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The Day God Divorced The Old Covenant



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The Bible uses the language of marriage, adultery, divorce, widowhood, and a new marriage to describe God's covenant relationship with Israel. This isn't merely poetic language. God presented Himself as Israel's husband, while Israel repeatedly broke covenant through spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 16:8, 32).

† Jeremiah explicitly says God gave faithless Israel a certificate of divorce because of her adultery. Yet Judah watched what happened and committed the same covenant unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 3:6-11).

† Isaiah asked for the certificate of divorce to expose why judgment had come. Israel's separation wasn't because God had failed His covenant promises. Their own sins and covenant rebellion brought judgment upon them (Isaiah 59:1-2).

† Hosea used the broken marriage of Hosea and Gomer as a prophetic picture of God's covenant controversy with His unfaithful people (Hosea 1:2; 3:1).

† Jesus later stood in Jerusalem and announced that her house was being left desolate. Hebrews declared the old covenant obsolete and ready to disappear. Revelation then pictured the covenant city as a corrupt woman judged and followed her destruction with the marriage of the Lamb.

† From the fulfilled perspective, AD 70 wasn't simply the destruction of a city. It was the visible historical removal of the old covenant order that had already become obsolete through Christ's finished work (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:8-10).

Jeremiah 3:8

And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a certificate of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and prostituted herself also.

† God Himself used divorce language to describe covenant judgment. Israel's adultery was spiritual unfaithfulness, and the divorce concerned the covenant relationship established with the nation (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6).

† Judah saw what happened to the northern kingdom but refused to learn from it. Instead of remaining faithful, Judah followed the same pattern of covenant rebellion (Jeremiah 3:10-11).

† This establishes the biblical pattern. Covenant marriage could be violated, covenant judgment could follow, and the unfaithful covenant partner could be put away because of persistent rebellion (Deuteronomy 31:16-18).

Isaiah 50:1

This is what the Lord says: Where is the certificate of divorce By which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your wrongdoings, And for your wrongful acts your mother was sent away.

† Isaiah makes clear that God's people weren't rejected because God was powerless or indebted to anyone. Their own covenant rebellion brought the separation and judgment described by the prophet (Isaiah 59:1-2).

† God hadn't failed Israel. Israel had violated the covenant. The responsibility rested upon the covenant-breaking people, not upon the faithfulness of God (Deuteronomy 28:15, 45).

† This distinction matters because God's judgment upon the old covenant nation didn't make God unfaithful. It demonstrated His faithfulness to the covenant sanctions He had already revealed through Moses (Deuteronomy 28:49-52).

Hosea 2:2

Dispute with your mother, dispute, Because she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; But she must remove her infidelity from her face And her adultery from between her breasts,

† Hosea again describes covenant apostasy through marriage language. The nation had acted as an adulterous wife by pursuing other gods and trusting in other sources for what God had provided (Hosea 2:5, 8).

† The statement she is not my wife, neither am I her husband describes a covenant relationship broken through unfaithfulness. This wasn't about God's inability to keep His promises. It was about Israel violating the covenant she had entered (Exodus 24:3-8).

† Yet Hosea also pointed toward restoration. God's purpose wasn't merely to end something old, but to establish His people in a restored relationship characterized by righteousness, faithfulness, and knowing the LORD (Hosea 2:19-20).

Matthew 23:38

Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

† Jesus spoke these words directly to Jerusalem after pronouncing judgment upon its religious leaders. He had just declared that the blood of the righteous would come upon that generation (Matthew 23:34-36).

† The house that had once represented God's covenant presence was being abandoned to judgment. Jesus wasn't predicting something thousands of years away. He identified the generation upon which the

judgment would fall (Matthew 23:36).

† Jesus immediately continued this judgment prophecy on the Mount of Olives, where He foretold the destruction of the temple and said all these things would occur within that generation (Matthew 24:2, 34).

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† When Hebrews was written, the old covenant was already obsolete, aging, and near disappearance. The writer didn't describe it as something that would remain alongside the new covenant forever.

† The new covenant had already been established through Christ, but the old covenant system still had a visible temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and earthly sanctuary during the transition period (Hebrews 9:6-10).

† That explains the language near disappearance. The theological basis of the old covenant ended through Christ's sacrifice, while its visible institutional structure remained until the temple system was removed in AD 70 (Hebrews 10:9-14).

† The destruction of Jerusalem didn't make Christ's work effective. Christ had already accomplished redemption. AD 70 publicly and historically removed the old covenant system that Hebrews said was ready to disappear (Hebrews 8:6; 10:18).

Revelation 18:8

For this reason in one day her plagues will come, plague and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

† Revelation portrays the condemned city as a corrupt woman whose judgment arrives suddenly. Earlier she is identified with the blood of the saints and witnesses of Jesus (Revelation 17:6).

† Revelation also identifies the great city spiritually as the place where their Lord was crucified, providing an important internal marker for understanding the city under judgment (Revelation 11:8).

† Jesus had already charged Jerusalem with shedding the blood of the prophets and righteous and said that judgment would come upon His generation (Matthew 23:34-37). Revelation uses the same covenant lawsuit imagery as it announces judgment upon the blood-guilty city

(Revelation 18:20, 24).

Revelation 18:21

Then a strong angel picked up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will never be found again.

† The image recalls Old Testament prophetic judgment language in which a city or kingdom is symbolically cast down because its appointed judgment has arrived (Jeremiah 51:63-64).

† Revelation isn't describing the destruction of planet Earth. It describes the fall of the great city that had become guilty of covenant corruption and the blood of God's servants (Revelation 18:24).

† The old persecuting covenant city falls, clearing the prophetic stage for the marriage imagery that immediately follows in Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:7

Let's rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has prepared herself."

† Revelation moves directly from the judgment of the corrupt woman to the marriage of the Lamb. The contrast is deliberate. One covenant order is judged while the bride associated with the Lamb is revealed in glory (Revelation 18:20; 21:2).

† The bride isn't another earthly political nation. Revelation later identifies the bride as the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2, 9-10).

† This matches the rest of the New Testament. Believers had already come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem above was already identified as free (Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:26).

Revelation 19:9

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

† The story ends in marriage, not abandonment. God wasn't destroying His redemptive purpose. He was bringing the old covenant age to its appointed conclusion and revealing the new covenant reality

established in Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

† What the prophets anticipated had reached fulfillment in Christ. The temporary covenant administration gave way to the better covenant established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

† The bride belongs to Christ, and God's dwelling isn't centered in an earthly temple made with hands. His people are His dwelling place through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Historical References

† Josephus described Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, including famine, internal violence, the burning of the temple, and the devastation that followed the Roman siege. His account provides an eyewitness-era historical description of the catastrophe Jesus had warned that generation about (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:20-24).

† Josephus reported that the temple was burned during the Roman conquest and Jerusalem was devastated afterward. Whatever theological conclusions are drawn from his history, his account confirms the extraordinary historical collapse of the temple-centered order.

† Eusebius later recorded the Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed before the war and settled at Pella. He connected the devastation of Jerusalem with divine judgment following the rejection and persecution of Christ and His apostles (Luke 21:20-22).

† These historical witnesses don't establish doctrine. Scripture establishes doctrine. Their value is that they describe historical events remarkably consistent with the first-century setting of Jesus' warnings.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We're not waiting for the old covenant to disappear. Hebrews said it was already obsolete and near disappearance in the first century (Hebrews 8:13).

† We're not approaching an earthly Jerusalem to find God's covenant presence. We've come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem through Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† We don't need another earthly temple, Levitical priesthood, or animal sacrifice. Christ offered the sufficient sacrifice, and His people are now God's dwelling place (Hebrews 10:10-14; Ephesians 2:21-22).

† God's judgment of the old covenant order wasn't the failure of His

promises. It was the fulfillment of His promises and warnings, while the better covenant established through Christ remains (Hebrews 8:6).

† The message of AD 70 isn't that God abandoned His people. It's that the temporary covenant order reached its appointed end and God's redemptive purpose reached its promised new covenant reality in Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

† We aren't waiting to become citizens of the Jerusalem above. In Christ, our citizenship and covenant identity are already centered in the heavenly reality God established through His Son (Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Did God literally call His covenant relationship with Israel a marriage?

A: Yes. God described Himself as Israel's husband and Israel's covenant rebellion as adultery (Jeremiah 3:8; 31:32).

Q: Did God's divorce language mean He broke His promises?

A: No. Scripture places the covenant violation upon Israel's unfaithfulness. God's judgment carried out the warnings already contained in the covenant itself (Deuteronomy 28:15, 45; Isaiah 50:1).

Q: Was Judah warned after seeing what happened to Israel?

A: Yes. Jeremiah says Judah saw Israel's unfaithfulness and judgment but still followed the same path (Jeremiah 3:7-11).

Q: When did Jesus say Jerusalem's judgment would occur?

A: Jesus placed the judgment upon His own generation and then foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple (Matthew 23:36-38; 24:2, 34).

Q: Was the old covenant still awaiting its final disappearance when Hebrews was written?

A: Yes. Hebrews called it obsolete, aging, and near disappearance

(Hebrews 8:13).

Q: Did the new covenant begin only after Jerusalem was destroyed?

A: No. Christ had already established the new covenant through His blood. AD 70 removed the remaining visible old covenant system, it didn't create the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15).

Q: Why does Revelation move from Babylon's destruction to the marriage of the Lamb?

A: The imagery presents the judgment of the corrupt city followed by the celebration of the Lamb and His bride. Revelation later identifies that bride with the new Jerusalem (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9-10).

Q: Are Christians waiting for another earthly temple to restore God's presence?

A: No. God's people are His temple, and believers have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22-24).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Jeremiah 3:8; Isaiah 50:1; Hosea 2:2; Matthew 23:38; Hebrews 8:13; Revelation 18:8, 21; Revelation 19:7, 9

† Historical writers: Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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