



Hiding in Plain View: The Bridal Paradigm

par-a-digm (par' ə dim), n. 1. an example or pattern 2. a model or ideal
(from the Greek *paradeiknumi* – to show side by side, to compare)

A paradigm is a new way of thinking about something. It reveals a pattern not yet seen. The bridal paradigm sets weddings and salvation side by side, reveals a pattern that's eluded our modern eyes, and gives us a new way to think about these two events.

Did you ever notice that Jesus marks the initial and final scenes of His ministry with a wedding? His first miracle occurs at the wedding in Cana (where He saves the host from running out of wine - John 2:1-11). His finale also takes place at a wedding – His own. This most important wedding signals the completion of salvation: our long engagement to Him is over and the consummation for which we both hunger is at hand (Revelation 19:7-9). The very placement of the two stories links weddings and salvation and allows these stories to enfold all that happens in between.

The biblical writer, John, also links weddings and salvation. How? By arranging his words in a pattern, a literary pattern, that links the two ideas. He does it first in his gospel, then does it again in the book of Revelation. The deliberate sequence of his words serves to emphasize His message.

The Bridal Paradigm in the Gospel of John

John stretches his first pairing of weddings and salvation over several chapters of his gospel (from John 1 through John 8). I'd read these chapters a number of times over the years, but at one reading a pattern suddenly leapt off the pages. Each time Jesus talks with a believer, John follows that encounter with stories about weddings and salvation. But when Jesus talks with unbelievers? Then John follows with stories about adultery and illegitimacy.

This pairing is no accident. John does it deliberately in order to emphasize the division between those who are joined to God and those who are not.

Notice John's consistent pattern: believing links with marriage and unbelief links with adultery. (And don't miss the importance of what Jesus says between these stories: that's where Jesus repeatedly claims to be both God and Messiah – the anointed one who *saves* from unbelief and offers to *marry* us.)

Take a look:

Jesus Speaks

John's Story

John 1:47	to a believer (Nathaniel)	→	2:1	wedding at Cana
John 2:14	to unbelievers (moneychangers)	→	2:17	jealousy (zeal) at adultery
John 3:1	to a believer (Nicodemus)	→	3:3, 15	new birth and eternal life (salvation)
John 3:25	to a believer (John the Baptist)	→	3:29	Jesus as bridegroom
John 4:7	to a believer (the repentant Samaritan adulterous)	→	4:14 4:26	Jesus offers her eternal life Jesus offers her a Messiah/husband

John 4:26 Jesus speaks the first I AM (I am God)

John 4:46-7:46 Messianic Proofs

John 7:50	believer (Nicodemus)	→	8:3-11	Jesus offers forgiveness to an adulteress
John 8:13	unbelievers (Pharisees)	→	8:19	Jesus says God isn't their father (i.e. they're bastards, born out of wedlock)

John 8:24 Jesus speaks the second I AM (I am God)

John 8:28 Jesus speaks the third I AM (I am God)

8:41 Jesus again calls them bastards (they're born of fornication)

John 8:58 Jesus speaks the fourth I AM (I am God)

8:59 they try to stone Jesus

The Bridal Paradigm in Revelation

In Revelation 19:1-21:10 John arranges his pattern a little differently. This time he alternates stories about weddings with stories about salvation. Back and forth, again and again John interweaves the two topics: salvation – wedding – salvation – wedding – salvation – wedding. Three times John repeats his pattern to make sure we don't miss his meaning. The positioning of John's stories is his way of connecting the two. See how John's meaning again pops off the page:

A1	salvation	(Rev. 19:1-6)	salvation belongs to our God
B1	wedding	(Rev. 19:7-9)	the marriage supper of the Lamb
A2	salvation	(Rev. 19:11-20:15)	salvation victory (the final defeat of Satan)
[How exactly Satan's defeat relate to salvation? Salvation always implies a victory: Jesus saves us from Satan's clutches. His final victory over Satan removes us forever from the evil one's harassment. Jesus wins. He is victorious. What else is that but salvation? And don't weddings do the same? Every bridegroom wins his bride from all other suitors.]			
B2	wedding	(Rev. 21:1-3)	New Jerusalem made ready as a bride
A3	salvation	(Rev. 21:4-7)	the water of life (salvation) without cost
B3	wedding	(Rev. 21:9-10)	the bride, the wife of the Lamb

*Every bridegroom, including Jesus,
wins his bride from all other suitors.*

Follow-Up Note

These two bridal paradigms are examples of the many and varied literary patterns which occur throughout the Old and New Testaments. Though they aren't found in every passage, biblical authors do use them deliberately and frequently. Why? To emphasize their point, to make their message linger in your memory, and, I imagine, for the sheer joy of creating a text that is a thing of beauty.

If you're intrigued by these "hidden" patterns, I suggest three books that describe them well: Bruce Waltke's [Genesis](#), Ken Bailey's [Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes](#), and David Dorsey's [The Literary Structure of the Old Testament](#).

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