

Word Pictures About Marriage



SABBATH—APRIL 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 2:23-25; Ezekiel 16:4-14; Hosea 1:2; Genesis 24:1-4; Revelation 19:1-9.

MEMORY VERSE: “The angel said to me, ‘Write this [message]: God blesses those [people] who are called [invited] to come to the wedding feast of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God’ ” (Revelation 19:9, WE).

THE BIBLE is filled with many love stories. These stories help us understand God’s plan to save us and His love for His people. Marriage is the closest and deepest of all love relationships between two people. Marriage can teach us important lessons about God’s love for us, about our relationship to Him, and how much He did to save us.

Modern ideas about love and marriage make it hard for us to understand what God is trying to teach us with marriage. Yes, sin hurt marriage in terrible ways. Even so, our experience with marriage can help us understand Bible truth and special messages about the end times. Marriage teaches us about relationships. Marriage is the same as a school. In this school, we learn important lessons about ourselves and our relationship with God.

This week, we will look at different ways the Bible talks about marriages, good and bad. We can then learn lessons from these examples to help us better understand how God loves us, even when we make mistakes. These examples about God’s love also help us to understand end-time happenings better.



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ONE HEART, MIND, SPIRIT, AND BODY (Genesis 2:23–25)

Marriage shows us the loving relationship that God wants with us. Few other word pictures in the Bible show us this Bible truth. Bible writers use marriage as a word picture for Bible truth a lot, as we see in the book of Revelation. So, Bible students need to understand what God means when He uses marriage as a word picture in the Bible.

The Bible talks about marriage in Genesis 2:23–25 and Ephesians 5:29–32. How does a human marriage show us Jesus’ relationship with people?

Jesus was talking with the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus used a quote from the Genesis story about Adam and Eve’s marriage. Then the Jewish leaders asked Jesus the question, “ ‘Then why did Moses command that a man can give his wife a letter of divorce and send her away?’ ” (Matthew 19:7, NIV).

For the Jews, Moses was one of the most important messengers God sent to His people. The Lord invented marriage. The Jewish leaders were trying to match this same God against His own special messenger. The Jewish leaders often tried to prove that Jesus’ teachings didn’t agree with the Bible.

God meant for marriage to continue for a lifetime. God never wanted married people to cheat. Sad to say, as sinners, we have ruined marriage in many ways.

We should not be surprised that Satan always tries to attack marriage. Along with the Sabbath, marriage is one of the two gifts God gave us in Eden. Both gifts show God’s plan to have a close relationship with us.

Marriage pairs two people together who are far from perfect. So, marriage will give us cause for problems. A marriage between the church and Jesus matches a perfect Savior with a bride who isn’t perfect. Even so, we can learn about God’s love from what a good marriage offers.

Here are three important rules for marriage: First, forgive each other, even if your wife or husband didn’t do anything to earn your forgiveness. Second, accept each other, just as Jesus accepts us with all our problems and mistakes. Third, try to please your husband or wife, and not yourself. How may these three important rules help us understand how God loves us? Also, how can these rules help any marriage?



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THE BEAUTIFUL BRIDE (Ezekiel 16:4–14)

Ezekiel 16 shows us an amazing word picture of God’s love for His people. God compares the people of Israel to a baby someone left in a field to die. The Lord takes the baby home. He cleans her up. When she is full grown, the Lord marries her. This picture of marriage is very powerful.

Read Ezekiel 16:4–14. What does this story about God’s care for the bride teach us about His plan for us?

God told Israel that under His care, the bride “ ‘became very beautiful’ ” (Ezekiel 16:13, Nlrv). When God first found her, no one thought she was beautiful. No one wanted her as a child. She was left to die. Then God cared for her. She became more and more beautiful until she was famous. (During the times of King David and King Solomon, Israel was famous. The Queen of Sheba made a special trip to see the beauty of Israel for herself!)

Israel’s beauty was a gift from God. Israel was beautiful because she was His bride. God says that she was so beautiful that everyone on earth was talking about it: “ ‘You became famous for your beauty, all because I made you so lovely!’ ” (Ezekiel 16:14, ERV).

God’s bride is beautiful, but not because she did anything to make herself beautiful. She is beautiful because God blessed her with His favor and made her that way. In the same way, Christians become beautiful in God’s eyes, too. We are not beautiful because of anything we do to make ourselves beautiful. We did not earn our beauty. We are beautiful because God showed us His mercy. Our beauty is His gift to us. We are beautiful because God makes us right with Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). God puts Jesus’ holy love on us, the same as clothes.

Everything was okay with the bride until the next verse in Ezekiel: “ ‘But you trusted in your beauty. You used your fame to become a prostitute [a person who has sex with someone for pay]. You offered your body freely to anyone who passed by. In fact, you gave yourself to anyone who wanted you’ ” (Ezekiel 16:15, Nlrv).

God made us to show His love and glory. When we believe that we made our beauty, our beauty becomes cheap and useless. Then we will get into trouble.

How can we protect ourselves against spiritual pride?



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HOSEA'S BAD WIFE (Hosea 1:2)

God asked His special messenger Hosea to do something very strange. God told Hosea to go and marry a prostitute. As we saw yesterday, a prostitute is a person who has sex with someone for pay. God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute because He wanted us to understand that sin is very terrible. God chose a wife, Israel. Israel cheated on God again and again. But God accepted her back after she cheated on Him. God helped her become a new person.

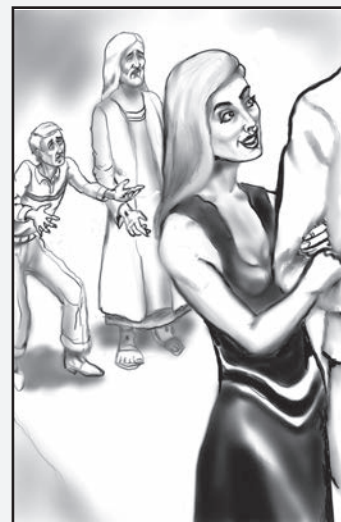
Compare Hosea 1:2; Hosea 3:1; Revelation 17:1, 2; and Revelation 18:1–4. What is a prostitute a word picture for in these verses? What lessons can the Christian church learn from the story of Hosea? In what ways has the Christian church done the same sins as Israel in Old Testament times?

The Bible shows that the New Testament church would make the same mistakes that Israel made in the Old Testament. The Jews sinned against God with false gods before the Babylonians carried them away. In the same way, the Christian church, in the A.D. 300s, had problems. The teachings of Arius divided the church. Constantine, the king of Rome, was worried. So, he caused church leaders to meet at Nicaea. Then Constantine tried to solve the problem with Arius' teachings. In both the Old and New Testament examples, God's people didn't go to Him to solve their problems.

God's choice of words shows us that He is helping us see what we've done wrong and how that makes Him feel. People whose husbands or wives cheat on them can understand how our sins make Jesus feel. Maybe the most amazing part of Hosea's story is how far Hosea went to save his sinning wife.

Notice the people God is talking to when He gives the final warning to come out of Babylon. God is inviting **His own people**, and not strangers. God knows who His people are. He loves them. At the worst hour in human history, God offers to save them. He paid for them with His blood. The cross of Jesus, more than anything else, shows us how much the Lord wants to save His people.

What are the ways today that any church, even our own, can "cheat" on God?

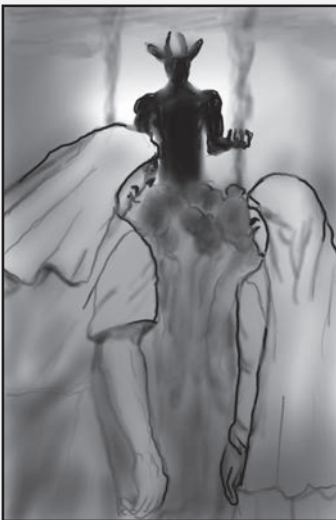


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ISAAC AND REBEKAH (Genesis 24:1–4)

When Abraham was old, no doubt he thought about the promise God made to him about his future children (read Genesis 15:5). So, Abraham gave his oldest and most trusted servant an important job.

Read Genesis 24:1–4. Why would it be so important to Abraham that his son not marry “a girl from Canaan” (Genesis 24:3, ERV)?



Much of the history of Israel during Bible times is about their following the false teachings of the religions around them.

Abraham’s reason was spiritual. He knew that the religion of the Canaanites and their worship of false gods were evil. Abraham didn’t want his son to start following the Canaanite religion. If Isaac married a Canaanite wife, that could happen.

Much of the history of Israel during Bible times is about their following the false teachings of the religions around them. The same thing is true for the Christian church today. Maybe the biggest example of this problem is the change from the Bible Sabbath to Sunday. For sure, Sunday worship will be an important part of the end times.

Read Genesis 24:57–67. What lessons can we learn about Jesus and His church from this story? Rebekah was a far-off cousin to Isaac. What does this information teach us about our connection to the Lord?

God is our far-off relative because He made us as copies of Himself. But sin separates us from Him. At the same time, we are God’s bride, even when our choices make our “marriage” to Him worse than it needs to be.

Yes, God loves us, His bride, more than we love Him. What choices can we make every day to make our love for God grow strong? At the same time, what choices will make our love become weak?

GOD JUDGES THE EVIL WOMAN (Revelation 19:1–9)

Read Revelation 19:1–9. In these verses, two things are celebrated at the same time: (1) the end of the prostitute and (2) the marriage of Jesus with His bride. As we saw already, a prostitute is a person who has sex with someone for pay. How is it possible that both things show God’s love at the same time?

Cheating comes at a very painful price. Cheating hurts the lives of our children and other people. Husbands or wives who are cheated on may discover that a time may come when they can’t save their marriage any longer. When the hearts of the people on this earth grow too hard to feel sorry for sin any longer, then God will choose to end human history. God doesn’t want the suffering from sin to continue any longer. At that time, we will feel sad for all the people who are lost. But we can celebrate that sin and suffering are finally over. God will make the earth and the skies new. No one will sin against God again. We learned the hard way that God was correct about the suffering that happens when we separate ourselves from Him.

Read Revelation 21:1–4. How is marriage used as a word picture in these verses? What does it mean? Why does this word picture fill us with much hope? What hope do these verses promise?

“Marriage is meant to last for a lifetime. Marriage is a symbol of the relationship between Jesus and His church. The love that Jesus shows the church is the love that husband and wife must show each other.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 7, page 46, adapted.

Jesus suffered terrible pain as people rejected Him and worshiped other gods. But Jesus gave Himself for us, anyway. Jesus paid for our sins. If we confess our sins and stop doing them, Jesus will give us the promise of everlasting life.

Read 1 Peter 1:18, 19. What do these verses tell us that gives us hope in the end times shown in Revelation 21:1–4?



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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read John 2:1–11; Matthew 22:1–14; 2 Corinthians 11:1–5; and Matthew 25:1–13.

Some Christians make the symbols and word pictures in Bible stories more important than the story. Then they start to teach that the story isn't real. Their teachings are false. We always must remember that God can take real experiences that happened and use them to teach us things about His future plans for the church.

Think about the wedding feast at Cana. This story may help us understand how Bible writers use marriage as a symbol in their special messages about the future. "Jesus' words gave everything that was needed for the feast. In the same way, Jesus' mercy is so powerful. His mercy can erase our sins, make us new, and give us spiritual life." —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 149, adapted.

Or, as we also read in *The Desire of Ages*, " 'When the Lord God decides to do something, he will first tell his servants, the prophets [special messengers].' Amos 3:7 [ERV]. And 'the LORD our God keeps certain [some] things hidden. But he makes other things known to us and to our children forever. He does it [tells us these things] so we can obey all the words of this law.' Deuteronomy 29:29 [NIRV]." —Page 234, adapted.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read John 2:1–11. Many things in John's Gospel story about Jesus show us Jesus' future work. Bible thinkers notice the way that John leads his readers to the Cross. Where do you see Jesus' love and future kingdom in the verses of this story? What does it teach us about God's plan to save us or about the marriage feast that God promises His Son?
- ② What does the picture story about the Ten Young Girls teach us about the end times? What does it mean that the groom is arriving later than we thought? What lessons does this picture story teach us about our personal relationship to Jesus and His relationship with the whole church? How are these two things different?
- ③ Think about false teachings that entered the Christian church. One of them is Sunday worship. What other false beliefs have come in? How have they come into the church? How can we protect ourselves against them?

BIG BUCKET OF BUTTER

After someone stole the family cow, Mother got a dog to guard their new cow. Mother also wanted the dog to guard the tithe. Tithe is 10% of all the money you get. Mother's tithe was a big bucket of butter.

The cow was the only income for Mother and her two small children while her husband was away in a Soviet prison camp. Mother lived in Tajikistan. At the time of this story, Tajikistan was part of the Soviet Union. Mother milked the cow and traded the milk for food at the market.

Then something strange happened. Mother milked the cow and told the two children to wait while she went to the market. Mother told them, "Don't open the door." Before Mother left home, she checked on the big bucket of butter. She made sure that the bucket was near the dog, who was tied up in the yard.

The children waited for Mother to come home. Then the gate opened. A stranger entered the yard. But the dog didn't bark. The man was wearing Muslim clothes. He walked over to the dog. Again, the dog didn't bark. The man picked up the butter bucket. Then he turned around and left. Later, the children told Mother about the man. But no one understood what happened.

Many years passed. Father came home from the prison camp. He started working as a pastor again. Father and Mother had five more children. Their oldest daughter, Nina, got married and had children of her own. Nina got a job cleaning the offices of a fertilizer company. Nina needed to visit the company's accountant to get paid. When Nina went for her paycheck, she told the accountant about the bucket of butter. The accountant asked, "When did this story happen?" Nina told her. Then the accountant started to cry. The accountant asked Nina, "Do you want to know how the story ended?" The accountant said that she was one of five children who grew up in Siberia. Their parents were killed during World War II. So, the children lived with their grandmother. Times were hard, and the day came when their food ran out. Grandmother told the five children to pray with her around the empty table. After they prayed, someone knocked on the door. A man stood outside wearing Muslim clothes. He held a bucket of butter and a loaf of bread.

The accountant asked Nina to tell her more about God. In time, the accountant and her daughter gave their hearts to Jesus and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

To this day, no one knows who the mystery man was. But Liubov Brunton, Nina's daughter, believes the man was an angel. Liubov says, "The angel took that bucket of butter from Tajikistan to Siberia in only a second. I just wonder where the angel found the bread. In heaven I will hear the rest of the story!"

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



A man stood outside wearing Muslim clothes. He held a bucket of butter and a loaf of bread.