

Faithfulness

There is a story in the Jewish writings, the Talmud, about an engaged couple. The man had to go away, but wrote love letters to his fiancée, promising to return.

In his absence, friends of the beautiful young girl mocked her, taunting her that her man would never return. Nonetheless, despite many temptations, she kept reading the promises in his love letters and remained faithful right up to the day when he finally did return to her.

This Talmudic story equates the girl to the Jewish nation in captivity. They had God's Promises, His Law and His Prophets, which gave them comfort that God would not forsake them.

Israel's Disobedience

However, the nation of Israel would never have gone into captivity if they had remained faithful to God. They had promised that they would follow God's commandments. Yet despite God pleading with them, they became corrupted by the idolatry of the nations near to them (see Jeremiah 7:23–26). The language of their prophets describing this rebellious behaviour is explicit and distasteful, comparing them to prostitutes.

...on every high hill and under every green tree you lay down, playing the harlot (Jeremiah 2:20 & 3:1,6).

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 (Ezekiel 16:15).

When God had first chosen the Jewish nation, they were desperate and without help. They had nothing, but God had offered them so very much. Although they were filthy, He was prepared to make them beautiful for Himself (Ezekiel 16:3–14). Faithfulness is critically important to God, and the language of flagrant prostitution shows His utter hatred of their subsequent waywardness.

The Faithful Bride

In contrast, the Old Testament book called "The Song of Solomon" or "Song of Songs" uses the most endearing romantic language to describe a faithful couple, dedicated to each other.

The young girl yearns for her husband-to-be, and she prepares herself and her house for his arrival. All the time she is looking and listening for him, ignoring any taunts or mocking from the sceptics.

This is a parable of the loving spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and his faithful followers, both male and female.

In the New Testament Jesus is several times portrayed as a bridegroom (e.g. Matthew 9:15; 25:1–13). The bride represents all true believers from creation to the return of Jesus. Jesus has gone away to heaven, but the Bible is full of promises that he will return to establish his kingdom on earth. This union of Jesus with immortalised believers – raised from the dead if they have died before his return (1 Corinthians 15:50–53) – is described in terms of a wedding (Matthew 22:1–14).

The love of Jesus has never been and can never be surpassed (John 15:13) – he died for true believers:

Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25–27).



Every single human being is blemished by sin, and we can never by our own efforts attain perfection, even less eternal life. But Jesus is able to present each faithful believer as ‘faultless’. His Father, the Lord God, is prepared to accept them as unblemished, because of Jesus’ sacrifice.

All Jesus asks is that believers remain dedicated, accepting and trying to obey what he said, while waiting, watching and longing for his return. Failure to do this leads to corruption of the Gospel, and prostitute imagery is again used in Revelation 17 to depict the false systems of belief. We need to appreciate that we all have the same wayward inclinations as Israel did – wanting to mix God’s ways with human ideas. Consequently, Christian believers have no grounds to consider themselves superior to Israel (Romans 11:19–24). There is no room for complacency.

Our Response Now

In this life, some people are blessed with the love and devotion of a spouse. They know the intense yearning when waiting for the return of their loved one. This can be all-consuming, and they would never dream of looking at anyone else or jeopardising their relationship. Such unions do not last for ever – they belong to our mortal life (Matthew 22:30).

But the love of Jesus is eternal, he died for his ‘friends’ – those who try to do what he asked of them (John 15:14). Our devotion, loyalty and longing for him should be greater than in any human relationship. How can we even consider jeopardising this priceless and eternal spiritual relationship?

Like the girl in the Talmudic story we need to read the Bible promises, believe them completely and – loving him for all he has done – prepare for Jesus’ return. Absolutely nothing in this life matters as much as this does, and the joy of that great day of the Lord will surpass anything we can experience or even imagine now. The critical question is: are we behaving spiritually like a prostitute or like the faithful young girl?

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