was not really prophesied. But John says here that they become "children of God" by being born again of God Himself. (See John 1 : 13) They did not become part of "the bride, the Lamb's wife", but they became children of God. It is the apostle Paul who later explains this in Romans 6-8. He teaches that the believer of today has been joined to Christ. (See Romans 6 : 1-9) He has become one with Christ. And since Christ was born of God, the believer today is also born of God with Christ. Christ is "the firstborn among many brethren". (Romans 8 : 29; Hebrews 2 : 10, 11) We are not the bride, or members of the bride, or many brides, but brothers. We are one with Christ. In fact, we have communion with Christ. Not because we are His bride. Then it would not be possible or allowed. But because we are His body.

In this way, "their fall is riches of the world". (Romans 11 : 12) Israel has not yet come to faith and has not yet become the bride. And until Israel is converted, the believer is not added to the bride, but to the body of Christ. One of the peculiarities here is that the promises made to Israel are thus applied in a very special way to those who, unlike Israel, come to faith. The promise to Israel was: communion with the Lord on the basis of the new covenant. But this promise is now applied to the believer: communion with the Lord on the basis of the new covenant which applies to all believers. The promised communion for Israel was the basis of marriage. And the Lord is also monogamous. In fact, He has only one wife. Therefore, the Lord's communion with the church is not a marital communion, but a communion, as it functions in a body. It is a communion between the head and the members.

By way of example, it might be a good idea to return for a moment to one of the Old Testament prophecies about the new covenant that we have not yet

discussed. The first three chapters of the book of Hosea give a typological account of how Israel was originally God's people but was to be set aside. This is expressed in the names of some of the prophet's children with Gomer: Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah mean "not my people" and "no mercy". But this sad news is immediately followed by a promise:

**Hosea 2:18-20**

- 18 [...] In that day I will make a covenant for them [...].
- 19 I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy;
- 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.

Three times it is repeated that the Lord will betroth Israel again, after which Israel will know the Lord, namely have communion with Him. The Lord would dwell in Israel. Now Peter had no qualms about this prophecy. He was writing to "pilgrims", believing Jews still in exile. (See 1 Peter 1 : 1) To them he writes:

**1Peter 2:9,10**

- 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, [...]
- 10 who once *were* not a people (*Lo-Ammi*) but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy (*Lo-Ruhamah*) but now have obtained mercy.

Apart from Exodus 19 : 5, the apostle quotes this prophecy of Hosea and applies it literally to a believing Israel. He is taking the prophecy literally. But as is often the case, this prophecy is quoted again in the New Testament, this time by Paul. The apostle argues that in the present time God wants to make known "the riches of His glory" to and through all believers. And speaking of these believers, he says:

**Romans 9:24-26**

- 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?
- 25 As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people (*Ammi*), who were not My people, and her beloved (*Ruhamah*), who was not beloved."
- 26 And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "you are not My people," (*Lo-Ammi*) there they shall be called sons of the living God.



The apostle quotes in turn from Hosea 2 : 22 and Hosea 1 : 10, but to whom does he apply this prophecy? According to his own words, he applies it especially to the believers among the Gentiles! He says: "us [...], not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles". Paul is arguing here that the terms "not my people" and "not beloved" do not only refer to a set-aside Israel, but also to the Gentiles, who had always been set-aside! However, if we only knew Hosea and Peter, we would have to conclude that Lo-Ammi and Lo-Ruhamah, as the children of Hosea and Gomer, were only types of Israel. The apostle Paul, however, gives a much wider meaning to this prophecy. In any case, while according to Hosea himself and according to Peter the prophecy applies literally to Israel, Paul applies it to the church. And he does not only do this here. But whenever he quotes the Old Testament, he applies it metaphorically or spiritually to the church. He does this deliberately and systematically. Anyone can check this for themselves. So spiritualising is not a fairly modern invention of theologians, it is what Paul does.

I would like to take you through his letters to show you how the promises of the new covenant, which were intended for Israel, are applied to the church! In this context, however, I do not have the opportunity to do so. I would like to point out, however, that the common theological practice of spiritualising prophecy is indeed reprehensible. Firstly, because spiritualisation is only possible thanks to the literal meaning. If Hosea's prophecy does not have a literal meaning, how can it have a spiritual meaning? If there are no trees and no apples, how can an apple not fall far from the tree? Then what does the saying mean? It means nothing! So how can you apply prophecies spiritually if you do not believe in a literal meaning? The spiritual meaning is based on the literal meaning and is therefore the opposite of rejecting the literal meaning. Secondly, it is only possible to spiritualise something if you understand the literal meaning. One must not only believe in the existence of trees and apples, but also know what they are in order to understand the proverb about the falling apple. Now, if we do not know, or do not want to know, the literal meaning of the prophecies, how can we understand their spiritual meaning? Seeking such a spiritual meaning outside the literal is actually ridiculous.

The point is that the prophecy of a marriage between the Lord and Israel under the new covenant is applied to the church. But not in a literal sense, but in a metaphorical or, if you like, spiritual sense. Perhaps it would be better to speak of a 'hidden' meaning. Because that is one of the biblical expressions for this phenomenon. For it is a meaning that was indeed hidden in the counsel of God, but

### **Ephesians 3:5**

- 3 [...] in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed [...].

This meaning was originally a mystery that Paul speaks of in this verse. This mystery is:

**Ephesians 3 : 6**

6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, [...] and partakers of His promise in Christ [...].

These mysteries, these hidden applications of the prophecies, were taught and preached by Paul. They were revealed to him alone. (Ephesians 3 : 3 and others) And they relate to the fact that "the Gentiles should be fellow heirs" of the promises made to Israel. One of these promises was that the woman would encompass the man. (Jeremiah 31 : 22) We have already seen how this promise applied literally to Israel. How this promise applies spiritually to the church is, of course, explained by Paul and needs to be examined by us.

## 7. The Church and Christ

If Israel is the bride, what is the relationship of the church to Christ? The apostle Paul answers this question, after stating in Ephesians 3 that the mystery includes:

### **Ephesians 3:6**

- 6 that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow sharers of the promise in Christ [...].

In the following verses he explains how Israel's calling to preach the word of God has also become applicable to the church. In Peter's letter to the Jewish believers mentioned above, the apostle of the circumcision applied this command literally to Israel:

### **1 Peter 2:9,10**

- 9 [...] that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;  
10 who once *were* not a people (Lo-Ammi), but *are* now the people of God (Ammi) [...]

Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, applies these words to the church. He says:

### **Ephesians 3:10,11**

- 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,  
11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,

The similarity is that both Israel and the church are called to proclaim. But where Israel's calling is related to the earth, the church's calling is to heaven. In the remainder of this letter, therefore, the apostle calls the believers to walk in accordance with this calling. (Ephesians 4 : 1-6) According to him, such a walk is characterised by the exercise of the spiritual gifts that each believer has received. (Ephesians 4 : 7) He bases this on a prophecy which he quotes verbatim from Psalm 68 : 19.

### **Ephesians 4:8**

- 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."

When we study these verses in their original context in Psalm 68, they seem to refer to Israel, which, after its conversion, will be gathered from exile (captivity) and will receive gifts in the land that the Lord has promised to give it. But Paul applies this prophecy to the church in a spiritual sense. For having come to faith, we have indeed "ascended on high" with Christ and have been seated in the land promised to us as an inheritance. Not Canaan, but the "heavenly Canaan", that is, heaven. For there is our citizenship. (Philippians 3 : 20) He has made us sit together in heaven in Christ. (Ephesians 2 : 6) We have been redeemed from our exile in the world. He has delivered us "from this present evil age" (Galatians 1 : 4) and placed us in heaven. Just as Israel awaits its earthly homeland, so we have become partakers of a better, heavenly country. (Hebrews 11 : 16) And just as the Lord will dwell in the midst of Israel in Canaan, so the Lord now dwells in the midst of the church in heaven. (Ephesians 2 : 22) And just as Israel will receive spiritual gifts after their conversion (Joel 2 : 28-32), so the believer of today has received spiritual gifts. And what are these gifts for? The following verses of the epistle tell us:

**Ephesians 4 : 12, 13**

- 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,
- 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Up to five times the same thing is said in different words. Five different ways of expressing God's present purpose for the church. It is that the saints, the believers, become perfect. Perfect as members of the body of Christ. Not as the bride, but as the body of Christ! And when we understand this position as members of His body, we also understand the "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God". For it is by faith that we have become members, not of the bride, but of the body of Christ. And therefore we know Him. Therefore, we have communion with Him. A communion which is still denied to the bride, but which already exists for the members of His body. And as His body, in which "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2 : 9), the church is "a perfect man". Not a woman, not a bride to be prepared, but "a perfect man". This is not an interpretation of this scripture. No, that is exactly what it says!

If we continue with the apostle's thought, we come to chapter 5 of this epistle. This is the passage that is always pointed to as the Scripture that teaches that the church is to be the bride of Christ. But in any case, we have already seen that the word "bride" does not appear there! So what does the apostle say? He begins with:

**Ephesians 5 : 22, 23**

- 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.  
23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

What it says is as important as what it does not say. Certainly, the idea behind these verses is clear: they say that there is communion. That is why these verses can never be quoted in connection with a bridegroom and a bride. The Lord is not called "the bridegroom of the church", but "the head of the church". If the church were really the bride, this would have been written here. And the very fact that it is not proves the opposite! What it really says is that the church is the body of Christ, just as in the previous chapter! There is one more thing I should point out. Often the apostle's argument is completely reversed. Many think that Paul is using the relationship between husband and wife as a model for the relationship between Christ and the church. In that case, two things must be off my mind. First, this relationship would be in a generally sad state. And second, this view subsequently denies the teaching that the church is the bride. For if the woman is really married, she has ceased to be the bride! Reality, however, is the other way round. It is not the husband and wife who are the model for Christ and the church. No, Christ and the church are the model for husband and wife! That is the simple meaning of this Scripture, and also of the following verse:

**Ephesians 5 : 24**

- 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

It is not that the church should be subject to Christ as a wife is subject to her husband. What strange situations would then arise in the church! No, as the church is subject to Christ, so the wife should be subject to her husband. Many will not like this, but it is simply what the word of God says here. For the church is subject to Christ. Not as His bride, not as His wife, but as His body. This submissive position of the church is not the result of the bride "preparing herself", but of the fact that we have been joined together. It is not the merit of my body to be submissive to my head! That is only the result of creation. In the same way, it is not the merit of the church to be subject to Christ. The church cannot do otherwise because it is the result of the new creation in Christ! This unity of body and head is the model for the believing husband and wife. Not the other way round! So the apostle can exclaim:

**Ephesians 5 : 28-30**

- 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

- 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.  
30 For we are members of His body [...].

As Christ loves His body, so the husband should love his wife. And no one hates his own body. Neither does Christ. He is the "Saviour of the body". He is the Sustainer of the church. "For we are members of His body". What is written here does not really need to be explained. What it says is that the church is the body of the Man. That there is love from the head to the body. That there is communion between the head and the body. For Christ is the head of the church and the church is the body of Christ. What is written here does not need to be explained, unless we do not know the difference between the body of man and the bride of man. But how are we to explain this difference?

If we are going to hold on to the idea that the church is the bride of Christ, we should first of all explain where Scripture explicitly teaches this. And secondly, we should explain why it is so explicitly not taught here in Ephesians 5. For what would have been more obvious than for verse 30 to say: "For we are members of His bride [...]"? On the contrary, it says: "For we are members of His body [...]". Our communion with Christ does not wait for the future! What a bad example the apostle would have given here to the married couple! No, we have communion with Christ. Because we are His body.

It is again remarkable how Paul motivates and explains this point of view. Once again he refers to the Old Testament:

**Ephesians 5: 31, 32**

- 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."  
32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

This time he quoted Genesis 2 : 24. A verse that we could not even guess had a prophetic meaning! The prophetic meaning of this verse was rightly a mystery. A great mystery. For an ordinary mystery in Scripture concerns the application of the prophecy for Israel to the church. Here, however, we have a verse which, at first sight, is not a prophecy at all. And if it turns out to be prophetic, then it applies to the church and not to Israel! An ordinary mystery is the spiritual application of a promise to Israel to the church. But this mystery is great because this verse does not apply to Israel at all, but only to the church. When we realise this, we also understand how this verse in Genesis 2 can say that man and

woman will "become one flesh"! If we are married and honest, we know that husband and wife may want to be one body, but they cannot! Therefore, according to Paul, Genesis 2 : 24 does not speak of man and woman, but of Christ and the church. And they are indeed one body! A bridegroom and a bride are considered not yet to have communion and are therefore two bodies. Husband and wife may want to be one body, but they cannot. But Christ and the church are indeed one body! Genesis 2 : 24 speaks of them in secret. It is the apostle Paul, as steward "of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4 : 1), who reveals this "great" mystery. Thus, we see how Ephesians 5 is the denial of the idea that Christ and the church are bridegroom and bride.

## 8. Male and Female

Behind all this lies a more fundamental problem, one that is never raised in the discussion of the bride and the bridegroom. This problem relates to the argument that Scripture does indeed speak of the church as a "she" and a "her". Contrary to the statement in Ephesians 4 that the church as the body of Christ must come to masculine maturity ("to a perfect man"), it can be argued that the church is a "she" and therefore feminine. And here is the problem. Scripture sees the church as alternately male and female. This is indeed true. But what does it mean? What does it mean that something is male? Or female? And what is the difference between these two concepts?

I must stress that "male" is not the same as "a man". And if the church appears to be "female", this does not necessarily mean that she is "a woman". In any case, all things in creation are male or female without automatically being man or woman. Unfortunately, the knowledge of these things is certainly no longer common at a time when everything is being done to suppress this elementary "truth in unrighteousness". (Romans 1 : 18) But it is a knowledge that has everything to do with the principles of this world. It is not specifically a biblical subject, but rather a physical subject, for it has everything to do with the old creation, the old nature. This old creation can be said to be dualistic (the creation is a "she" while the Creator is a "He"). That is, creation is made up of pairs. Creation consists of groups of two! In the description of the seven days in Genesis 1 we find many of these pairs. There is talk of heaven and earth, light and darkness, day and night, water under the firmament and water above the firmament, sea and land, sun and moon, sea creatures and birds; man and woman. You could also say that all things in creation have their downside. Or their opposite, or their counterpart, the "other half". This last expression is deliberately ambiguous because it refers to woman as the other half of man.

The point is that every "duality" is made up of a "masculine" and a "feminine" side. Within the duality of the sun and the moon, for example, the sun is male and the moon is female. Within the duality of heaven and earth, heaven is male and earth is female. That is why we speak of "Mother Earth"! And within the duality of a marriage, the husband is male and the wife is female! Contemporary knowledge of creation often does not go beyond this last statement. They conveniently forget that this is only true within the duality of marriage! In that case we are left with the statement that a man is male or a woman is female. And even that no longer seems entirely certain. What we must remember, however, is that this male - female relationship only exists within such a duality. In other words, the concepts 'male' and 'female' are not abso-



lute but relative. They tell us something about a relationship. About a relationship with something or someone else. And only within that relationship are they valid. An example may illustrate this. In the relationship between the sun and the moon, the sun, as the source of light, is masculine, while the moon, because it does not produce light itself but receives its light from the sun, is feminine. The sun gives and is male, while the moon receives and is therefore female. But this is only true within this duality. For if we imagine a night when the full moon is in the sky and the sun has set, then this duality of sun and moon is not an issue. We can perhaps speak of another duality, that of the moon and the earth. And now things are suddenly different. For the earth itself does not give light, but now receives its light from the moon. In this duality of earth and moon, the earth as the recipient is female, and the moon as the giver of light is male! From this we see that the male or female nature of things is not absolutely fixed, but depends on the relationship in which things are seen. It is therefore possible for the church to be seen sometimes as masculine and sometimes as feminine. The same applies to Israel. Israel is primarily male. It was the name of Jacob. It was the name of the people who are called "priests" and "kings". Like the Lord Himself, it is called "the Lord's servant". It is called a "son". But this does not change the fact that Israel is also called a "woman", a "harlot", a "daughter", a "sister" and a "bride"! It all depends on the relationship in which these terms are used!

Let us now return to Israel and the church. If we say that Israel is "female", it means nothing until we know the answer to the question: In relation to whom or what is Israel female? Israel is feminine in the relationship between the Lord and Israel. The Lord is the giver; Israel is the receiver. The Lord is the Creator; Israel is the created. The Lord is the giver of content; Israel is the one who "encompasses". (Jeremiah 31 : 22) The Lord is the ruler, Israel the subject. And so on. And the same reasoning applies to the relationship between the Lord and the church! For the church is indeed seen as feminine. But feminine in relation to whom or what? To the Lord, of course. The church is the receptive, the subject, the created, the encompassing. Indeed. The church, like Israel, is female in relation to the Lord. But all that is feminine is not yet a woman, let alone a bride. And even the moon, though feminine in relation to the sun, is not yet the sun's wife or bride. This brings us back to the similarity between Israel and the church. This similarity is, in principle, that both are partakers of the new covenant. And therefore both are female in relation to the Lord.

Yet both Israel and the church are also described as male. This does not contradict the above. No, it simply speaks of a different relationship. In the duality of Israel and the Lord, Israel is female. But when Scripture looks at Israel in relation to the world, Israel is male. For the people were chosen to proclaim the

word of God in the world. To rule the world. To subdue the nations. To bring salvation, for salvation is of the Jews. These functions of giving and exercising power are masculine, but they are functions directed to the nations. So within the duality of Israel and the nations, Israel is masculine and the nations are feminine. The same obviously applies to the church. The church is also called to proclaim. In a slightly different way than Israel, but that is not the point now. The church is also called to rule. To judge the world over time. In short, the church, like Israel, is masculine in relation to the world.

So far, then, there is no difference between Israel and the church in terms of their masculine or feminine position. But things change when we see Israel and the church in relation to each other. Indeed, when the two are so similar, it is natural to compare them. And that is what Scripture itself does. In the duality of Israel and the church, we see at a glance that the church has a male position in relation to the female Israel. For Israel, with its earthly calling and inheritance, is obviously subordinate to the church, with its heavenly calling and inheritance!

It becomes even clearer when we compare Israel and the church, taking into account the person of Christ. We have seen above that Scripture speaks very emphatically of the church as the body of Christ and of Israel as the bride of Christ. When we consider these relationships on a human level, we are dealing with the man, his body and his (future) wife. This is obviously not a duality, but a trinity. If we then want to fill in the concepts of male and female, we must first see that this trinity consists of two dualities. First there is the duality of man and his body. Then there is the duality of man and his wife. Because first of all, a human being himself is a duality. In any case, he is made up of a visible and an invisible aspect, the invisible being called "spirit" by definition. The visible part is simply called "body"! And since the body comes to life and lives thanks to the "life-giving spirit" breathed into it, the body is female and the spirit is male. The spirit is the giver, the body is the receiver. The spirit is the content giving, the body is the "encompassing". So the human body, whether that of a man or a woman, is always female in relation to the indwelling human spirit. In other words: The body of the man is feminine in relation to the being of the man! And so the body of Christ is female in relation to Christ! Not because it is His wife, but because it is His body, His covering! The same reasoning applies if we see head and body as a duality. Then the head is male and the body is female. The head and the body form an organic whole. The body cannot exist or continue to exist if it does not form a whole with the head. But when we see this whole as duality, the body is female and the head is male. And that while head and body together form the body of a man.

And this brings us to Israel. For when we no longer speak of "male" and "female", but of "man" and "woman", then it is suddenly established that although head and body can be considered male and female, together they are "man". Christ and the church, though male and female, are together one Man. And when Scripture then speaks of Israel as "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21: 9), there can be no more problems. Israel is not mentioned there as "female", but as "the woman"! Surely it can no longer be difficult to answer the question of who the Man is? Yes, Christ. But the answer is incomplete in these relationships. It is, of course, Christ, including His body. The head and body of Christ are the Man. And believing Israel is "the bride, the Lamb's wife".

For those who have not been able to follow this brief exposition of male and female at this pace, here is an even shorter route. For the whole question is actually answered in the answer to the question: Is the groom's body part of the bridegroom or of the bride? And is this question so difficult to answer? Are we members of the bridegroom's body or are we members of the bride's body? Difficult?

## 9. The Man and the Virgin

In the New Testament, there are only two passages used to represent the Lamb's bride as the church. The first was the already discussed fifth chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. The other is a separate verse from another letter of this apostle:

### **2 Corinthians 11 : 2**

- 2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Indeed, this verse gives the impression that it is about preparation for marriage. But it does not say that. It does mention a virgin, but a virgin is not yet a bride. In fact, of the fourteen times the word "virgin" is mentioned in the New Testament, this is the only time it refers to the church! So we have every reason to be cautious. In this verse we can see that there are actually three different phrases, which we will study separately.

- A For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy**
- B For I have betrothed you to one husband**
- C that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ**

This verse is part of Paul's long discourse on himself, which begins in chapter 10 : 1 and ends around 13 : 10. Nothing doctrinal is taught about the church in these more than three chapters! On the contrary. Paul is not talking about the church. He is talking about himself. About himself and his personal relationship with the church in Corinth. In this context he literally says about himself in part A of the above verse:

### **A For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy**

The "for" at the beginning of this verse indicates that there is now an explanation of what has gone before. So an explanation of the previous verses follows. In the last of these previous verses (11 : 1) he says that he is a bit foolish in a way. He is jealous! He wants to keep the Corinthians to himself. Just as a husband can be jealous of his wife because he wants to keep her for himself, so Paul is jealous of the Corinthians because he wants to keep them for himself. That is what these chapters are about!

This is what he says in part B of this verse:

**B For I have betrothed ("harmozo") you to one husband**

The emphasis is not on the word "husband" but on "one". Not an indefinite article, but a definite numeral adjective! Paul seems to think that the Corinthians should only listen to him and shows a kind of inferiority complex towards other preachers. This is evident in the following verses, especially verses 3 to 6 and 12 : 11. I must urge you to check and study these verses. The question now is: Who is this "one husband" to whom the apostle wanted to bind the Corinthians? This "one husband" is obviously Paul himself! This is not a far-fetched explanation, but the clear thrust of all these chapters! Therefore, if we do not recognise this truth, we are really missing the point of this second letter to the Corinthians! Paul wanted to bind the Corinthians to himself. Not "betroth", as many translations suggest, but "bind". The word "harmozo" means "to harmonise" and is found only here in Scripture. Harmonising is, for example, the joining of different tones into a resounding chord. Into a unified whole. This is how Paul envisioned the Corinthians being of one mind with him. A chord of praise to the glory of the Lord. But alas! The Corinthians became known, but not for their high spiritual life. In this respect the writer of these chapters is a disappointed man. He had not been able to bind them to him. He had had to watch as others preached a different message, thereby distracting the Corinthians from Paul's message. And from the Lord Himself.

So why did Paul want to keep them to himself? This will be answered in part C:

**C that I may present (literally: display) you as a chaste virgin to Christ**

The use of "that" at the beginning of this phrase indicates that it is referring to the purpose of the preceding text. This purpose is that Paul wanted to keep them away from the influence of other preachers and teachers in order to protect them from false influences. This is outlined in the following verses. The word "chaste" ("hagnos") always has the meaning of "untouched", "without blemish" and "spotless". This is also the meaning of the word "virgin". Paul's ideal is an immaculate church in Corinth, the result of his personal work, in which he can glorify Christ. He himself is the first to admit that this is rather foolish! For a good understanding of this passage, it is necessary to study chapters 10 to 13 carefully. Paul wants to present the church to Christ as a chaste virgin. He does not want to bind her to Christ because he is not able to do so. Our union with Christ has been established by Christ Himself and therefore does not need to be established. Not by the Lord Himself, nor by the apostle Paul. No, he simply wishes to present this church to Christ as the result

of his work. A pure, unblemished church. For this is the meaning of the term "chaste virgin".

Two things can be added to this. The first is that in the duality of Paul and the church, it is obvious that Paul is the male part, while the church is the female part. But that does not make them husband and wife. Let alone groom and bride. The second is that we may be very familiar with the idea that a virgin is a woman, or at least something female. To some extent this is the case in this verse. For "church" ("ekklesia") is indeed a feminine word. Moreover, this church is feminine in relation to the apostle Paul. But all this should not blind us to the fact that a virgin is not necessarily female. Not in the English language, and certainly not in the language of the Bible. For what does Scripture say?

**Revelation 14:4**

4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins [...].

This is said of the 144,000 sealed from Israel. Whether they are virgins in the literal or figurative sense is irrelevant here. In the first place, the word "virgin" is used here to refer to men who have not been defiled with women! The fact is that in at least three out of fourteen cases the word "virgin" is used in Scripture to refer to men. (1 Corinthians 7 : 36, 37 and Revelation 14 : 4) The consequence of this is that it cannot be concluded from the use of the word "virgin" that the church is a woman. For Scripture knows of at least 144,000 virgins who are men. Moreover, the word "virgin" is never associated with the term "bride". Although it seems an obvious association, it is not biblically based! So when 2 Corinthians 11 : 2 speaks of the union between something female and something male, it is speaking of the union between the church at Corinth and the apostle Paul, and the concepts of bridegroom and bride are completely absent!

## 10. The Bridegroom and the Bride

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to a prophecy in which the bridegroom and the bride are mentioned in the same breath as an exception, which confirms all the above.

### Isaiah 62:1-6

- 1 For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp *that* burns.
- 2 The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.
- 3 You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
- 4 You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah (*literally: "My Delight Is in Her"*), and your land Beulah (*literally: "Married"*); for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married.
- 5 For *as* a young man marries a virgin, *so* shall your sons marry you; and *as* the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, *so* shall your God rejoice over you.
- 6 [...] O Jerusalem [...].

The mention of "Zion" and "Jerusalem" leaves no doubt to whom this prophecy is addressed. It is about Israel. Israel in her female relationship with the Lord. The first verse announces that Israel's righteousness and salvation will be brought forth. From the prophecies already discussed, it is clear that this is accompanied by the coming into force of the new covenant over Israel and the beginning of the eternal kingdom of the Messiah from Israel over the nations. This kingdom is therefore mentioned immediately in the second verse. There is also a reference to a new name for Israel. This, above all, indicates a new identity for Israel. In other words: Israel is born again and as a result is given a new name. In the third verse, Israel is seen as the Lord's "peculiar treasure". It is an allusion to the prophecies to this effect in the old covenant. Verse 4 then reports that Israel will no longer be known as the "forsaken" or the "desolate". These old names must give way to the new name. But these old names apply to Israel as long as it is not part of the new covenant and therefore not yet the bride. Israel is, as we have said, the "forsaken". She has been sent away with a certificate of divorce. Her land, which was in reality "His land", has been desolated. But after Israel's rebirth, she will no longer be the "forsaken" or the "des-

olate". On the contrary. She will be called the "married" one. (Verse 4) For Israel will then have found grace with the Lord. Grace based on faith. And when Israel will come to faith, she will be married (again) by the Lord. Because of the promises the Lord has made. And then there is a remarkable verse:

**Isaiah 62:5**

<b>A</b>	<b>For as a</b>	<b>YOUNG MAN</b>	<b>marries a</b>	<b>VIRGIN,</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>So shall</b>	<b>YOUR SONS</b>	<b>marry</b>	<b>YOU;</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>And as the</b>	<b>BRIDEGROOM</b>	<b>rejoices over the</b>	<b>BRIDE,</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>So shall</b>	<b>YOUR GOD</b>	<b>rejoice over</b>	<b>YOU.</b>

Four different phrases describe the relationship between the bridegroom and the bride. It is a fourfold parallelism! In A the "young man" and the "virgin" are mentioned. In C and D, this "young man" turns out to be the "bridegroom", that is, the Lord God. Here He is not presented as "the Ancient of Days" as in other prophecies. Here He is the young man, because now His existence from eternity is not alluded to. It is not about His pre-existence. No, it is about Him who came in the fullness of the times to suffer and die. But above all, to rise from the dead. This young man is the firstfruits of a new creation! And therefore He is the bridegroom. The same applies to the "virgin". This "bride" (see C) is, of course, Israel. But it is a believing, regenerated Israel, with a new name, a new nature, a new identity. She is no longer the adulteress. No longer the forsaken. No longer the widow. No longer the defiled. No, she is a justified, reborn Israel. A chaste virgin. A chaste woman. A chaste bride.

If we put A, C and D under each other, we see that the "young man" of A corresponds to the "bridegroom" of C and "your God" of D. On the other hand, we see how the "virgin" of A corresponds to the "bride" of C and "you" of D. This "you" is, of course, still Israel, as in the previous and following verses. If we now include phrase B in this equation, and start with the "virgin", we see how "virgin", "bride" and "you" correspond to "you" in line B. In other words: "you" of line B is the bride, namely Israel. If we make the same comparison in relation to the bridegroom, we see that "young man", "bridegroom" and "your God" correspond to "your sons" in line B! And is this not amazing? This verse tells us who the bridegroom is! He is, according to A, the "young man", namely the risen Christ as the head of a new creation. According to D, He is the God of Israel! And according to B, He is "your sons"! This means two things: The bridegroom seems to be somehow descended from the bride! And the bridegroom is plural! And, of course, the bridegroom is descended from Israel. Scripture therefore teaches that Israel will mourn over the Lord at her conversion as over a firstborn son. (see Zechariah 12 : 10ff) This is not a comparison, but a



harsh reality. He is the son and heir of Israel. The Messiah comes from Israel and is therefore a son of the bride! But not only that. He is also plural. The bridegroom is not a "son", but "sons" of Israel. How is this possible? Simply because the bridegroom consists of a head and a body. And is not the body of Christ, the Messiah and bridegroom of Israel, made up of the believers of this present dispensation? Answer the question yourself: Who are these sons who together make up the bridegroom? Is it not clear that the church is being alluded to here? Oh, sure, the church was a mystery under the old covenant. The church was a hidden entity in the Old Testament. But where was the church hidden in the Old Testament? Is it not in this verse, among others? In the light of the Pauline letters, does this verse not speak overwhelmingly of a bridegroom made up of many members? In this verse, then, we see the members of the body of Christ represented in their relationship to the future believing Israel. It is that of the bridegroom to the bride. And this explains why every Bible-believing Christian (yes, there are others) has a love for Israel. Why he "delights in her". Because Christ's love for Israel, His future bride, naturally has an effect in His body. We as members of the church, who already live in communion with the Lord, have a love for Israel because Christ loves Israel and because Israel in Christ will be our future bride. Not because we chose or prefer it ourselves. But simply because Scripture declares it directly and unequivocally. The question, however, that the Lord Himself asks us is this: Do we believe this? Do we believe that we are already inseparably united with the risen Messiah of Israel, in order to be united in the future with believing Israel, our future bride? Only then can we rightly exclaim with Paul:

**Romans 8 : 35**

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

For only then can we be persuaded and realise that, already now and not just in the future, there is nothing that

**Romans 8 : 39**

39 [...] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (*See also Romans 8 : 35-38*)

He is our Lord and our head, Israel's Messiah and Israel's bridegroom.