

# The Wedding Discoveries

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The Research and References Behind the *Galilean Wedding* Presentation and the Documentary & Book *Before the Wrath*

Compilation & Commentary  
by Jay R. McCarl

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**W**here did I find the information about an ancient ‘Galilean’ wedding? What were my sources? Glad you asked. The best explanation is found in the companion book to the video, “Before the Wrath”, which is a reprint of my earlier, now out-of-print book on the subject. Below is an excerpt of the last chapter of the book, which explains the process of discovery for the Galilean wedding traditions. The book was never intended to be a scholarly dissertation but rather a quick read that even youth could appreciate, so even though it was a long-term research project, it contained no end notes and few footnotes. The methodology, however, was quite simple and obvious, and the resources, abundant (as you will see in the rest of this document). Blessings. — Jay

## Excerpt from the book, “Before the Wrath”

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Chapter: *More than I ever Dreamed*, © 2012 by Jay R. McCarl

When the Jerusalem Temple fell, everything changed.

The temperamental Galileans had started another rebellion and Rome finally got fed up. Their legions rolled down from the north, destroying everything and everyone in their path until they finally surrounded Jerusalem. The besieged Jews retreated into the inner courts of their mighty Temple—remodeled by paranoid King Herod to be an impenetrable fortress. Caesar had ordered the Temple not to be destroyed, but an over-zealous Roman soldier loosed a flaming arrow, and in A.D. 70 the massive sanctuary, along with the thousands of Jews hiding inside, was incinerated.

Survivors of the onslaught were crucified or sold into slavery and dispersed throughout the whole Roman world. It became known as the great dispersion—the Diaspora.

The Jewish people were experts at maintaining religious traditions, but now, far removed from their Promised Land and with their magnificent Temple in ruins, the center of their faith began to fade into memory. For the most traditional people in the world, things started to change.

In time, many Jewish traditions began to take on a more European flavor—and while western ways seeped to their age-old customs, others slipped away.

And you can easily spot some of the changes in the way they do their weddings.

For instance, modern Jewish weddings are full of unforgettable moments: the white canopy sheltering the couple, the bride and groom circling around the rabbi and smashing a glass while all the guests shout “Mazel tov!”\*

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\* Yiddish for “Good Luck!”

But what were their wedding traditions like before the fall of the Temple? This is not an easy question to answer because few historians recorded anything about it. And why would they? Why would they waste valuable space on an expensive scroll recording the petty traditions of farmers and fishermen living in northern Judea?

That is why there just isn't much historical information out there.

When the Temple fell, everything changed—and so did Jewish wedding traditions. And this is *really* important, because we need to understand what those traditions looked like before that dreadful change.

Many of the metaphors Jesus used pointed to a wedding—in particular a Galilean-style wedding. That means understanding what these weddings were like—and what they *weren't* like—was essential to grasping His message in all its sublime force.

The trick was finding out what the Jews added and what was omitted during the centuries of their dispersion.

There are questions concerning the original timing of the use of the Huppa, the presence of a rabbi and the segregation of men and women at the wedding feast. The smashing of the glass was definitely a more recent development. It originated with a Middle Age Jewish custom of crushing a jar of perfume to commemorate the Temple's destruction and the beautiful aroma of a new life. And "Mazel tov"? It's a Yiddish custom that showed up in Jewish weddings around 1860 (A.D.).

The problem was, almost all of the available information about Galilean weddings was recorded in the New Testament of the Bible. After all, the Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and John were Galileans, and Luke would have interviewed Peter and Mary (at least), who were also from Galilee. And most significant, Jesus was from there, too. But over the centuries, though the Bible itself has not changed, our ability to spot the idioms in the text has faded like a man slowly going blind.

So I had to go back—way back—before the Romans burned the Herod's Temple. I had to look at the bits and pieces of modern and medieval Jewish weddings and set aside everything they added over the centuries of their dispersion. What remained is where I began.

I also had to consider the regional customs—modern and ancient—wedding traditions that were followed by Arabs and other surrounding peoples of that age.

Outside the Bible, resources on this subject are rare, but there were enough of them to grind out a new set of lenses to see what Jesus was saying—especially when He mentioned a wedding.

So, I put on these new glasses and started looking around. Gradually I began to notice references to the Wedding, the Bride, the Bridegroom and the Wife that, in all my years of Bible-reading, I had simply read right past.

At first glance, the imagery seemed mysterious and distant—flowery symbols with meanings veiled in a dark spiritual fog beyond all earthly penetration. But God wanted people to understand Him—simple people, all people. He was not concealing anything—in fact, He was revealing it.

When I began paying attention, I discovered marital metaphors everywhere in the Book. I rediscovered wedding psalms and poetry, wedding allegories and analogies in the Pentateuch, histories, prophets and gospels and marriage-related parables and types in the New Testament epistles and Revelation. It was *everywhere*.

There is also an abundance of Old Testament references and allusions to Israel as the wife of God—His exclusive title for His people, the Jews, and of which I have made no attempt to discuss here (it is an entirely different—though related—subject which, had I tried to weave it into the content of this book, would have bloated it beyond readability). There was already more than enough to talk about.

Even so, the same sort of relationship is often applied to the church in both the Old and New Testaments, where she is the betrothed bride of Christ, and that such attributions were neither random nor rare.

In this light, it is no wonder God refers to Himself throughout the Scriptures in masculine terms—it was divinely intentional and not some sexist plot by stealthy committees of misogynistic Bible translators.

As I wrote this book, I created a few hypothetical situations (the wedding processions, the arrival of the caravan and so forth) in order to immerse the reader into the everyday life and thought processes of the people of Jesus' day. These scenarios are, to an extent, idealized and assume a degree of romance, humor, good weather, available resources and family cooperation. Life was hard in those days—*really* hard, and I did not want to distract from the joyful future to which the Galilean wedding pointed by including some of the more painful depictions of everyday struggles. For instance, a quiet night in a village was rare. Had you lived back then, you would have heard all kinds of sounds echoing in the darkness—snoring, crying babies, vomiting, the moaning (perhaps even screams) of sick and dying people and more. You get the idea.

Neither did I address (to any reasonable extent) details related to family honor and a good name or how a ketubah emulated God making the covenant with Abraham or giving Moses the Ten

Commandments. Had I done so, it would have produced engrossing but lengthy rabbit-trails that led away from central path of the book.

I pray you will fall madly in love with Jesus all over again, or perhaps for the very first time. I think you will see many things in the Bible as if for the very first time, even if you have read it a hundred times before. I know I did.

There was more than I ever dreamed.

# Explanation of “Galilean Wedding” Discovery Process

## Introduction to Premise and Process

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Question: *“So, where and when was this bridegroom-bride-wedding metaphor discovered? Who dug it up (or made it up) and in what form was it found?”*

Answer: *It’s been staring us in the face all along—we didn’t notice simply because we are not Galilean peasants...*

This document is not a new book or prelude to another movie, it’s a supplement that answers the oft-asked questions, ‘Where’d you get all this?’ or ‘How do you defend the claims presented in your book?’.

When I wrote the book “The Best Day of Forever” (now “Before the Wrath”) my intention was to keep it readable and engaging to a non-scholarly audience. Though the research process took more than six years, I decided not to overwhelm readers with quotes, footnotes and endnotes typical of more highbrow expressions. Having said this, I have resurrected this project to supplement the original manuscript with reference sources, including recollections of oral testimonies along with my own informed conclusions, which will need to be accepted by the reader at face value or not at all.

The basis for this form of systematic theology is observable historical data, especially the written record contained in the Scriptures and extra-Biblical sources. These indicate that Jesus rarely, if ever, taught using western (Hellenized/Greek) abstractions, to which His largely non-Hellenized peasant-audience of Hebraic Jews (Galilean) would not have related well or at all. Instead, He used parables, metaphors, similes, local proverbs and idiomatically descriptive words to ‘make memories’ in a people who, with an (optimistically) 11% literacy rate, had limited access to written resources, much less ownership of such. Desi Maxwell, professor of Hebrew Studies at Belfast Bible College characterized this teaching method as ‘putting handles on the truth’ for people to ‘carry’ His lessons wherever they went. This ‘ancient dialectical’ logic of the Galileans is still prevalent today among large populations of non-westernized Levantine people groups.

Using this thought process in teaching His disciples, Jesus compared the purpose of His first advent to that of a bridegroom-bride relationship to soften their entrenched presumptions about His Messiahship as nationalistic, autocratic and even violent. Such things, He taught them, will occur at His second appearing (and which they would also continue to misunderstand until the Day of Pentecost), but His mission this time around was to establish a new covenant, return to His Father and at an unannounced future date, return for His church. Just like their own pattern of wedding traditions that they knew so well...

Among the scholars and authors noted in this reference catalog, there are varying observations and opinions concerning the purpose of certain traditions in the wedding ceremonies and the order in which they appear. Our western analytical view struggles with such variations (often assuming them to be contradictions), but it must be understood that people would do things differently from region to region down to individual family

traditions. For instance, one scholar might state that the bride's dowery was the bride-price; another may conclude that the two items were distinct, serving different purposes. They would both be correct, depending on the regional, village or familial traditions at play. Further, the authors of the references cited in this compilation are included due to the veracity of their data, not necessarily their interpretation of it. Some of the citations are by atheists, higher critics, mystics, Jewish-roots advocates and other controversial individuals. Their conclusions concerning the data can range from clinical to horrendous, but if their data is verifiable, truth cannot be made untrue by errant interpretations, and is therefore significant.

Further, there are untold sources that have yet to be tapped concerning this subject. At the outset of my research, I consulted Dr. Rachel Roubin (professor of post-graduate Hebrew studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, ret.). After providing invaluable pointers concerning research on the subject of Second Temple Period Biblical weddings, she asked me, "Do you speak German?"

"No," I answered, embarrassed that I hadn't kept my German fresh after High School.

"That's too bad," she said, looking down and shaking her head.

"Do you speak French?" she asked.

"No, not at all," I responded.

"Oh, that's too bad," she repeated, again shaking her head. Then she added, "There are journals in the U.C. Berkley library that would be helpful."

Subject-related journals in *Berkley*?

Even more, during a recent visit of the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, I viewed volume after volume in Henry Huntington's vast antiquarian library bearing tantalizing titles. The books were well preserved behind glass, and like many of the great libraries of the world, available only by special supervised arrangement.

Most of all, keep in mind that the Bible contains the greatest known record of wedding-custom descriptions in Jewish history—many of which are incidental accounts while others are intended to be parabolic, and thus didactic—especially to peasantry. Additional references can easily be determined by researching Second Temple Period Jewish wedding customs and comparing them with specific sayings in the Bible. It is subjects like this where the Bible is its own best commentary. Additional data was achieved through personal interviews with Bedouin Arabs, Jewish scholars, historians and well-researched pastors. These sources could be referenced only as oral testimony, which (admittedly) will not pass the test of a scholarly critique. Even so, it needed to be done.

So, if you're interested in the sources for my book and movie, here they are. Of course, folks who write books like mine are *summarizing* the research of others, extrapolating conclusions and presenting it in a coherent way. This sort of process must always begin with the Scriptures in context—with the narrative of any individual book in light of the sixty-five others that comprise the Bible. Add to this the short and long-term history behind the narrative, the background and profile of the original hearer, the semantic perceptions of the original hearer and—most of all, the revealed message of the 'Author' Himself.



## **The Premise** (roadmap of this research process)

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1. The Bible is *not* a mystery, a book of riddles or a 'hiding', it is a revealing/revelation
2. The Bible was *not* written to scholars or theologians
3. The Bible *was* written to be understood (if not, why did God give it to humanity?)
4. The Bible was written to be read to (or by) peasants, children, women (mostly illiterate people) in order that people *could* know and understand God, to the extent to which He has revealed Himself
  - a. God has revealed Himself:
    - i. Through nature (what He made)
    - ii. Through what He does
    - iii. Through prophets (what He says)
    - iv. Through His written record (the Scriptures)
    - v. Through His Son (John 14:9)
    - vi. Through His Holy Spirit (John 15:26)
5. The Bible is an Eastern Book
  - a. Its entire writing style is non-Hellenized
  - b. Its entire writing style reflects ancient dialectical logic
    - i. Its original audience did not abstract well (unlike the Hellenized)
    - ii. It employs concrete illustrations and highly illustrative semantic vocabulary to which non-Hellenized people could easily relate and retain
6. For a more on this subject, please read Dr. Jim Fleming's detailed explanation:  
Fleming, James, Ed.D. *The Life of the Shepherd, Farmer and Village in Biblical Times*.  
La Grange, GA, USA: Biblical Resources, 2007, Appendix<sup>1</sup>

### **Rhetorical considerations of Jesus' teaching methodology**

- a. Was Jesus Hellenized?
- b. Was Jesus being deliberately mysterious and/or mystical, allowing himself to be misunderstood?
- c. Were the Gospel writers Hellenized?
- d. When He taught and preached among Galileans, was Jesus speaking to Hellenized, non-Hebraic people?
- e. Did Jesus teach in a Hellenized fashion?
- f. If question 'd' & 'e' are affirmative, why would He do so considering his Galilean audiences' strenuous (occasionally violent) opposition to Hellenization?

## **The Process**

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*The discovery process follows the basic form below:*

- **Take** all known ancient Levantine wedding customs (Palestine, Judea, Samaria, Egypt, Nabataea, Galilee, etc.) found in ancient historical writings (usually fragmentary and incidental)
- **Subtract** all wedding traditions added *after* AD 70, including Talmudic traditions (often wrongly presumed to reflect more ancient methodologies)
- **Compile** and examine what remains
- **Compare** what remains to the Biblical record, both Old and New Testaments, especially—but not limited to—the parables and metaphors of Jesus

## **My Conclusions**

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Though some of the references cited in this document are more recent than the publication of my original book, ‘The Best Day of Forever’ (now ‘Before the Wrath’) the newer sources merely reinforce the older and the soundness of my original thesis. Further, I now favor the new book title to the former, since, as Paul declared, God did not appoint us—the church, Christ’s bride—to suffer wrath (1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9), unlike the unrepentant world.

## **The Bottom Line**

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*Question: As He taught, did Jesus, Paul and John occasionally reference a common regional wedding parabolically and metaphorically to explain Christ’s return for His church?*

*Answer: Like it or not, they did—it’s obvious and verifiable Biblically, historically and academically.*

*Question: This being so, what are we to do with it? What did Jesus want the peasant multitudes, religious leaders, His disciples and those who would come after them to understand?*

*Answer: The reader must decide in light of what His followers understood Him to say.*

## **For the Record...**

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I am neither an archeologist nor anthropologist, but to a certain extent, the latter is something I do. I have been immersed in the study of Biblical culture, customs and semantics for decades and have been told by the truly credentialed that my research has been spot-on (for which I am both grateful and relieved). My original educational pursuits were decidedly different—fine art and astronomy. Ministry and pure practicality notwithstanding, I eventually earned my bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the more needful field of Chaplaincy Ministry.

My great passion, however, has always been Biblical history, anthropology and semantics, which has taken me to the Middle East upwards of fifty times—leading study tours,

teaching and researching at Biblical, historical and archeological sites. I've had the honor of teaching these subjects in colleges and institutions in Israel, Latin America and Europe, and have been guided and affirmed by professors from Hebrew University Jerusalem, Belfast Bible College and more.

Leading influences on my research include Dr. Rachel Roubin (Hebrew University Jerusalem), Prof. Desi Maxwell (Professor of Hebrew Studies, Belfast Bible College, ret.), Arnold Fruchtenbaum, author Gayle Erwin, Jacob Cohen, M.Div., and my ongoing contact with Israeli and Turkish scholars and Jordanian Arabs.

The most useful published resources in my library include various Bible-background commentaries (Zondervan and IVP) and the works of Kenneth E. Bailey, Dr. Jim Fleming, Henri Daniel-Rops, Prof. Robert Garland (lectures) and the rest of my Bibliography listed at the end of this document (yes, I read them all). Of course, the best classroom is always 'boots-on-the-ground' and all those first-hand conversations with those who still practice the ancient customs, using the same logic employed throughout the Bible: namely, the Bedouins.

If you seek additional exposition on the following resources, *please read my book...*

## **Acknowledgments**

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It seems a genuine God-incidence that I found myself progressively connected with scholars, researchers, professors and generally brilliant people—experts in the field of Biblical backgrounds, history, archeology and ancient Levantine customs and thought—who opened the door to a world I read about every day, yet never knew existed. Author Gayle Erwin lit the fuse in 1991 during a lecture about the Last Supper. Biblical Resources Jerusalem fueled my fascination by demonstrating how the moving parts of that world worked together. Dr. Rachel Roubin of Hebrew University Jerusalem put my research to the test and pointed me down unanticipated paths of discovery to ancient weddings. Professor Desi Maxwell of Belfast Bible College added additional affirmation and direction. People I never met—Dr. Os Guinness, Kenneth E. Bailey and Dr. Jim Fleming—became interpreters of the long-forgotten language of Biblical thought, supplying provocations to dig ever deeper. Still others provided data, observations and enlightenments, including Chaplain Jacob Cohen, Mr. Abu el-Walid Dajani, Bob Probert, Pastor Nizar Touma, Rabbi Yoel and tour guides Ronnie Cohen, Dilek Yarcan, Ender Tan, Jihan Al-Rababy, Fadi Abu Jabbar and the great David Kidron.

*'For those who believe, no proof is necessary. For those who don't believe, no proof is possible.'*

– Stuart Chase

## Scriptural References to Weddings<sup>†‡</sup>

### GENERAL REFERENCES TO WEDDING FEASTS

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#### Luke 14:7-11

<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: <sup>8</sup> **“When someone invites you to a wedding feast**, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup> If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. <sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

#### John 2:1-11

On the third day a **wedding took place at Cana in Galilee**. Jesus’ mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> **When the wine was gone**, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

<sup>4</sup> “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

<sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

<sup>6</sup> Nearby stood six stone **water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing**, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

<sup>8</sup> Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. **Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and said**, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but **you have saved the best till now.**”

<sup>11</sup> This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

### WEDDING FEAST OF THE LAMB (The marriage of Jesus & His Bride)

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#### Revelation 19:6-10

<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

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<sup>†</sup> All references are from: The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Zondervan (unless otherwise noted); most **‘bold’** emphases added by me.

<sup>‡</sup> All highlighted **‘Comments’** are mine unless otherwise noted.

“Hallelujah!  
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.  
7 Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!  
**For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.**  
8 **Fine linen, bright and clean,  
was given her to wear.”**

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

<sup>9</sup> Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘**Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!**’ ” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

<sup>10</sup> At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For **the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**”

## WEDDING BANQUET DESCRIPTIONS

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### Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a **wedding banquet for his son.** <sup>3</sup> He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

<sup>4</sup> “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

<sup>5</sup> “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

<sup>8</sup> “Then he said to his servants, ‘**The wedding banquet** is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ <sup>10</sup> So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing **wedding clothes.** <sup>12</sup> ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

<sup>13</sup> “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

<sup>14</sup> “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

## SURPRISE ELEMENT OF WEDDINGS

**Comment:** Jesus was a Galilean and spoke to His Galilean disciples and the masses as such. Keep in mind that Jesus wanted to be understood—He was *revealing*, not *hiding* His message and intentions.

### Matthew 24:36-25:13

<sup>36</sup> **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** <sup>37</sup> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were **eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> **and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.** <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

<sup>42</sup> “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

<sup>45</sup> “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. <sup>47</sup> I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ <sup>49</sup> and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. <sup>50</sup> The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. <sup>51</sup> He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**25** “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be **like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.** <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup> The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

<sup>6</sup> **“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’**

<sup>7</sup> “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

<sup>9</sup> “ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

<sup>10</sup> “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup> “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

<sup>12</sup> “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

<sup>13</sup> **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**

**Comment:** Concerning the bride sleeping in her dress, this appears to be common to that style of wedding, since she had to be ready to be ‘abducted’ at a moment’s notice. The bridesmaids typically and traditionally would have worn white linen, whereas the bride’s garments would have been an explosion of color. Keeping her clean and wrinkle-free would

have been the duty of the bridesmaids (thus their ongoing presence with the bride as she waited). In such times and places poor regional peasants would have held to different expectations of wardrobe and cleanliness than we do today.

**Comment:** The 'bridesmaids' parable is an entirely different subject from the Lord's bridegroom-bride relationship, namely, it's about being ready and alert to the fact that the bridegroom could come for her at any time. In our western form of logic, the parable fits the wedding theme (which it does) and therefore must be another part of the same previous metaphors (which it isn't)—it stands alone in a sense.

This parable is considerably more intense than it appears to Western eyes. The number '10' is not the main issue here, but rather the readiness of the bridesmaids for the anticipated appearance of the bridegroom. The oil lamps were considered necessary for the bridegroom to be able to see the members of the wedding party as they stood in the street (at night) while waiting for him to arrive. The five who had oil were able to fuel and light their lamps, and thus be 'seen' by the bridegroom and taken to his father's compound in the boisterous procession. The bridesmaids without oil acted irresponsibly and were shamefully neglectful—a peasant hearing this parable would picture bridesmaids who not only lacked oil *in* their lamps but did not have oil *for* their lamps. Simply put, they neglected to fill their oil flasks. The foolish five were caught off-guard because they were shamefully presumptuous of the situation. Having an empty oil-flask (in the ears of the hearers) was inexcusable considering the immanent possibility of the bridegroom's surprise abduction of the bride. In fact, such a person would be condemned as lazy and utterly irresponsible in fulfilling a basic social duty.

This parable has everything to do with the rapture, as Jesus had just referred to such an event using other parabolic metaphors about a master returning home to find his servants about his business, and an owner of a house taking proper measures knowing that a thief could invade at any time. The frequent confusion with this parable is often the result of the chapter break between 24 and 25—where centuries ago a well-intentioned editor inserted reference breaks, which often destroyed contexts. In this case, Matthew 24 and 25 is one continuous context. When we read it as such, the messages in chapter 25 gain an entirely new momentum.

### **Revelation 22:7-20**

<sup>7</sup> **"Behold, I am coming soon!** Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

<sup>8</sup> I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

<sup>10</sup> Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. <sup>11</sup> Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

<sup>12</sup> **Behold, I am coming soon!** My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

<sup>14</sup> **Blessed are those who wash their robes**, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

<sup>16</sup> **I, Jesus**, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

<sup>17</sup> The Spirit **and the bride say, "Come!"** And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

<sup>18</sup> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. <sup>19</sup> And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

<sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, **"Yes, I am coming soon."**  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

## **ADDITIONAL 'SURPRISE' ELEMENTS**

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### **Luke 12:35-48**

<sup>35</sup> **Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning**, <sup>36</sup> like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. <sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. <sup>39</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> **You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."**

<sup>41</sup> Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

<sup>42</sup> The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. <sup>44</sup> I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. <sup>45</sup> But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. <sup>46</sup> The master of that servant **will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.** He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

<sup>47</sup> "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. <sup>48</sup> But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From



everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

**PARABOLIC REFERENCES TO THE BRIDEGROOM RETURNING TO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE TO PREPARE FOR THE WEDDING** (see various commentary references below, under Marriage: Traditional Processes and Procedures, Ancient Weddings, Marriage Covenants, Betrothal Period, Going of the Groom to Get the Bride, The Wedding Feast of the Lamb, The Rapture and the Jewish Wedding, Additional Testimonies and Interviews, and Further Reading References)

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**Matthew 24:36**

<sup>36</sup> "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

**John 14:1-4**

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going."

**John 14:28-31**

<sup>28</sup> "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. <sup>30</sup> I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, <sup>31</sup> but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

**REFERENCES TO THE BETROTHAL PERIOD**

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**Comment:** The interval between the Betrothal and Wedding feast when the bridegroom & bride were legally married but not living as husband and wife was approximately one year.

**Matthew 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother **Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph**, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to **divorce her quietly**.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to **take Mary home as your wife**, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”— which means, “God with us.”

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and **took Mary home as his wife.** <sup>25</sup> But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

### **Matthew 9:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

<sup>15</sup> Jesus answered, “**How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?** The time will come **when the bridegroom will be taken from them;** then they will fast.

### **Mark 2:18-20**

<sup>18</sup> Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?”

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, “**How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?** They cannot, so long as they have him with them. <sup>20</sup> But **the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them,** and on that day they will fast.

### **Luke 5:33-35**

<sup>33</sup> They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “**Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?** <sup>35</sup> But the time will come **when the bridegroom will be taken from them;** in those days they will fast.”

### **3 Maccabees 4:6-8**

<sup>6</sup> And young women who had just entered the bridal chamber to share married life exchanged joy for wailing, their **myrrh-perfumed hair** sprinkled with ashes, and **were carried away** unveiled, all together raising a lament instead of a **wedding song,** as they were torn by the harsh treatment of the heathen. <sup>7</sup> In bonds and in public view they were violently dragged along as far as the place of embarkation.

<sup>8</sup> Their **husbands,** in the prime of youth, their necks encircled with ropes **instead of garlands,** spent the remaining **days of their marriage festival** in lamentations instead of **good cheer and youthful revelry,** seeing death immediately before them.

[The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

### **Tobit 9:6**

<sup>6</sup> In the morning they both got up early and **went to the wedding celebration.**

When they came into Raguel’s house they found Tobias **reclining at table.**

[The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

## REFERENCES TO THE DURATION OF WEDDING FEASTS

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### **Tobit 10:7**

Now when the **fourteen days of the wedding celebration** had ended that Raguel had sworn to observe for his daughter, Tobias came to him and said, “Send me back, for I know that my father and mother do not believe that they will see me again. [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

### **Tobit 11:17–18**

When Tobit met Sarah the wife of his son Tobias, he blessed her saying, “Come in, my daughter, and welcome. Blessed be your God who has brought you to us, my daughter. Blessed be your father and your mother, blessed be my son Tobias, and blessed be you, my daughter. Come in now to your home, and welcome, with blessing and joy. Come in, my daughter.” So on that day there was rejoicing among all the Jews who were in Nineveh. <sup>18</sup> Ahikar and his nephew Nadab were also present to share Tobit’s joy. With **merriment** they **celebrated Tobias’s wedding feast for seven days**, and **many gifts were given** to him. [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

## WEDDING ALLUSIONS BY THE APOSTLE PAUL IN EPHESIANS?

**Comment:** Concerning Paul’s references to the relationship of Christ and the church to the entire wedding process (Shiddukhin, Erusin, Nissuin), his language usage and overall context of his Ephesian letter contains picturesque allusions to an arranged marriage.

For instance, in Ephesians 1:4, Paul’s initial readers/hearers, though mostly (if not entirely) Hellenized, likely would not have abstracted on the highly generalized level in which this verse is usually understood in the current western world. The typical modern interpretation defaults to a highly abstracted Calvinistic concept of being chosen by God ‘in Him before the creation of the world...’ In other words, the concept set forth by modern western theologians treats Paul’s declaration as an unfathomable mystery, wherein he makes no effort to characterize to enhance the understanding of his hearers. This type of interpretation is expected by modern theologians and commentators and considered part and parcel of the majesty and mystery of the sovereignty of God, which is true. The question is, who was Paul’s intended audience for this letter? Like all of Paul’s letters, his content is heavily punctuated with idiomatic words and phrases, without which his content would have been more prose than purposeful.

What would the Ephesians have thought when they heard Paul declare, “*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*”? For us western Christians, it’s an accepted concept about God and His grace—but on a concept. To Paul’s hearers, it almost certainly painted a picture of a father choosing a bride for his son—an arranged marriage-engagement—a *shiddukhin*, set in place well in advance of the betrothal ceremony and wedding.

How is this a possibility? Simply put, Paul’s letters had an inner consistency of contextuality. This is far less apparent with the later addition of chapter numbers and

breaks, which can damage contextual flow and emphases. When reading Ephesians straight through without chapter breaks, Paul's content appears less a compilation of sayings and teachings and more of an actual *letter* that *flows* through a variety of subjects and ideas with occasional repetitions to reinforce underlying themes. Herein, a later passage stands out like a closing parenthesis on his overall context: V. 5:25-32, especially 5:27.

Paul commanded in V. 5:25-26a, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy..." Paul's use of the word holy is a derivation of the root word for 'holy' used in V. 1:4. In V. 5:25, Paul said Jesus 'gave Himself up for her [the church]', which is also not an abstraction—Jesus' own life was the bride-price to redeem her, which was a very easy way to visualize the groom-bride arrangement. V. 5:27b, however, may be the most telling of all, when Paul said, "...and to present her [the bride-church] to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but *holy* and *blameless*." Paul here repeated the same phrase using the same Greek words in the same order, *hagios* and *amomos*—*holy* and *blameless*—as he did in V. 1:4 when speaking about God's 'chosen' bride and 'wife', the Jews—and God's adopted and typologically betrothed bride, the Gentile church.

Note: The Apostle Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles and, although not a Galilean, he was originally a militant, anti-Hellenization Pharisee. His allusions to Levant-regional wedding-typology suggest personal understanding as well as contact with other Galilean apostles and disciples of Jesus.

### **Ephesians 1:3-4**

Praise be to the God and **Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup>For **He chose us** in him before the creation of the world **to be holy and blameless in His sight**.

### **Ephesians 1:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a **deposit guaranteeing** our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

### **Ephesians 4:30**

<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you **were sealed** for the **day of redemption**.<sup>2</sup>

### **Ephesians 5:25-27**

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her** <sup>26</sup> **to make her holy**, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but **holy and blameless**.

## Ephesians 5:31-32

<sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will **leave his father and mother** [leaves his father’s house to abduct his bride] and be united to his wife, and **the two will become one flesh** [ratified covenant relationship].” <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—**but I am talking about Christ and the church.**

**Comment FROM:** *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, New Testament, Ephesians 5:26 [Kindle Edition, P. 687, Location 10694]: “His *washing* possibly alludes figuratively to the bride’s prenuptial washing (washing was natural before any occasion on which one wished to impress another positively). **After this washing the bride was perfumed, anointed and arrayed in wedding clothes. The betrothal ceremony in Judaism also came to be called *the sanctification of the bride, setting her apart for her husband.*** The word naturally refers to the saving gospel of Christ.”

## REFERENCES TO THE BRIDE-PRICE

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**Comment:** Aside from dowry, unless the ‘price’ refers to the actual dowry, which, depending on local or familial traditions, could be the case

## Genesis 34:11-12

<sup>11</sup> Then Shechem said to Dinah’s father and brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. <sup>12</sup> **Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring** as great as you like, and **I’ll pay whatever you ask me.** Only give me the girl as my wife.”

## Exodus 22:16-17

<sup>16</sup> “If a man seduces a virgin who is not **pledged to be married** and sleeps with her, he must **pay the bride-price**, and **she shall be his wife.** <sup>17</sup> If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must **still pay the bride-price** for virgins.

## REFERENCES TO THE BELIEF THAT LEVANTINE COVENANTAL MARRIAGES PRODUCED A BLOOD RELATIONSHIP

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## Song of Solomon 4:9-12

- <sup>9</sup> You have stolen my heart, **my sister, my bride;**  
you have stolen my heart  
with one glance of your eyes,  
with one jewel of your necklace.
- <sup>10</sup> How delightful is your love, **my sister, my bride!**  
How much more pleasing is your love than wine,  
and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!
- <sup>11</sup> Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, **my bride;**  
milk and honey are under your tongue.  
The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon.

<sup>12</sup> You are a garden locked up, **my sister, my bride;**  
you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

### **Ephesians 5:22-33**

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her** <sup>26</sup> to **make her holy**, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to **present her to himself** as a **radiant** church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> **In this same way**, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—<sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become **one flesh.**” <sup>32</sup> This is a **profound mystery**—but *I am talking about Christ and the church.* <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

### **Matthew 19:4-6** [Also Mark 10:2]

<sup>4</sup> “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female;’ <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two **will become one flesh**?’ <sup>6</sup> So **they are no longer two, but one.** Therefore **what God has joined together, let man not separate.**”

### **Malachi 2:14-17**

<sup>14</sup> You ask, “Why?” It is because **the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth**, because you have broken faith with her, though **she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.**

<sup>15</sup> Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

<sup>16</sup> “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s **covering himself with violence** as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty.

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

### **Ephesians 5:31-32**

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become **one flesh.**” <sup>32</sup> This is a **profound mystery**—but *I am talking about Christ and the church.*

## REFERENCE TO THE ASSISTANT TO THE BRIDEGROOM

**Comment:** The 'best man' assisted in making arrangements for the wedding feast, etc.

### John 3:25-30

<sup>25</sup> An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. <sup>26</sup> They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

<sup>27</sup> To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' <sup>29</sup>

**The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice.**

That joy is mine, and it is now complete. <sup>30</sup> He must become greater; I must become less.

## PROPHETIC ETERNAL UNITING OF THE CHURCH (BRIDE) TO JESUS (BRIDEGROOM)

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### Revelation 21:1-3, 9-10

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.** <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them..."

<sup>9</sup> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**" <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and **showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.**

## REFERENCES TO THE ENGAGEMENT [Shiddukhin]

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### Tobit 6:13

So listen to me, brother; tonight **I will speak to her father about the girl, so that we may take her to be your bride. When we return from Rages we will celebrate her marriage.** For I know that Raguel can by no means keep her from you or promise her to another man without incurring the penalty of death according to the decree of the book of Moses. Indeed he knows that you, rather than any other man, are entitled to marry his daughter. So now listen to me, brother, and **tonight we shall speak concerning the girl and arrange her engagement to you.** And when we return from Rages we will take her and bring her back with us to your house."

[The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

## MISC. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES/DUTIES OF A BRIDE TO HER HUSBAND

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### Sirach 15:1-3

Whoever fears the Lord will do this,  
and whoever holds to the law will obtain wisdom.

<sup>2</sup> She will come to meet him like a mother,  
and **like a young bride she will welcome him.**

<sup>3</sup> **She will feed him** with the bread of learning,  
and **give him the water** of wisdom to drink.

[The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

## REFERENCES TO A BRIDEGROOM'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR WEDDING FEAST PREPARATIONS

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### Judges 14:10

<sup>10</sup> Now his father went down to see the woman. And **Samson made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms.**

## REFERENCES TO THE BETROTHAL [ERUSIN]

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### 2 Corinthians 11:1-2

I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that.

<sup>2</sup> I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. **I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him.**

### Genesis 19:14

<sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, **who were pledged to marry his daughters.** He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But **his sons-in-law** thought he was joking.

### Exodus 22:16-17

<sup>16</sup> "If a man seduces a virgin who is **not pledged** to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. <sup>17</sup> If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay **the bride-price** for virgins.

## REFERENCES TO THE PLEDGE GIFT

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### 2 Corinthians 5:5

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a **deposit, guaranteeing** what is to come.



## Ephesians 1:13-14

<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a **deposit guaranteeing** our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

## CUP OF COVENANT

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### Luke 22:17-20

<sup>17</sup> After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you **I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.**"

<sup>19</sup> And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

<sup>20</sup> In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

### 1 Corinthians 11:25-26

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in my blood**; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death **until he comes.**

## BRIDE DESCRIPTION / WEDDING CLOTHES

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### Psalm 45

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*. A wedding song.

- 1 My heart is stirred by a noble theme  
as I recite my verses for the king;  
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.
- 2 You are the most excellent of men  
and your lips have been anointed with grace,  
since God has blessed you forever.
- 3 Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;  
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
- 4 In your majesty ride forth victoriously  
in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;  
let your right hand display awesome deeds.
- 5 Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies;  
let the nations fall beneath your feet.
- 6 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;  
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

- 7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions  
by **anointing you with the oil of joy.**
- 8 All your **robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;**  
from palaces **adorned with ivory**  
the **music of the strings** makes you glad.
- 9 Daughters of kings are among your honored women;  
at your right hand is the **royal bride in gold of Ophir.**
- 10 Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear:  
Forget your people and your father's house.
- 11 The king is enthralled by your beauty;  
honor him, for he is your lord.
- 12 The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift,  
men of wealth will seek your favor.
- 13 All glorious is the princess within her chamber;  
**her gown is interwoven with gold.**
- 14 In **embroidered garments** she is led to the king;  
her **virgin companions follow her**  
**and are brought to you.**
- 15 They are led in with joy and gladness;  
they enter the palace of the king.
- 16 Your sons will take the place of your fathers;  
you will make them princes throughout the land.
- 17 I will perpetuate your memory through all generations;  
therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.

### **Jeremiah 2:32**

- <sup>32</sup> Does a **maiden** forget her jewelry,  
a **bride** her wedding ornaments?  
Yet my people have forgotten me,  
days without number.

### **Ezekiel 16:9-14**

“ I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. <sup>10</sup> I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. <sup>11</sup> I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, <sup>12</sup> and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. <sup>13</sup> So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. <sup>14</sup> And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.

**Isaiah 61:10**

<sup>10</sup> I delight greatly in the LORD;  
my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with **garments of salvation**  
and arrayed me in a **robe of righteousness,**  
**as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,**  
and **as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**

# Bibliographical References to Biblical Wedding Customs, Traditions and Elements, Both Literal and Parabolical

## **GALILEANS AND JUDEAN CULTURE AND TRADITIONS: DIFFERENCES**

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**FROM:** France, R. T., *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Kindle Edition [P. 7-8]

### **II. Galilee and Jerusalem**

Modern readers of the New Testament often know little about the geo-political world of first-century Palestine. ***It is commonly assumed*** that “the Jews” were an undifferentiated community living amicably together in the part of the world we now call “the Holy Land,” united in their resentment of the political imposition of Roman rule to which all were equally subject. **One of the more significant gains in recent New Testament studies has been the increasing recognition that this is a gross distortion of the historical and cultural reality.**

**In particular it is now widely recognized that Galilee was in the first century, as indeed it had been ever since the death of Solomon, a distinct province with a history, political status and culture which set it decisively apart from the southern province of Judea, despite the fact that the latter contained the holy city of Jerusalem to which all Jews felt a natural allegiance as the focus of the worship of the God of Israel.**

The situation in the time of Jesus may be drastically oversimplified as follows.

**Racially** the area of the former Northern Kingdom of Israel had had, ever since the Assyrian conquest in the eighth century BC, a more mixed population, within which more conservative Jewish areas (like Nazareth and Capernaum) stood in close proximity to largely pagan cities, of which in the first century the new Hellenistic centers of Tiberias and Sepphoris were the chief examples.

**Geographically** Galilee was separated from Judea by the non-Jewish territory of Samaria, and from Perea in the south-east by the Hellenistic settlements of Decapolis.

**Politically** Galilee had been under separate administration from Judea during almost all its history since the tenth century BC (apart from a period of “reunification” under the Maccabees), and in the time of Jesus it was under a (supposedly) native Herodian prince, while Judea and Samaria had since AD 6 been under the direct rule of a Roman prefect.

**Economically** Galilee offered better agricultural and fishing resources than the more mountainous territory of Judea, making the wealth of some Galileans the envy of their southern neighbors.

**Culturally** Judeans despised their northern neighbors as country cousins, their lack of Jewish sophistication being compounded by their greater openness to Hellenistic influence.

**Linguistically** Galileans spoke a distinctive form of Aramaic whose slovenly consonants (they dropped their aitches!) were the butt of Judean humor. Religiously the Judean opinion was that Galileans were lax in their observance of proper ritual, and the problem was exacerbated by the distance of Galilee from the temple and the theological leadership which was focused in Jerusalem.

**If, as I hope, this is not a complete caricature, it means that even an impeccably Jewish Galilean in first-century Jerusalem was not among his own people; he was as much a foreigner as an Irishman in London or a Texan in New York. His accent would immediately mark him out as “not one of us,” and all the communal prejudice of the supposedly superior culture of the capital city would stand against his claim to be heard even as a prophet, let alone as the “Messiah,” a title which as everyone knew belonged to Judea (cf. John 7:40–42).**

To recognize the realities of the situation is to gain new insight into the obstacles facing Jesus of Nazareth in gaining acceptance as a credible “Messiah” in the southern province, despite (or even perhaps because of) the enthusiasm he had excited in his own province. We shall note this element in the narrative especially of Jesus’ first arrival outside the walls of Jerusalem in 21:1–11, and it will be a constantly underlying element in the subsequent confrontation between the Galilean prophet and the Jerusalem establishment.

It has long been recognized that the geographical framework of Mark’s gospel accentuates this north-south divide, and many have argued that there is an ideological, not merely an historical, basis for Mark’s decision to tell the story in this way.<sup>12</sup> In Mark Jesus’ ministry in Galilee is in general a success story, with enthusiastic crowds, copious miracles, and the open proclamation of the good news; the only mentions of Jerusalem in this part of the story are as the source of opposition and misunderstanding (Mark 3:22; 7:1). But from the moment Jesus, in the far northern area of Caesarea Philippi, turns toward Jerusalem the shadow of the cross falls across the story, and nothing but disaster is expected in Jerusalem. And so it transpires: the southern capital rejects and kills the northern prophet; hope for the future is found not in Jerusalem but in the declaration that the risen Jesus will be restored to his scattered flock back home in Galilee (Mark 14:28; 16:7).

Matthew has not only endorsed this ideological divide by his adoption of Mark’s outline for his narrative (see previous section), but he has also considerably

enhanced it. His chapter 2 focuses on the link between the Messiah's birth in Judea and his eventual domicile in Galilee, and the final prophetic motif that "he should be called a Nazarene" (2:23) reflects the dismissive tone of a superior Judean observer. Jesus' decision to settle in Capernaum leads Matthew to insert a substantial formula-quotation from Isaiah which identifies "Galilee of the nations" as the place where the true light is to shine (4:13–16). When Jesus arrives at Jerusalem it is only Matthew who comments on the reaction not only of the accompanying crowds but also of the people of the city (21:10–11), and the two rival "teams" of Galileans and Judeans are seen as starkly opposed in their attitudes to the northern prophet. When Peter, as distinctive a northerner as his master, is unmasked in the high priest's courtyard it is, Matthew tells us, as a companion of "Jesus the Galilean" (26:69). Above all, whereas Mark's story (as we have it) merely looks forward to a new start back in Galilee, Matthew gives flesh to that hope in his magnificent Galilean climax in 28:16–20, and the juxtaposition of the last two pericopae of the gospel forms a poignant contrast between the desperate cover-up maneuvers of the defeated priests in Jerusalem and the triumphant launch of the messianic mission in Galilee. In these ways, distinctive to Matthew's telling of the story, the Marcan Galilee/Jerusalem schema is underlined. To read Matthew in blissful ignorance of first-century Palestinian socio-politics is to miss his point. This is the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

## **MARRIAGE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL**

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**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P. 138]

Marriage was early in Israel: a great many rabbis held that for men the age of eighteen was the most suitable. A father was advised to marry his son "while he still had his hand upon his neck." The most liberal allowed that one might wait until one had reached twenty-four before taking a wife; but the most rigid asserted that "the only Holy One—may He be blessed—cursed the man who, at twenty years, was not married." As for the girls, they were married as soon as they were physically ready for marriage, which, according to the law, was at the age of twelve and a half. When Our [Mary] bore her Son, she was probably no more than fourteen...

P. 139 ...No doubt it was said that marriages were decided in heaven, decided by God Himself forty days before the boy's birth. There is no doubt either that it was the parents who referred to this tradition, in order to justify their choice, The initiative lay with the future husband's father, since was his family that would be increased by the marriage; and this had been the custom since the time of the patriarchs and the judges. Furthermore, the wisdom of the rabbis provided the parents with excellent advice: it was not prudent to marry a young girl to an elderly man, nor a small one to a tall man.

## ANCIENT WEDDINGS

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**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P.143-46]

On the eve of the great day the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, went to fetch his betrothed from her father's house. He wore particularly splendid clothes for the occasion, and some would even put on a crown, either to follow Solomon's example or because of the verse in Isaiah (Isa. 61:10). A procession was formed under the direction of the "bride. groom's friend" who acted as master of the ceremonies and who remained by his side throughout, "rejoicing, too" (John 3:29). The bride was brought in a litter, with her hair on her shoulders and a veil over her face and golden rounds on her forehead. All along the way the people sang those wedding songs that were handed down from generation to generation and which are to be seen at their finest in the Song of Songs—"Who is this that makes her way up by the desert road, erect as a column of smoke, all myrrh and incense, and those sweet scents the perfumer knows?" (Cant. 3:6).

So, the procession reached the bridegroom's house. His parents then uttered a traditional blessing, which was taken up by all those present, and which expressed their wishes for the happiness and the fruitfulness of the marriage. There were several of these blessings in the Scriptures, and people were expected to know them. This was almost the only religious element in the marriage. The evening was passed in games and dancing: the bridegroom took part, but the bride withdrew with her friends, her bridesmaids, into a room that was kept aside for her.

The great day came next morning, and the atmosphere was that of feast, a general rejoicing and a holiday. The young men played various games of skill and the young women, so we learn from the tractate Taan, danced in the vineyards, singing to draw the attention of those who might be inclined to marry. There was a meal towards the end of the day, and the men and women were served apart: this was the time for the giving of the presents. The bridesmaids stood about the bride, all dressed in white—there were usually ten of them—and, if we are to judge by the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, with burning lamps in their hands. The bride sat under a canopy, the huppah, which had been part of the ritual for a very long time and which gave her the air of a queen—the whole ceremony, for that matter, had something regal about it. It was no doubt at this time that she sang those beautiful hymns of love from the Song of Songs—"A kiss from those lips! Wine cannot ravish the senses like that embrace . . .

Draw me after thee were thou wilt; see, we hasten after thee, by the very fragrance of those perfumes allured!" To which the bridegroom would reply, stepping towards her, "Rouse thee, and come, so beautiful, so well beloved, still hiding thyself as a dove hides in a cleft rock or crannied wall" (Cant. 1:2 and 2:13).

The spouse had come at last, and happy were those wise virgins who had oil enough in their lamps to shine upon the meeting. "How beautiful thou art, my beloved, how beautiful," sang the bridegroom; and he praised his bride's charms one after

another, using those poetic images that the Scriptures offered in such abundance—her black hair like the kids in the mountains of Gilead, her teeth as white as the sheep that come from the washing, her lips as red as the anemone and her cheeks as rosy as a halved pomegranate. Seeds were now thrown down in front of the pair or a pomegranate was crushed—both old fertility rites—and a vase full of scent was broken. Was there then some solemn promise, and a blessing given by the representative of the community? We do not know, but the present Jewish ritual leads one to suppose that this was the case and that the actual marriage was contracted "under the canopy." What is quite certain is that the feast began again with even more noise and energy than before. Men and women were now at the same table; everybody ate a great deal and everybody drank a great deal—so much, indeed, that sometimes the wine would run out, as it happened at Cana in Galilee: one might almost say that it did so on purpose, in order that Jesus should perform the first and the kindest of His miracles there.

**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

**3. Marriage Customs in New Testament Times.** A number of new regulations had been introduced by the Rabbis in the marriage laws of the Old Testament. These require careful examination, if we are to get a clear apprehension of the New Testament references to marriage.

There were three stages in a properly conducted marriage, namely: (a) *Shiddu-khin* (engagement): (b) *Qiddu-shin* (betrothal), and (c) *Hup-pan* (marriage or wedding feast).

**FROM:** Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. *Women at the Time of the Bible*. Palphot, Ltd., Hertzlia, Israel, 2007 [P. 26]

### **The Wedding in Second Temple Times**

The betrothal and the marriage were two separate ceremonies, often a whole year apart, during which time the groom would continue to give the bride's family gifts. Jesus' parable of the 10 virgins can help us imagine how a wedding ceremony looked in Second Temple times. The virgins who light the way for the bridegroom, for example, would mean a nighttime ceremony. The virgins going out to meet the bridegroom would presumably have been those accompanying the bride. That wedding banquets ended far into the night can also be deduced from the description in the parable of servants waiting for the master to return from such an event (Luke 12:36).

The wedding in Cana, where Jesus performed the miracle of changing water into wine (John 2:1-10), describes a banquet hosted by the groom. Feasting would have lasted seven days, according to ancient sources (although the feasting at the remarriage of a widow was a more modest one-day affair). Other New Testament references to weddings are symbolic and reveal additional customs. John 3:29



describes a "friend who attends the bridegroom." Revelation 19:7 describes the rejoicing and special preparation by the bride.

John the Baptist describes his joy at the coming of Jesus as a joyful wedding (John 3:29). A series of seven wedding blessings preserved in the Talmudic tractate Ketuboth 8a is still pronounced today at Jewish weddings. The last of the blessings, ending with an allusion to Jeremiah 33:11, like the passage in John, uses the imagery of a wedding to describe the end of days: " ...Speedily, O Lord our God, may be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of the singing of bridegrooms from their canopies and of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who makes the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride."

In order to bring more joy to the bride, Ketuboth 17a suggests one may compliment the bride - even beyond the boundaries of truth! The words of praise quoted in this context, "no powder and no paint, and no weaving [plaiting of the hair], and still a graceful gazelle," may be the vestiges of a wedding song.

## **MARRIAGE: TRADITIONAL PROCESSES & PROCEDURES**

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**FROM:** King, Philip J. & Stager, Lawrence E. *Life in Biblical Israel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2001, Marriage [P. 54-56]

In marriage the economic motivation was more important than the romantic. The chief goal of marriage was to have and raise children, especially boys. In ancient Israel, marriage, like the society itself, was patriarchal, with authority residing in the father and different social statuses assigned to men and women. Women were subordinate; in fact, the wife addressed her husband as *ba'al*, "master," or *'adön*, "lord." Note the distinction in the text of Hosea: "On that day, says Yahweh, you will call me, 'My husband' (*isi*), and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al' (*ba'li*)" (Hos. 2:18 [E.T. 2:161]). At times the two terms seem interchangeable: "When Uriah's wife heard that her husband (*isah*) was dead, she lamented over her husband (*ba'läh*)" (2 Sam. 11:26). Apparently the husband addressed his wife as *'isti* ("my wife"), which is the counterpart of *isi* ("my husband").

**In giving his daughter in marriage, the father received a "bride-price," mohar, the amount of money or equivalent in kind to be paid by the prospective husband to the bride's father (Gen. 34:12; Ex. 22:15-17; 1 Sam. 18:25). It was considered a form of compensation for the loss of the daughter. The custom is still practiced in the Arab world, where it is known as mahr. The practice of the bride's father making a gift of a dowry (money or property) is uncertain for lack of information.** Israelite legal codes contain no mention of it, although 1 Kings 9:16 recounts how the pharaoh of Egypt gave the city of Gezer, in the central coastal region, to his daughter on her marriage to Solomon.

It is difficult to determine the age of the bride and groom at the time of marriage. The Bible provides no specific information on this subject. As indicated above, it is safe to assume the bride was considerably younger than the groom, and childbearing would have begun soon after puberty.

**The first stage in forging the marriage relationship was the betrothal or engagement, which lasted several months. Made sometime before the wedding, this promise of marriage was practically as binding as the marriage itself. Some texts, in fact, treat betrothal and marriage almost the same (Deut. 28:30; 2 Sam. 3:14; Hos. 2:21-22 [E.T. 2:19-21]).** There was no opportunity for sexual relations before marriage because **the bride was not to be seen by her intended husband until their entry into the wedding chamber.** This accounts for **Rebekah** covering herself with her veil (sa §b) when she inadvertently met Isaac in the field before marriage (Gen. 24:65). The woman was expected to be a virgin at the time of marriage, but the man was exempt from the requirement.

Monogamy was the ideal, but polygamy was practiced, especially by the affluent and royalty, as in the case of "political marriages" (e.g., David married Maacah, the daughter of the Aramean king of Geshur [2 Sam. 3:31; the Egyptian pharaoh gave his daughter in marriage to Solomon [1 Kings 9:16]; Omri arranged the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:311). In effect, the creation story supports monogamy: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2.24). Nevertheless, the Bible has several accounts of polygyny (one husband with more than one wife) although never polyandry (one wife with more than one husband). A pragmatic reason may account for the custom of acquiring multiple wives: having many children to tend the flocks and sow the fields was an advantage in an agricultural society. As a rule, endogamy (marriage within the clan or tribe) was observed, but the Bible gives several examples of exogamy (marriage to a member outside the kinship group) that threatened the land holdings. Marriage between cousins was not unusual in the Bible: Isaac married his cousin's daughter Rebekah (Gen. 24:15, 24, 47); Jacob married his maternal uncle's daughter Rachel (Gen. 28:2, 5; 29:9-10).

Marriages were ordinarily arranged by the parents according to Near Eastern custom, although this practice is not required by biblical law. In the Genesis story, Hagar arranged the marriage of her son Ishmael to an Egyptian woman: "He [Ishmael] lived in the wilderness of Paran [south of Judah]; and his mother [Hagar] got a wife for him from the land of Egypt" (Gen. 21:21). Abraham arranged the marriage of his son Isaac to Rebekah by sending his servant to secure a wife for Isaac from among his kin in Aram-naharaim (Genesis 24). However, Esau chose his own wife from among his kin without parental consent (Gen. 28:6-9). Samson, too, selected his own wife (Judg. 14:1-10).

Certain biblical songs, notably the Song of Solomon and Psalm 45, may provide clues about aspects of the wedding ritual. While the Song of Solomon has been variously interpreted, it is perhaps best to regard it as a kind of erotic poetry known from Mesopotamian sacred marriage songs and Egyptian love songs. Psalm 45, a royal

ode composed for the wedding of a king, reflects several features of the marriage ritual.

In the first half of the psalm (vss. 3-9) the king is adulated for his physical appearance, military prowess, and heroic virtue. In the second half (vss. 10-16) the queen is praised for her beauty and for her wedding attire.

**The ceremony may have begun with the groom and his friends approaching the house of the bride (Song of Sol. 3:6-11), who is veiled and adorned with jewelry and ceremonial attire (Ps. 45:15-16; Isa. 49:18; 61:10; Jer. 2:32; Ezek. 16:12-13). She was escorted to the groom's home to the accompaniment of singing and dancing (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10). The bride's entry into the bridegroom's household was the significant moment: at that point they were considered to be husband and wife.** "Then Isaac brought her Rebekah] into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife [i.e., the marriage was consummated]; and he loved her" (Gen. 24:67). Oddly, in the case of Gideon and his Shechemite wife, the mother of Abimelech, Gideon lived in Ophrah, and she in Shechem (Judg. 8:31).

A sumptuous repast was served (Gen. 29:22), followed by festivities lasting one or two weeks. **On the occasion of Samson's marriage he refers to "the seven days of the feast"**(Judg. 14:12). And in the case of Jacob, "Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife that I may consort with her, for my time is completed.' So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he cohabited with her" (Gen. 29:21-23). A special nuptial chamber (*huppa*) was designated, and the bride was escorted there by her parents. This practice finds its way into metaphor as well: "In the heavens he [Yahweh] has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy (*huppa*)" (Ps. 19:5-6, E. I. 19:4-5; also Joel 2:16).

Marriage was not considered a religious rite but a "civil contract." It was the normal way of life: in Israel celibacy had no status, and not to be married was considered a humiliation. "Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, we will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes; just let us be called by your name; take away our disgrace" (Isa. 4:1). In biblical history, Jeremiah alone was enjoined by Yahweh not to take a wife and have a family: "You [Jeremiah] shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place" (Jer. 16:2). By complying with this stricture, Jeremiah was to symbolize the impending death and destruction confronting parents and children before the fall of Judah and the exile.

**FROM:** Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. *Daily Life at the Time of Jesus*. Palphot, Ltd., Hertzlia, Israel [P. 59]

*"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled." (John 3:29)*

The engagement ceremony was the first essential step in marriage. During the festivities accompanying the engagement, which took place at the house of the bride's father, a contract would be written and signed by the groom and witnesses, outlining the economic and social obligations of the future husband to the bride. The groom would then seal the contract by giving the bride an item of value, which could be very modest.

If the future bride was very young (engagements took place as young as 12 years of age), she could defer the move into the groom's home and the beginning of married life for several years. In any case, she was given at least 12 months to prepare her clothes and jewelry. The husband used this period to prepare the home as well as the festivities of the marriage itself.

The wedding took place in the evening, when the bride was brought to the groom's house in a festive torchlight procession. A hint of this custom can be found in the words of Jesus: "the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Matthew 25:1).

Beforehand, both bride and groom bathed and were anointed with aromatic oils and dressed in their finest clothes, saved especially for the occasion. The guests, too, wore their best attire - in fact, it was considered an insult to come improperly dressed (Matt. 22:11-12). Revelation 21:2 uses the phrase "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" as a way to describe the unimaginable beauty of Jerusalem at the end of days.

When the family and all the neighbors were gathered in the house or courtyard, a gala meal would begin. But before the meal, the guests would ritually purify themselves by washing their hands. This custom is reflected in John 2:6: "Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used for the Jews for ceremonial washing." We know that at the meal the wine flowed freely (John 2:2-3). During the meal, poetry would be read and songs sung, and gifts presented to the couple.

**FROM:** Sar El Newsletter, *Tying the Knot, Bible Style: What Was a Marriage Like in Jesus' Day?*, Ronnie Cohen, Israeli Tour Guide

Traveling through the Galilee countryside on my way to Cana with my tour group recently, I found myself daydreaming about the marriage that took place so long ago in this small town close to Nazareth, with Jesus in attendance.

The families of bride and groom would have been well-acquainted with each other after the successful conclusion of negotiations over the terms of the marriage contract. **Known as the ketubah, this written agreement dealt with such issues as dowry, and even terms of settlement awarded the bride in the rare instance of divorce.** Parents chose a partner for their son or daughter, but compatibility was a factor to be considered. Moreover, **the sages determined, "...no girl should be compelled to ally herself with a man against her will..."**

The marriage ceremony was preceded by the betrothal. **At this time the groom handed the bride any object over the minimal value of a *prutah*, the smallest**

**denomination of coin.** He would declare the terms of the marriage contract before witnesses and recite the following blessing to his betrothed: “You are hereby sanctified to me by the Laws of Moses and Israel.”

This moment was replete with symbolism for all those present, because in Biblical tradition, marriage represented God's covenant with Israel. Hosea expressed the depth of this sacred bond thus: “I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.” (Hosea 2:19-20)

The marriage took place at a later date. Beforehand, both bride and groom bathed and were anointed with aromatic oils and dressed in their finest clothes, saved especially for the occasion (Ps 45:7-14). The guests, too, wore their best attire—in fact, it was considered an insult to come improperly dressed (Matt. 22:11-12). The groom was attended by his best man (Judges 14:20; John 3:29), and the bride by her bridesmaid (Psalm 45:14).

The townspeople came to the bride’s house bearing gifts, and singing and dancing accompanied her to the groom’s home (Psalm 78:63). The bride and groom were led to a special tent called the huppah, erected by the bride’s father.

Before the festive meal, that marked the occasion, the guests would ritually purify themselves by washing their hands. This custom is reflected in John 2:6: “Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing...” At the meal, of course, we know that the wine flowed freely (John 2:1-11).

The occasion ended when the groom wrapped his cloak around the bride and accompanied her to the bridal chamber. In Ezekiel's words expressing God’s love for Israel: “...When I looked at you, and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you...” (Ezekiel 16:8).

**FROM:** Probert, Bob, *I am My Beloved's*. Sherea Press, Publishing, 795 Via Lata; Colton, CA, 1992

**LINK:** [idolphin.org/wedding.html](http://idolphin.org/wedding.html)

**Compared to the Relationship between Jesus Christ and his Bride the Church**

Event in Jewish Wedding	Application to us as Christians	Scripture References
<p>1. <b>The Beginning:</b> The groom's father made and approved choice of the bride.</p> <p>2. Christ is the bridegroom. Church is the bride</p> <p>choice. John 3:29</p> <p>the Baptist shows himself as bestman.</p>	<p>The Father makes and approves the choice.</p>	
<p><b>2. The Groom's Promise:</b> a. Made a covenant or contract promise. <b>b.</b></p>	<p>God made a new covenant with Israel to replace one He made with</p>	<p>Jeremiah 31:31 <b>Matthew 26:27-</b></p>

<p><b>Drink the cup of wine to seal the covenant. c. Groom pays a price to show he is serious. d. Groom's speech of promise to his bride that he would come to claim her soon.</b></p>	<p>Abraham. Jesus drank cup of redemption at Passover. Jesus paid the price for us on the cross. Jesus promises to come and take His bride, the church, away to be with Him.</p>	<p><b>29</b>, 1 Corinthians 6:20 <b>John 14:2-3</b></p>
<p><b>3. Groom Prepares a Place for His Bride:</b></p> <p><b>Groom prepares a bridal chamber where they stay for seven days. He works on it until it pleases his father. Then he may go after his bride.</b></p>	<p>Jesus tells us that He does not know when He will come; only His Father knows. We must be alert and ready! For, He is preparing our place now. Be alert: Don't worship idols. Be ready: Do all He asks while you're here. Develop an active prayer life. Offer yourself in ministry opportunity. Keep ourselves from doubt and failure.</p>	<p>Mark 13:32-33</p>
<p><b>4. The Bride Waits: While the groom builds the new home, the bride waits and wears a veil. This shows she belongs only to the groom. She prepares for her wedding by making blankets, etc. She also shows gratitude to her family for raising her and she mends hurt relationships. No matter what, she had to be ready because he would come at night.</b></p>	<p>We must do His will in our daily lives. We must be committed to our ministries at home and church. We must heal wounded relationships and express our agape love to each other. We must exhort! Jesus tells us that He will come like a thief. So, we must be living "His Love" at all times. The church, too, is veiled. The world is not sure who the church is. When we go, it will know.</p>	<p>2 Corinthians 11:2 Luke 19:13 1 Corinthians 13:1 Luke 12:40</p>
<p><b>5. The Bridesmaids: Unmarried friends who attend the bride and provide light for the groom who comes at night.</b></p>	<p>We prepare the bride in our ministry to each other. We groom her. We must be ready in our service and not run out of power or conviction as the bridesmaids did.</p>	<p>Matthew 25:1-13</p>
<p><b>6. The Bridegroom Comes: The groomsmen would run ahead of the groom and shout that he was coming. While the father's head was turned, the groom would steal the bride. The wedding party then went back to the groom's house to meet the guests.</b></p>	<p>The angel, Gabriel, will blow the trumpet of God, and Jesus will come like a thief to snatch away His Bride. When we arrive in Heaven, a host of people will be waiting for us.</p>	<p>1 Thessalonians 4:16-17</p>
<p><b>7. The Bridal Chamber: The bride and groom enter the bridal chamber</b></p>	<p>As John the Baptist was filled with joy when he saw Jesus, so we too</p>	<p>John 3:29 Revelation 19:7-8</p>

where the marriage is consummated. The party waits outside until the groom tells the best man that it is consummated. Then, <b>the guests rejoice for 7 days.</b>	shall be filled when we join Jesus in the heavenly bridal chamber. Some liken those 7 days in the chamber to the 7 year tribulation period which we will spend not in agony on earth, but in bliss in heaven. Then we will return as the wife, not the Bride.	
<b>8. Married Life Begins:</b> New couple goes to the father's home to begin married life.	We too, will go to the Father's house for the Marriage Feast of The Lamb, then go with Christ in His reign in His kingdom here on earth for 1,000 years.	Revelation 20:16

**FROM:** Chill, Abraham, *The Minhagim*. Sepher-Hermon Press, New York, 1979 [P. 286-289]

Amongst the Yemenite Jews, the groom would approach his mother at the beginning of the marriage ceremony and ask her forgiveness for the wrongs he ever did to her. As an act of contrition, he kneels and kisses her knees. She expresses her forgiveness and presents him with the coin with which he will marry his bride.

It is an ancient tradition dating back to Biblical times to celebrate the marriage of a virgin for seven days following the wedding. This festive period is known as *sheva berakhot* ("Seven Blessings") because during these seven days, when there are guests present who were not at the wedding or did not participate previously in one of the festive meals following the wedding, the same seven *berakhot* of *nissuin* that were recited under the *Huppah* are repeated after each meal.

Two episodes in the Scriptures serve as precedents for a week's celebration.

(a) When Jacob discovered the ruse that Laban had perpetrated against him and demanded that the younger daughter Rachel be given to him as a wife, Laban replied, *Male sheou'ah zot*- "Fulfill the week of this one and we will give you the other as well" (Gen. 29:27). "The week" refers to the week of celebration following Leah's wedding.

(b) When Samson married Delilah and his guests came to celebrate we find, "And Samson said to them, 'I will propound to you a riddle; if you can in any wise tell it to me within the seven days of the feast'" (Judges 14:12). Here too, the seven days represent the festive week following Samson's wedding.

The procedure of this celebration is as follows: after the washing of the hands, bread is broken and a meal is served. At the conclusion of the meal, Grace is recited over a cup of wine. At this point there is a difference between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities. In the latter a second cup of wine is used for the purpose of the seven benedictions because of the principle "*en osim mitzvot haoilot, haoilot,*" *mitzvot* are not to be performed in bundles. In her words, if one cup of wine was used for Grace we may not assign it to another function—that of the *sheva berakhot*, Sephardim, on

the other hand, use one cup because, they contend, the principle of not performing mitzvot in bundles applies only to those that are of Biblical origin. The mitzvah of reciting *sheva berakhot* during the week following the wedding is of Rabbinic origin.

Some very interesting and unique wedding customs have evolved during the centuries:

(a) While it is not obligatory, many choose to hold the wedding during the first half of the month. It is an expression of the hope that just as in this period of the month, the moon waxes larger and larger until it reaches its full stature, so may it be with the good fortune of this couple. This is not to be construed as superstition but merely a good omen for a happy life.

(b) In Baghdad, three roasting spits were set into the ground of the courtyard surrounding the groom's home during the sixth day of the week in which he was married. The groom would leave his home, extract these spits from the ground and throw them behind him. This was a symbol of casting off evil spirits.

(c) Based on the writings of 'the medieval Kabbalist, Rabbi Yehudah he-Hasid, the custom evolved not to marry a woman whose name is identical with that of a man's mother. Were both the bride and her mother-in-law to have the same name, an embarrassing situation could arise when the husband would call his wife and his mother would answer the call.

(d) It is customary for the bride to present her future husband with a *tallit* before the wedding. The basis for this custom is in the Torah: "You shall make yourself fringes upon the corners of your garments" (*tallit*). This verse is immediately followed by, "If a man take a wife..." (Deuteronomy 22: 12, 13). The inference is that first he acquire a *tallit* and then a wife. Since the bride is the one who is instrumental in fulfilling the passage, she presents him with a *tallit* in fulfillment of the first passage...

An interesting question is why we do not recite at the wedding a benediction over our fulfillment of God's commandment to take a wife unto ourselves, just as every other mitzvah warrants a benediction. The authorities propound the thesis that the wedding is not a *mitzvah* in itself, an end in itself, but a means for the fulfillment of a mitzvah, that of being fruitful. We are called upon to recite benedictions only over mitzvot themselves and not over the means to that end.

**FROM:** Hedrick, Dr. Gary, President of CJF Ministries. *Here Comes the Bride*, Messianic Perspectives Newsletter, July-August 2011 [P. 4-7]

## **2. A Wedding Requires a Covenant**

When a Jewish couple got married in ancient times, they entered into a covenant known in Hebrew as the *ketubah* (see sidebar).

The *ketubah* was primarily for the bride's protection. It specified the price paid by the groom. It also spelled out his responsibilities toward her. One commentator



explains. "Under the law of coverture, the newly-married bride was "covered by her husband's stature and actions."

As recently as the 18th century, a similar law of coverture applied to married women in the United Kingdom. It meant that a husband and wife were, in the eyes of the law, one person. For example, the wife could not sue anyone (or be sued) without her husband also being a party. Everything he owned was hers- and vice versa. The husband also became responsible for all of his bride's debts (if she had any) and actions- even those from before the marriage.

Under the New Covenant (*Berit ha Chadashah*), Jewish and gentile believers have become one with the Messiah. Note that He mentioned both horizontal and vertical unity in His high priestly prayer:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23).

Furthermore, our sin-debt (past, present, and future) has been forgiven by virtue of our union with the Lord Jesus and the fact that His righteousness has been imputed to us by faith (Rom. 1:5). He is our covering (Ruth 2:12 and our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west Psalm 103:12

### **3. A Wedding Requires a Protocol**

My wife, Marcia, planned our wedding in 1977. Friends and family members helped, of course, but she knew exactly what she wanted and arranged every detail with meticulous care. A few days beforehand, she handed me a schedule with the date and time of the rehearsal, as well as the program for the following afternoon's ceremony. I knew exactly when to be at the church with my groomsmen.

This was no less true in ancient times.

They followed a plan. Once the bride ~ chosen, and she accepted the proposal, there were three steps in making the young couple man and wife:

**Betrothal:** This was the *kiddushin*, the engagement period (although it was more binding than a modern engagement). "Betrothal was a binding contract established between two families and sealed by the exchange of gifts. During this period the couple did not live together; sexual relations with each other at this stage was regarded as equivalent to adultery." Joseph and Mary, Jesus' earthly parents, were in the betrothal period when she became pregnant through the miraculous working of God's Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18)

**Preparation:** This period began with the signing of the marriage contract and payment of the bride-price (*mohar*—a sum paid by the groom to compensate the bride's family, e.g., Gen. 34:11-12), which sealed the contract, and a dowry (paid by the bride's father to the bride and/or groom; 1 Kings 9:16). The length of this period was indeterminate.

**Retrieval:** This finalized the arrangement with a marriage ceremony. The bridegroom went in a processional to the home of the bride and took her to their future home, followed by "a marriage supper and time of celebration." Most sources say this celebratory feast lasted for a week- and sometimes even longer.

In His Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Lord compared His return to that of a bridegroom coming to fetch his betrothed bride (Matt. 25:1-13). This was the retrieval phase (see above). In this story, the Lord was making the point that no one knew precisely when the bridegroom and his party would come to retrieve the bride and her party.

People who don't believe in an imminent Rapture of the Church have a problem here—and they know it. That's why they go through all sorts of logical (or illogical) contortions to explain away this parable's meaning. However, the meaning is clear: the bridal party didn't know the precise time of the bridegroom's coming. In the story, five "wise" bridesmaids were prepared when the moment finally came and five "foolish" ones weren't (see vv. 6-10)...

#### **6. A Wedding Requires a Change of Address.**

Every married couple needs a place where they can set up housekeeping.

Before he went to the bride's family home to retrieve his beloved, the bridegroom spent whatever time was necessary preparing a dwelling for his new family.

Andreas Kostenberger comments:

"I will come again and take you with me, so that where I am, you will be as well" (cf. [John] 17:24). The reference is to the second coming. Similar terminology is found in Song 8:2a, where the bride says that she will bring her lover to her mother's house. Here Jesus, the messianic bridegroom (3:29), is said first to go to prepare a 'place for his own in his Father's house and then to come to take them home to be with him."

Before He left this world, the Lord Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for His bride:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3)

The Bible's offer of salvation is essentially a marriage proposal. God loves you and He's proposing marriage: *"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"* (Rev. 22:17).

[P. 10]

In ancient times, the young man would come to the prospective bride's home to propose to her (Song of Solomon 5:2). If she wasn't interested, she wouldn't answer the door when he knocked- and the poor fellow would go away dejected. But if she liked him, and she was ready to accept his proposal, she would open the door and invite him in for a meal she had prepared in advance.

Several commentators see a parallel here with Revelation 3:20, where the Lord says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me ." ... 21 "Christ is presently at the 'door' of each one's heart, announcing himself and knocking. The picture of Christ standing at the door and knocking may reflect Song of Solomon 5:2, where the beloved says, "Listen! My lover is knocking; "Open to me .. . my darling..." (Grant Osborne, *Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, P. 212])

**Endnote 21:** "Christ is presently at the 'door' of each one's heart, announcing himself and knocking. The picture of Christ standing at the door and knocking may reflect Song 5:2, where the beloved says, 'Listen, my lover is knocking; "Open to me...my darling"' (Grant Osborne, *Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002]. 212)

**FROM:** Rose, Tov, *Jesus in the Jewish Wedding: Messianic Fulfillment in the Bible & Tradition*, Tov Rose, 2018 [P. 55-57]

## **MARRIAGE IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS**

### **The Jewish Marriage**

People didn't "fall in love". Marriages were more normally set up and executed according to a plan that fitted the needs of the whole society of the Jews.

When a young man saw the girl he wanted he consulted with his father about the idea of marrying her. Sometimes his father picked the girl and no consultations were necessary. When the bridegroom's father approved the choice the young man would go to the bride's house and speak with her father. fathers really counted for something in Israel.

At the bride's house the young man would do three very important things:

1. He would make a covenant with the bride an actual contract.
2. He would drink a cup of wine with her which sealed the contract.
3. He would pay a price for her. Her father would be entitled to money for his daughter.

A young man had to be very serious about getting married because he had to make a sacrifice. In olden times a man with a daughter had suffered financially bringing her up since she was not the field worker that a son would have been.

After the groom had made the covenant, drank the cup, and paid the price, he would make a little speech to the bride. He was going to leave her for a long time and go back to his father's house. He was going to build a bridal chamber for her, a place where they would have their first coming together in marriage (modern honeymoon)'.

Before he left her, he would tell her: "I go to prepare a place for you". The contract, cup, and money were her security that he would return no matter how long it took him to build the bridal chamber. The groom would have to finish the chamber and have it approved by his father. It had to be stacked with provisions - the bride and

groom were going to remain inside for seven days, the prescribed length of the "honeymoon". It took quite an amount of work on the part of the groom to build a first-class bridal chamber. If anyone asked the bridegroom, during the building process when he would be getting married, he would say, "I don't know, only my father knows." He could not go back and claim his bride until his father approved the chamber and said that the time was right. Because of this work and payment, a bride knew she was loved and was prepared to wait a Jong time.

During this time the bride waited with dignity. She would wear her veil whenever she went out, in order that some other young man would not try to initiate a contract with her. Now she was called set apart, consecrated bought with a price. In effect she was no longer her own person, but an individual contracted to her bridegroom. She conducted herself with due respect and she used her time to think about married life and to prepare herself for it. As she gathered her trousseau, she always waited, being home every night, especially as time went on. She didn't want to be caught away from borne when the bridegroom came. The tradition was that he would come at night, even at midnight, and try to take her by surprise. It was an "abduction". The bride was "stolen" from her house. She would be waiting with her bridesmaids and her sisters and whoever she wanted to take in the wedding party with her, and they would all have oil in their lamps in case the groom did choose to come at night. As the time went on they were ready to go every night. And suddenly, one night the bridegroom would come. The bride's father and brothers would look the other way, as long as it was the young man with the contract, and the bride and her friends would be whisked off into the night. When the groom's party was close enough

to the home of the bride to be heard, they shout and when the bride beard that shout, she: would know she was as good as married.

The young man would head towards the groom's father's house with the bride and her friends. They would travel through the streets making quite a bit of noise with their laughing. If strangers looked out they would not know who the bride was, because the veil hid her. The bride and the groom would go into the chamber while the wedding party waited outside. There would also be a large crowd of wedding guests - friends of the groom's father - assembled at the house, awaiting the couple. Everyone would wait until the bridegroom would tell a trusted friend through the door that the marriage was consummated. Then the celebrating would start. There were never anv annulments and every marriage was started right in its proper place at the proper time. The next time the crowd would see the bride, at the end of the seven days, she would have her veil off and would be a wife, not a bride. They would spend the entire time celebrating the grand occasion, for seven clays. Sometimes they would run out of wine and have to get more; it was difficult to plan for so many people for so long a time. At the end of seven days of celebration the bride and groom would come out now husband and wife. And then there would be a grand marriage supper, what we call a reception. Everyone would congratulate the new couple and there would be a scene of wonderful joy. And finally the new couple would leave to take up residence in the husband's house. He would have prepared a

place for them to live, his own kingdom, as it were, and the couple would go there leaving his father's house. They would permanently reside there, with the husband hoping they wouldn't have too many daughters and have to go through all that with each one.

At the modern Jewish wedding:

1. "Chuppa", the canopy, symbolises the old bridal chamber
2. the cup is drunk at the wedding
3. the honeymoon is at the home of the bridegroom's father

## **ARRANGED MARRIAGES**

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**FROM:** Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph, *The Book of Jewish Values, A Day-by-Day guide to Ethical Living*, Random House, New York, 2000 [P. 183]

"...as long as he or she wishes to marry a person whom Jewish tradition permits the child to wed (such as a fellow Jew), the child is not obligated to obey his or her parent's wishes... As a child, you owe your parents many things: gratitude, attention...honor, and even a sense of reverence. What you don't owe your parents, however, is control of your conscience."

P. 385: Part of a festival or celebration also was giving the leftovers (including festive decorations) to the poor, so the celebration could continue long after the festival/wedding/event had concluded

**FROM:** Freeman, James M. *Manners and Customs of the Bible*. Logos International, NJ [P. 26]

### 30. BRIDE CHOSEN BY PARENTS.

XXIV, 4. Thou shalt *go* unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

The bridegroom does not make choice of his bride; the parents negotiate this important business between themselves, and the young people are expected to acquiesce in the arrangement. In this instance Abraham sends a trusty servant hundreds of miles away to select for his son a wife whom he never saw. Hagar chose a wife for Ishmael. Gen. xxi, 21. Isaac gave command to Jacob on this important subject. Gen. xxviii, 1. Judah selected a wife for Er. Gen. xxxviii, 6. Young men who chose wives for themselves without parental mediation usually afflicted their parents in so doing. Gen.: xxvi, 35; xxvii, 46. The sons, however, had sometimes the privilege of suggesting their personal preferences to their parents. Thus, Shechem did (Gen. xxxiv, 4) and also Samson. Judges xiv, 2.

**FROM:** "Glory Be unto The Father." Sermon No. 1738. Delivered September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1883, by C. H. Spurgeon, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington [P. 620-621]

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings us heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in

him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” (Ephesians 1:3, 4.)

The text title is “The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which may respect the double affiliation of Christ. First, as to his Godhead: there is that mysterious sonship which we cannot understand, but which is nevertheless clearly revealed. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as Jesus is God. And then there is that second sonship which belongs to Christ as man, in which again he is said to be the Son of God. “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman.” The Father thrice said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The great work of expiation is over, and “now is the Son of God glorified,” and the Father manifests his unbounded love to his Son; let it then be a matter of great joy to us that the Father loves his people even as he loves his Son, and blesses us as he blesses him. Even as Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh because of his love to Joseph, even so the great Father lays his mighty hand in benediction upon all his chosen and blesses the very least believer as he blesses his Son Jesus. He who hath highly exalted his Son Jesus, to whom he stands in a double sense in the relation of a Father, has also prepared a throne in glory for all who are in Christ.

“The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” How endearing and attractive is the name! If we can view the Father in that light, we shall be able to approach him with firmer confidence, we shall rejoice in him with greater joy. **Note that the text contains a possessive pronoun: it saith, not “The God and Father of *the* Lord Jesus Christ,” but “of *our* Lord Jesus Christ,” who is ours in this particular sense, that he is our federal Head. Just as the first him, even so the Adam headed up the race, and we stood or fell in second Adam headed up and comprehended within himself all the chosen, and we who can claim that Christ is ours are for that reason able to claim all that belongs to Christ, for our heavenly Bridegroom endows us with all his possessions.** “It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; and of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Jesus says, “All things that the Father hath are mine,” and the Spirit saith, “All things are yours”; and therefore we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. **Believers, are you not one with Christ? Then Christ’s God is your God, Christ’s Father is your Father. “Ye are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”; for this cause did he leave his Father and cleave unto the church, that he might be one flesh with her.** All believers are heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

This is the true view of the Father: he is our Father, our God, our Savior’s Father, our Savior’s God. Let us delight ourselves in him and magnify and bless his name.

**FROM:** O’Brien, Brandon J., Richards, E. Randolph, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes*. IVP Books, Downers Grove IL, 2020 [Chapter 1: ‘Kinship: Being a Family’; (subheading) ‘Joining the Family’; (sub-subheading) ‘Marriage’]

The way people chose whom to marry was also very different from how I do it in my individualist world today. In the biblical world, marriages were most commonly

arranged. This usually offends our Western sense of individualism. I alone should choose whom I marry. While a noble sentiment, it doesn't work out as well as we might like. Randy is surrounded by college students who are often at the life phase of choosing a spouse. What Christian advice do we offer? "This is the most important decision you can make as a Christian. It will have implications for the rest of your life. Now go out there and choose wisely." That's a lot of pressure without any real help.

Ancients made such decisions collectively. Parents and other relatives were deeply involved. We would not, though, want to paint a rosy and hassle-free image of arranged marriages. In a fallen world, both cultures have flaws.

### **ARRANGED MARRIAGE-WIFE-SEEKING**

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**FROM:** Rice, Edwin Wilbur, D.D., *Orientalisms in Bible Lands: Giving Light from Customs, Habits, Manners, Imagery, Thought and Life in the East for Bible Students*. Philadelphia: The American Sunday School Union, 1910, Second Edition [P. 17]

Moreover, the girl is married generally at twelve, and sometimes as early as seven years of age. She may be betrothed much younger, when a mere infant. It is rare that man or maiden marries outside the tribe to which each may belong. The father, parents, guardians, or elders are expected to arrange marriages, betrothals, and dowry contracts for the children. The Oriental modes of wife-seeking vary widely in different tribes and countries, yet they are broadly alike in their general characteristics. In Western Asia it may be the father, of his own accord, concludes it is time a wife be sought for his son. Or perhaps the father has not thought of it, and the young man says to his father, "I have enough for a marriage dowry." This means that he wants a girl-wife found for him. The father approves. The mother, or near female relative, or a *Khatibeh*, professional "matchmaker," is employed and instructed to find a wife for the young man. He may describe his ideal maiden to them as a guide in the search."

**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

### **CONDUCTING NEGOTIATIONS TO SECURE A WIFE**

The customs of the Arabs in certain sections of Bible lands when they negotiate to secure a bride for their son, illustrate in many respects Biblical practices. If a young man has acquired sufficient means to make it possible for him to provide a marriage dowry, then his parents select the girl and the negotiations begin. The father calls in a man who acts as a deputy for him and the son. This deputy is called, "the friend of the bridegroom" by John the Baptist (John 3:29). This man is fully informed as to the dowry the young man is willing to pay for his bride. Then, together with the young man's father, or some other male relative, or both, he goes

to the home of the young woman. The father announces that the deputy will speak for the party, and then the bride's father will appoint a deputy to represent him. Before the negotiations begin, a drink of coffee is offered the visiting group, but they refuse to drink until the mission is completed. Thus, Abraham's servant, when offered food by the parents of Rebekah, said, "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand" (Gen. 24:33). When the two deputies face each other, then the negotiations begin in earnest. There must be consent for the hand of the young woman and agreement on the amount of dowry to be paid for her. When these are agreed upon, the deputies rise and their congratulations are exchanged, and then coffee is brought in, and they all drink of it as a seal of the covenant thus entered into.

**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

(a) **Shiddu-khln** was the preliminary negotiation leading to legal betrothal. It was usually arranged by the parents or their proxies. Sometimes, in European countries, the parents avail themselves of the services of a professional matchmaker, called *Shad-khan*, to find a suitable partner for their son or daughter. In the Palestinian Talmud we read: "he that betroths a woman without preliminary engagement is punished with stripes, but the betrothal is valid."

## **THE KETUBAH / COVENANT**

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**FROM:** Juster, Daniel, *Jewish Roots: A foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*, Davar, Beth Messiah Congregation, Rockville, MD, 1986 [P. 234]

"The blessing over the wine, a great symbol of joy, enhances the wedding as one of the most joyous events in Israel..."

"The Ketubah is a marriage covenant agreement which now comes in several forms. In ancient times, the Ketubah emphasized the promissory price to be paid the bride in the event of divorce. Such was meant to be a preventative; in light of a looser Jewish interpretation of the meaning of divorce than found in the New Testament. Yeshua allowed divorce between believers on the ground of adultery." (Matthew 5:31-32).

**FROM:** Greenberg, Rabbi Irving, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1988 [P. 83-84]

In Jewish tradition, marriage is the peak covenantal moment of personal life. Nothing could be more appropriate as a metaphor for receiving the covenant than a marriage ceremony. Some Sephardic congregations followed through the kabbalistic image of the wedding of God and Israel by reading a simulated wedding or engagement contract between God and Israel. One example of such a document



(writ-ten in 1688) is a perfect parody of the standard engagement contract used even today by traditional Jews:

The One who foretells the end from the very beginning  
Will uphold the validity of these conditions of covenanting  
That were agreed between the two sides, all for greater name, praise, glory.  
Party of the first part: One and Unique, the Creator of All, the All-Powerful,  
the Life and Ground of Existence, Prime Matter, and so forth.  
Party of the second part: The Community of Israel, beautiful as the moon,  
shining like the sun, and so forth.  
The worthy young man, a mighty one like the cedars, the beloved of the  
world, the unique groom, the King of Kings, the Holy One blessed be He,  
Will marry -for good *mazel!*—the beauteous maiden, Israel, with canopy and  
sanctification according to the laws of Moses and Israel.  
The Holy Groom obligated Himself to bring with Him all that He created,  
shaped, and made all for her.  
The Holy Bride obligated herself to bring all that she has with her.  
The groom also undertook to give the bride additional presents:  
The holy Sabbath, both spiritual sustenance and bodily sustenance.  
And the wedding will be—with good *mazel!*—on the sixth of Sivan in the year  
5448 (1688 C.E.) to the creation of the world—to be paid for on the Groom's  
account, who on account of this has issued crack of thunder and lightning.  
And all is in effect and valid!  
[Signed] the heaven and the highest heavens—first witness  
[Signed] the earth and all within it—second witness

**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Aramaic Word Study—Marriage Contract—Katava* כתבא  
Devotional, 12/05/2022

**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2022/12/aramaic-word-study-marriage-contract-katava-%d7%9b%d7%aa%d7%91%d7%90/>

**Revelation 20:15:** “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (NASB)

**Isaiah 45:3:** “And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call *thee* by thy name, *am* the God of Israel.” (NASB)

In my book, *Hebrew Word Study, Revealing the Heart of God*, I wrote about this verse in chapter 38. Recently, my spirit quickened with the thought that my study was incomplete. I addressed the issue of what treasures of darkness meant, which was knowledge of God that is not hidden but was just not accessible without the finished work of Jesus Christ. I neglected to explain, however, the purpose of this hidden knowledge. So, I will give this addendum to my book.

You will notice that God says He will give us the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places but then gives the reason why He will extend this gift

to us. It is so that we may know that He is the Lord. It further states that He calls us by our name, and what we are to know is that He is the God of Israel.

Is that it, just so we know He is the God of Israel? I don't need the treasures of darkness or the riches in secret places to know that. I know it and I believe it, so big deal, some treasure. Wait, I left something out. "Which call thee by thy name."

The word name in Hebrew is the word *shem* with the preposition *beth* and a second person singular suffix or pronoun—*your*. The word call is *qor* which is in a participial form. The word *shem* means the word that identifies you, shows your reputation, and what you are. Someone with the name Jack Carpenter does not really fulfill the word *shem* if he is not a carpenter who is a jack of all trades. He may have no carpentry skills whatsoever, his straight lines may look like electrocardiograms but people will call him Mr. Carpenter because that is his identifier but not his reputation. That is not *shem*. *Shem* is a character pattern not just a word to identify you. In heaven we will not be called the name our parents gave us. We will be called by a word that identifies our character pattern. Maybe your parents and friends call you Charlie here on earth, but in heaven, you will be known as The Helper, The Peaceful One, The Caring One. We will have many names but we will all share one name—The Forgiven Ones.

The Bible says in Revelation 20:15: "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*" NASB. Now suppose your name was Charles Smith. I mean there are literally millions of Charles Smith, how do you know you will not be mistaken for a mass murderer name Charles Smith and you end up getting tossed into the Lake of Fire because the recording angel could not find Charles Smith in the book of life? What is the Book of life? The words book of life in Aramaic is *katava chai*. *Katava* is the Aramaic word for a contract and *chai* means life. Thus, the Book of Life is a contract of life. However, in the Jewish mind when they hear the Aramaic word *katava*, they will think of a marriage contract. Hence this book of life is really a marriage contract. Jesus is our life or our bride groom and if your name or character pattern is not written on the marriage contract with Jesus, then you will be cast into the lake of fire. Jesus. For certain the character pattern of anger, hatred, and selfishness will not be found in this marriage contract or book of life.

Now if you are born again in Christ Jesus, married to Him as His bride, He is calling you all the time. If you are angry, He is calling you, but He does not call you: "Hey angry one." He will call you: "Hey forgiven one" or "Hey, the One I Have Cleansed, why are you angry, calm down, count to ten, aleph, Beth Gimmel. Sit down, have a bagel." Yesterday, I watched a television series about Caesar Millian who is known as the Dog Whisperer. One segment stood out to me. As the dog was barking and all agitated, Caesar reached out and held the dog, not just until the dog quieted down, but he maintained a firm grip on the dog until you could visibly see a change come over the dog and was suddenly a peaceful happy little animal. It was then that he let go of him.

I could not help but think that is the way God treats His children. When we get agitated, worried, fearful, angry or any other negative emotion, God reaches out, calls us by our name or *shem*: "Hey, forgiven one, it's ok, you ok just excited, calm down, rest, be peaceful. God doesn't stop there but he continues to hold us, ministering His peace to us until we are rested. Do you ever watch those romantic movies when the wife gets a bad report, and her husband takes her, hugs her talks soothingly to her until she calms down, and just rests peacefully in his arms? So too, when we become overly excited and anxious, God takes us in His arms, speaks soothingly to us, calls us The Forgiven One, and calms us down.

Of course, if our name is not The Forgiven One, He cannot minister this peace, He cannot hold us. Thus, we are unable to find that rest and peace in Him. So, perhaps I will add an addendum to Chapter 38 in my book. Not only are the treasures of darkness a knowledge of God, but it is also the peace of God that comes after He is able to call us by our new name, the Forgiven One, the name that is found in the Book of Life.

Oh yes, by the way, *your name* in both Hebrew and Aramaic is *simka* which sounds almost identical to *simcha* which means serenity and happiness. When God gives a new name our new name in Hebrew and Aramaic will be the Serene and Joyful One.

## THE BRIDE 'PRICE'

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**FROM:** Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. *Women at the Time of the Bible*. Palphot, Ltd., Hertzlia, Israel, 2007 [P. 25]

Marriage contracts are not mentioned in the Bible. But since certificates of divorce are mentioned (Deut. 24:1; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8) it is not impossible that they existed, especially since they were common in other Near Eastern cultures...

**FROM:** Freeman, James M. *Manners and Customs of the Bible*. Logos International, NJ [P. 37]

56. BRIDE BOUGHT. XXIX,20. Jacob served seven years for Rachel.

The dowry comes not *with* the bride, but *for* the bride. In Oriental marriages the bride is given only on receipt of a consideration. In many cases Lile transaction amounts to actual bargain and sale; this, however, is not necessarily the case. Custom regards the father of the bride as entitled to some compensation for the trouble had in her training, and for the loss of service experienced by her departure from home. If this compensation cannot be rendered in money, jewels, or cattle, it may be given in labor. It was in this way that Jacob became herdsman to Laban. Moses probably served Jethro in a similar manner, for the sake of having Zipporah. Comp. Exod. ii, 21; iii, 1. Shechem offered to Jacob and his sons any amount of dowry he was pleased to ask for Dinah. Gen. xxxiv, 12.

**FROM:** Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. *Women at the Time of the Bible*. Palphot, Ltd., Hertzlia, Israel, 2007 [P. 25]

### **The Bride-Price**

...very different terms are often cited with respect to money or goods changing hands on the occasion of engagement or marriage: the **dowry** and the **bride-price**. The bride-price, or *mohar*, most common in the Bible, compensated the bride's family for the loss of the woman's work. And, as we will learn in the chapter on motherhood, in Bible days women often died due to plagues, disease, and childbirth. The bride-price may therefore reflect a scarcity of women.

A **dowry**, on the other hand, is brought by the bride to her husband's family. A kind of a dowry is mentioned in the Bible - a presentation to the bride by her family is known in translation as "parting gifts," the Hebrew *shiluchim*, which lends itself to translation as "send-offs." These could take the form of land, such as the town of Gezer that Harosh gave to his daughter on her marriage to Solomon (1 Kgs. 9:16). Achah seems to have received land from her father in the Negev on the occasion of her marriage (Josh. 15:18-19). Such a "parting gift," used symbolically, is mentioned in Micah 1:14.

**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 59]

In the larger picture, a believer's spiritual ketubah is none other than the New Covenant itself. The groom (i.e., the Messiah) promises to pay a proper price (i.e., his own death) for his beloved. Meanwhile, the bride (i.e., the body of Messianic believers) promises to pay her dowry with her own yielded life. **As Saul beautifully summed up in his letter to the Corinthians: "For you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God"** (1 Corinthians 6:20).

**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Aramaic Word Study—Rejoice Evermore—Chada Kulzavan* כּלְזָבַן, Devotional, June 15, 2021

**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2021/06/aramaic-word-study-rejoice-evermore-chada-kulzavan-%d7%97%d7%93%d7%90-%d7%9b%d7%9c%d7%96%d7%91%d7%9f/>

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice evermore.

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice always, NIV

I Thessalonians 5:16: Always be joyful. NLT

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice at all times. Berean Study Bible

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice always *and* delight in your faith; Amplified Bible

I suppose it is safe to say that all modern English translations of the Bible pretty well walk in lockstep with each other. We are to always be joyful. That is not an easy task, especially these days.

I suppose we should understand what Paul meant by rejoicing. In English, Webster says that rejoicing is great joy; jubilation. So, what more can we say, we all know what it means to rejoice but to do it always is troubling. Paul did not put this in the Bible to take up space, he must have really meant it. In Greek, the word is *chairete* which simply means to be glad.

It is in the Aramaic where we get some kind of picture. Like Hebrew, Aramaic is a picturesque language, and understanding of the ancient world, at least what the ancients thought when they heard a word, can best be described in pictures. So, what is the picture of this word in Aramaic? **The word is *chada'* which means to rejoice and be glad, but this word is usually associated with something else. It is associated with a bridal dance. Not the word for a bridal dance, but the joy of a bridal dance.**

***You never hear of a groom dance.*** I guess in this woke generation the groom should be getting equal billing but traditionally, the focus is the bride dancing with her father and brothers. Everyone is always gushing over the bride wanting to dance with her. Even during the ceremony the groom sort of sneaks up to the front and no one stands or goes ooh and ahh, no one really notices him. All attention is turned to the rear and all stand when the organist strikes up the chord for the bridal march to ooh and ahh for the bride. Ah, the bride, she's the star of the show, the poor groom seems to be there just to fill in space.

I am not sure why it is the bride that is showcased in Western weddings. I could not find anything on the internet to explain why the groom is almost an afterthought in a wedding. There is a universal opinion that it should not be that way and that the groom should be just as celebrated as the bride, but it is still the bride that gets all the glory and one cares to explain why. My guess is that many cultures in ancient times treated a woman as property and the wedding was really a legal procedure to seal a contract between the bride's father and the groom and the bride was adorned and made as beautiful as possible for the groom to show off his new possession, sort of like an auto dealer detailing a new car so the new owner can drive it around and show off his new acquisition.

But to get back on topic, **when Paul says to rejoice what is going through the minds of the people of his day, if they heard this in Aramaic, they would hear Paul say to rejoice like it is your wedding day and you are dancing the bridal dance.**

A wedding can be a pretty scary event. You are committing yourself to someone for the rest of your life. You are giving up your personal freedom, you are now going to have to share everything, no more this is mine that is yours, it is now this is ours. Not only that, you have no idea what you are tying your knot to. It is for better or is it going to be for worse, will it be richer or poorer, health or sickness? Yet, you dance *chada'* a joyful dance because no matter what you will share it with someone you love and who loves you in return. People mocked the old song that sang: "Love is all you need." But, really, with Jesus, love is all you need.

Now let's put this word in its context. Paul tells us we are to **rejoice evermore**. Evermore in Aramaic is **kulzevan** which is a merchant's term for buying and selling. You are to rejoice as if you made a good sale or purchase. I believe that this adverb associated with **chada'** for rejoice is painting a picture of a bride rejoicing over having been part of a purchase agreement to be the bride of a man who has promised to love her, at least was in a Jewish wedding. **The bride and groom enter into a covenant to love each other no matter what the future throws at them. This is a picture of our relationship with Jesus. He has paid a tremendous price to make us His bride, he paid with His life.**

Not only has He purchased us as His bride He has promised to love us no matter what life throws at us. He will be there with us through sickness and health, richer or poorer, and for better or for worse. Maybe war is in the future, starvation, poor health we do not know but what we do know is that we will not go through it alone, there will be someone who loves us, who will always be there for us and He will be someone that we will love and He will always belong to receive that love from us.

The bridal dance shows the joy of not just being loved but to have someone who longs for us to love. The human heart longs to be able to say "I love you" and have that person respond in love. Jesus has died to give us that chance to say; "I love you." He gets just as much joy in hearing us say it as we get in being able and free to say it. We get to say: "I love you" whenever we can.

Of course, if you married Jesus just because He is rich and powerful and can give you whatever you want, then just delete this study, it doesn't apply to you, you're just some gold digger.

## THE DOWRY

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**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Second Jewish Book of Why*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 2004 [P. 20]

By custom, when the girl chosen by the mother pleases the father of the young man, they ascertain whether the father of the girl will entertain a proposal for the alliance. If so, a deputy or "friend" is sent, who, with the father of the groom or some male relative, plans a call on the other household, and as near mealtime as possible. In some lands of the East the rules of hospitality permit one to refuse to eat until he receives a promise that the favor he has come to ask will be favorably considered or granted. They are asked to "break bread." The deputy, however, politely refuses, and their mission is stated, the meal is then partaken of by all parties, but not until after it is over is the business begun. The father of the girl has a wakeel, or deputy, also to speak for the maiden. The presents for the bride are shown. The two representatives get down to business in earnest. There is generally much haggling about the amount of the *Mahar*, or dowry.

**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P. 142]

Before the wedding could take place an important guests had to be decided: the question of the dowry. It was not really a downy in the sense that we understand it, for it was not b father who gave his daughter money or goods, but he who received them. The custom was exceedingly ancient, and the Bible mentions it a great many times. The gift that the man was to give to the father of his betrothed was called the *mohar*.

Was it a purchase price? The Arabs assert that the mohar is only one element in an agreement allying the two families, it is still obscure. In any case, the Law called for the payment of the virgin's mohar if a seducer, legally obliged to marry the girl he had lain with, was refused by the father. The discussion of the dowry was a long, drawn-out affair and it gave rise to interminable arguments. It was generally agreed, by reason of a text in Deuteronomy (Deut. 22:27), that fifty shekels of silver (not exceedingly high) constituted a suitable mohar. Once the sum was agreed upon a contract was drawn up and signed, on a Wednesday if it were for a girl and a Tuesday for a widow, always in the middle of the month, as the full moon brought good luck. But this was not the end of the bridegroom's financial obligations. Custom required him to offer his future bride a collection of gifts, which was called the *mattan*. This was not the *morgengabe* of Germanic law, the present due after the first night of the marriage, but rather a dower which the woman would keep if she were left a widow. It would also happen that some fathers, to increase their daughters' standing, would make them the present of a positive dowry, the *silluhim*; but Jesus the son of Sirach says, in his twenty-fifth chapter, that it is a shame for a man to be kept by his wife.

**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

#### THE MARRIAGE DOWRY

*Reason for dowry for bride's family.* In the Orient, when 111, bride's parents give their daughter in marriage, they are actually diminishing the efficiency of their family. Often unmarried daughters would tend the flock of their father (Exod. 2:16), or they would work in the field, or render help in other ways. Thus, upon her marriage, a young woman would be thought of as increasing the efficiency of her husband's family and diminishing that of her parents. Therefore, a young man who expects to get possession of their daughter must be able to offer some sort of adequate compensation. This compensation was the marriage "dowry.?"

It was not always required that the dowry be paid in cash, it could be paid in service. Because Jacob could not pay cash, he said, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel" (Gen. 29:18). King Saul required the lives of one hundred of the enemy Philistines as dowry for David to secure Michal as his wife (I Sam. 18:25).

*Reason for dowry for the bride herself.* It was usually customary for at least some of the price of the dowry to be given to the bride. This would be in addition to any personal gift from the bride's parents. Leah and Rachel complained about the stinginess of their father Laban. Concerning him they said, "He hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured the price paid for us" (Gen. 31:15, A. R. V. margin). Laban had had the benefit of Jacob's fourteen years of service, without making the equivalent of at least part of it as a gift to Leah and Rachel.

Since a divorced wife in the Orient is entitled to all her wearing apparel, for this reason much of her personal dowry consists of coins on her headgear, or jewelry on her person. This becomes wealth to her in case her marriage ends in failure. This is why the dowry is so important to the bride, and such emphasis is placed upon it in the negotiations that precede marriage." The woman who had ten pieces of silver and lost one was greatly concerned over the loss, because it was doubtless a part of her marriage dowry (Luke 15:8, 9).

*Special dowry from the bride's father.* It was customary **for** fathers who could afford to do so to give their daughters a special marriage dowry. When Rebekah left her father's house to be the bride of Isaac, her father gave her a nurse and also damsels who were to be her attendants (Gen. 24:59, 61). And Caleb gave to his daughter a dowry of a field with springs of water (Judges 1:15). Such was sometimes the custom in olden times.

**FROM:** Gower, Ralph. *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1987 and 2000 [P. 52-56]

A "friend who attends the bridegroom" (John 3:29) negotiated on behalf of the prospective bridegroom and his father with a representative of the bride's father. Arrangements had to be made for work compensation (the *mohar*) to be paid to the woman's family, and a dowry had to be paid to the bride's father. He could use the interest from the dowry but could not spend it (see Genesis 31:15) because it was to be kept in trust for the wife in case she was ever widowed or divorced. Where such sums of money could not be paid because of the poverty of the suitor, other means were found instead, such as service (Genesis 29:18) or elimination of enemies (1 Samuel 18:25).

It became a custom that part of the dowry should form a circlet of coins that were attached to the woman's head dress. They became a symbol like a wedding ring, and therefore the loss of such a coin (Luke 15:8-10) would be the cause of a great deal of anxiety. As part of the marriage agreement, the bride's father would make a marriage gift (dowry) to his daughter (Genesis 24:59-61; Judges 1:12-15).

Marriages were arranged, if possible, with members of one's own kin. Abraham sent a servant to find a bride for Isaac from his own people (Genesis 24:3-4), and Jacob was sent to the same place to find a wife (Genesis 28:2; 29:19). Samson's parents were upset because Samson had not chosen a wife from his own clan (Judges 14:3). Marriages some- times took place outside the clan (Genesis 41:45; Ruth 1:4), and



this usually happened for political reasons (1 Kings 11:1; 16:31). It was never approved, however, because people from other clans worshipped different deities and this affected the whole religious life of the people (1 Kings 11:4). Close marriages within the family were forbidden. The laws forbidding marriages between close relatives are set out in Leviticus 18:6-18.

## VARIATIONS ON DOWRY CUSTOMS

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**FROM :** Guzik, David, *Enduring Word Commentary*, Numbers 27:1-5

...a woman would get a dowry from her father as a wedding present - and typically, the father would require his potential son-in-law to provide much if not all of the dowry. A dowry might consist of clothes, jewelry, money, furniture or more, and it was thought that the dowry could help provide for the woman if her husband left her or unexpectedly died.

## BETROTHAL & CEREMONY

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**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

(b) **Qiddu-shin** (betrothal). The word "Qiddu-shin" means "sanctification", because by that ceremony the girl was "sanctified" or set apart for the sole society of her fiancé. From the moment the ceremony was performed, the couple had the status of husband and wife and the bond could only be dissolved by divorce or by death. The marriage proper of a virgin took place twelve months after the betrothal. This was intended to give the girl time to provide herself with her outfit. The marriage of a widow could take place thirty days after the betrothal. If the man who was betrothed to a virgin died, his fiancée would be called a "widow", although they had not yet been married. A man betrothed to a woman, but not yet married, was legally referred to as the "husband". We frequently read in the Mishnah of "a virgin who is a widow" (Kethuboth, i:2, 4).

It is in complete accordance with this Jewish custom that the Virgin Mary is called the "wife" of Joseph (Matt. 1:20), and Joseph is called her "husband" (i:19), although they were only "betrothed" and not yet married. The distinction between "betrothal" and marriage is recognized in St. Matt. i:18.

A betrothal was valid if performed in one of the three following ways:

(i) By handing to a woman, either personally or by proxy, a small *coin* or its equivalent and saying:

"Be thou consecrated unto me by this, according to the law of Moses and Israel." If the girl was of age, that is, had completed her twelfth year, her consent was essential. If she was a minor, her father might betroth her.

(ii) By *Betrothal Contract*, which was drawn up by authorities and contained the mutual obligations, the marriage settlement, the dowry and other conditions.

(iii) By *cohabitation*. This, however, was regarded as disgraceful and the transgressor was punished with "stripes".

In Judea, it was customary for the *bride's* father to provide a Betrothal Repast+ at his own expense and in his own house. The future bridegroom would be one of the party. After the meal, the bride and bridegroom were allowed to be in each other's company in a private room, so that they might get accustomed to each other's society. In Galilee, the engaged enjoyed much more freedom than those in Judea.

**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 49]

To prepare for the betrothal ceremony, it was common for the bride and groom to separately take a ritual immersion in water (mikveh). This ritual immersion in water (mikveh) was always symbolic of a spiritual cleansing.

**FROM:** Punton, Anne, *The World Jesus Knew*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1996 [P. 22]

Betrothal was not like a modern engagement. Although the couple did not live together, it was still so binding that it could only be terminated by divorce. The Oral Torah insisted on this point, basing itself firmly on the sanctity of marriage as taught in the Hebrew Bible.

Joseph, a religious man, was guided by the Oral Torah. When it seemed that Mary had betrayed him, he had no choice but to follow the accepted procedures and divorce her. He could not do this entirely secretly. The bill of divorce had to be handed to the woman, by the man or his proxy, before witnesses. Joseph therefore planned to do it as quietly as he could and then to use his influence to shield Mary from scandal.

A reminder of the former practice of betrothal exists to this day in the Jewish wedding service which is in two parts, betrothal and marriage. Once separated by a year, these two parts are now placed together.

Orthodox churches in the Middle East also go back to Jewish roots in a line barely influenced by western Christendom. They have a public betrothal service, solemnized by a priest, a year before the wedding. Although the agreement no longer needs a divorce to end it, a family is dreadfully disgraced if either party opts out of the anticipated marriage. Anyone living in a Christian Arab village will still see betrothal ceremonies but, with the encroaching influence of the West, the binding nature is now losing its force.

**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P. 141-143]

When the future bride had been chosen, either by the parents or the young man, there began the period that preceded the marriage, the time of the betrothal. This was very important, particularly in those cases where the betrothed scarcely knew one another or even did not know one another at all. It usually lasted for a year; but curiously enough, although the Jews can hardly have known the "widow's delay" of modern French legislation, they agreed that a widow's betrothal time need only be a month.

According to our laws it is marriage alone that has an absolute and legally binding character: breach of promise is rarely considered actionable, and then only in cases where real damage has been suffered. In Jewish law this was not the case at all. Two conditions were clearly distinguished: betrothal and marriage. Young people who had agreed with one another with a view to marriage were betrothed, but they would not be considered as truly married until the husband, according to the words of Deuteronomy, should have "taken her to himself?" The "taking possession", the *hakhnashah*, was really the "uniting" of two beings for life; the word had both meanings. Thus, in Saint Matthew the angel says to Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take thy wife Mary to thyself."

But although these two conditions were in theory quite separate, in fact they merged into one another. This is shown by the imprecision of the words employed. Was Mary Joseph's spouse at the time of the angel's visit or his betrothed? The fact is that the Law recognized rights and obligations during the betrothal that were almost the same as those of marriage. A betrothed woman suspected of unfaithfulness was put to the famous trial of the bitter water laid down in the Holy Writ (Num. 5:11-31); the *Protevangel of James*, one of the most widely spread apocryphal books in the early Church, says that [Mary] was submitted to it. A fiancée who was found guilty of adultery was to be stoned, exactly as if she had been a wife. On the other hand she did have the advantage of some legal rights: she might not be rejected except by a letter of divorcement; if her fiancé should die, she was counted as a widow, and a child born during the betrothal was held to be legitimate. This preliminary state therefore had a very close resemblance to definitive marriage.

**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

#### THE BETROTHAL

*Difference between a promise and a betrothal.* A promise of marriage among the Jews of Bible times might mean an engagement without anything definite. There could be a number of engagements broken off. It was the betrothal that was binding, rather than a mere promise of marriage. The promise might be set aside, but a betrothal entered into was considered as final.

*The betrothal a covenant.* Among the ancient Hebrews the betrothal was a spoken covenant. Ezekiel pictures God as marrying Jerusalem, and the following words are used of her: "I swear unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee' saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine" (Ezek. 16:8). After the exile, the betrothal included signing a written document of marriage.

*The ceremony of betrothal.* The Jewish betrothal in Christ's time was conducted thus: The families of the bride and groom met, with some others present to serve as witnesses. The young man would give the young woman either a gold ring, or some article of value, or simply a document in which he promised to marry her. Then he would say to her: "See by this ring [or this token] thou art set apart for me, according to the law of Moses and of Israel."

*Difference between betrothal and marriage.* The betrothal was not the same as the wedding. At least a whole year elapsed between the betrothal and the actual wedding. These two events must not be confused." The Law said, "What man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her?" (Deut. 20:7). Two events are differentiated here: betrothing a wife, and taking a wife, i.e., in actual marriage. It was during this period of about a year, between the betrothal and the wedding, that Mary was found to be with child of the Holy **Spirit** (Matt. 7:18, A. R. V.).

**FROM:** Gower, Ralph. *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1987 and 2000 [P. 52-56]

## **Betrothal**

Once the arrangement to many was entered into, there was a betrothal that was more binding than the engagement in contemporary society. A man who was betrothed to a woman, even though not yet married, was exempted from military service (Deuteronomy 20:7). If a girl was already betrothed and was raped by another man, she could not become that other man's wife, as would normally be the case (Deuteronomy 22:28-29), because she already belonged to her husband-to-be. Such violation involved the death penalty (Deuteronomy 22:23-27).

The formal words of the betrothal were probably those spoken by Saul when Michal and David were betrothed, "You shall be my son-in-law" (see 1 Samuel 18:22). The betrothal could be broken only by a legal transaction (in effect, a divorce), and the ground for such termination was adultery (see Deuteronomy 22:24). Betrothal lasted for about twelve months, during which the home was to be prepared by the groom, and the wedding clothes would be prepared by the bride. The bride's family would prepare for the wedding festivities.

Mary and Joseph were betrothed when it was found that she was pregnant. Joseph did not want to expose her publicly, because, as a supposed adulteress, Mary would have been stoned to death. It must have taken a great deal of love for Mary and a great deal of trust in God speaking through his dream that enabled Joseph to marry her. Maybe this is a reflection of the character God looked for in the man who was to bring up Jesus (Matthew 1:18-20). In New Testament times a man such as Joseph

became formally betrothed when he gave a present to the girl and said, "By this, thou art set apart for me according to the laws of Moses and of Israel."

Bride and groom entered under a canopy when they arrived at the house. There they presided over the wedding feast at which a great deal of time was spent in eating and drinking (Song of Songs 2:4 may allude to the canopy). At the wedding in Cana, Jesus provided one hundred twenty gallons of wine for the guests, but they had already drunk so much that the person in charge (the "ruler of the feast") thought it was a pity that the excellent new wine should have been left to the end when the people could not appreciate it (John 2:6-10). Festivities often lasted for seven days (Judges 14:12), or perhaps even longer. The guests were there to witness that the marriage had been consummated (Genesis 29:22-23); the bloodstained bed coverings were shown to demonstrate that the bride had been a virgin (Deuteronomy 21:13-21). (The veil does not seem to have been removed from Leah's face until after the marriage was consummated; Jacob did not know it was Leah until the light of day, Genesis 29:25.) During the festivities, God's blessing was asked upon the couple, and it may well have been for this reason that Jesus was invited to the wedding at Cana (John 2:2). In very wealthy families guests were actually provided with "wedding clothes" (Matthew 22:12).

**FROM:** Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. *Women at the Time of the Bible*. Palphot, Ltd., Hertzlia, Israel, 2007 [P. 25]

### **The Betrothal Ceremony**

In Talmudic times betrothals were usually held in the home of the bride's father and included the groom's presentation of money or something else of value to the bride. The marriage was enacted by the man's words to the woman "behold you are consecrated unto me," still part of Jewish marriage ceremonies. The *ketubah*, or marriage contract, would detail all terms and conditions of the union. Although only the man makes the declaration, the Mishnah hints at the woman's part in negotiations when it says "if a man marries a woman and she stipulated that he should maintain her daughter for five years..." (Ketuboth 12:1).

**FROM:** Walton, John H.; Matthews, Victor H.; Chavalas, Mark W. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, Rev. 21:9

Given the commitment involved in ancient Jewish betrothal, a betrothed woman and thus a bride could be referred to as a wife (as in 19:7).

**FROM:** Walton, John H.; Matthews, Victor H.; Chavalas, Mark W. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, Matthew 1:18

Betrothal (*erusin*) then was more binding than most engagements are today and was normally accompanied by the groom's payment of at least part of the bride price. Betrothal, which commonly lasted a year, meant that bride and groom were officially pledged to each other but had not yet consummated the marriage;

advances toward anyone else were thus regarded as adulterous (Dt 22:23-27). Two witnesses, mutual consent (normally) and the groom's declaration were necessary to establish Jewish betrothals (in Roman betrothals, consent alone sufficed). Although rings were used in the Roman world, it is not clear whether Palestinian Jews used them in this early period.

**FROM:** Walton, John H.; Matthews, Victor H.; Chavalas, Mark W. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, Matthew 1:19

(Betrothals were so binding that if a woman's fiancé died, she was considered a widow; betrothals could otherwise be terminated only by divorce.) But a woman with a child, divorced for such infidelity, would be hard pressed ever to find another husband, leaving her without means of support if her parents died. But because divorces could be effected by a simple document with two witnesses, Joseph could have divorced [Mary] without making her shame more widely known. (It was necessary to involve a judge only if the wife were the one requesting that the husband divorce her.)

## **THE HUPPAH**

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**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 50]

### **Eyrusin (Betrothal)**

After the mikveh, the couple appeared under the huppah ("canopy") in a public ceremony to express their intention of becoming betrothed or engaged.

From ancient times, the wedding canopy has been a symbol of a new household being planned (see Psalm 19 5; Joel 2:16). During the ceremony, some items of value were exchanged (e.g. rings) **and a cup of wine was shared to seal the eyrusin vows.**

**FROM:** *Fiddler on the Roof*; 'Sunrise, Sunset' Lyrics

What words of wisdom can I give them?  
How can I help to ease their way?  
Now they must learn from one another  
Day by day;  
They look so natural together  
Just like two newlyweds should be  
**Is there a canopy in store for me?**

## BETROTHAL GIFT

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**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Second Jewish Book of Why*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 2004 [P. 21-22]

“When the betrothal is simply by oral consent, which is more usual among the peasants, it may be confirmed by the gift of a piece of money, coin, or a gold ring, as the deputy says, “See by this coin thou art set apart for me, according to the law of Moses and of Israel,” or “Be thou wedded to me.””

## CUP OF THE COVENANT

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**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 59]

The *eyrusin* ceremony (kiddushin) includes the blessing of the first cup under the huppah. One of the last acts of Yeshua while he was in his earthly body was to bless the cup representing the New Covenant. **He stated that he would not taste another cup with his disciples until a later time in the kingdom of God** (see Matthew 26:27- 29). What perfect symbolism connected with the *eyrusin*, the betrothal time!

**There is theological debate concerning the eternal security of the believer, the possibility that one may lose his or her salvation. The lessons of the *eyrusin* contribute to resolving this discussion.**

**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred j., *The Jewish Book of Why [Volume 1]*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 1981, Revised 2004 [P. 40]

“Why are two separate cups of wine drunk from during the wedding ceremony? According to one interpretation, the two cups symbolize the joy and sorrow the couple may encounter in lie By be parties sipping from both cups, they are expressing their willingness to face life's vicissitudes as equal partners. The more likely explanation is that the wedding ceremony is an outgrowth of two separate and distinct ceremonies that were, in the beginning, celebrated as much as one year apart—one year if the bride was a virgin, and one month apart if she was a widow. The first ceremony was called *erusin* (later called *kiddushin*), and the second was called *nisuin*. The *erusin* was the betrothal, the equivalent of our engagement ceremony, and on this occasion prayers were recited and a cup of wine was shared by the bride and groom. The second ceremony was the *nisuin*, the actual marriage ceremony, and here blessings were also recited over a cup of wine from which the bride and groom drank. The practice of reciting blessings over two separate cups of wine continued even when the two ceremonies were incorporated into one.”

**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Second Jewish Book of Why*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 2004 [P. 231]

“No Sabbath or holiday meal and no special party meal (seuda) is considered complete without bread and wine. Their distinction has been linked to Scripture, which speaks of bread as the food that sustains life and wine as the food that adds joy to life (Psalms 104:14-15).”

**FROM:** Donin, Rabbi Hayim Halevy, *To Pray as a Jew: A guide to the Prayer Book and Synagogue Service*. Basic Books, USA, 1980 [P.311, Seven Cups of Blessing: Betrothal (1), Wedding Feast (6)]

“The Jewish wedding ceremony consists of two sets of blessings. The first is called the "Blessing of Betrothal" (Birkat Eirusin), which is a single blessing preceded by the blessing for wine. The second is called the "Blessings of Marriage" (Birkhot Nisuin) and consists of six blessings preceded by the blessing for wine, making a total seven blessings. The Talmudic name for the latter set is Birl Hatanim ("Bridegroom's Blessing"). Its primary purpose is to bless the couple with success, joy, and happiness. The current popular name for these marriage blessings is simply Sheva Berakhot, ("Seven Blessings").

These blessings are said not only during the wedding ceremony but also after Grace following the wedding dinner and the festive meals that occur throughout the week of rejoicing. The only difference between the Sheva Berakhot recited at the raiding ceremony and those recited at the dinner table following the Grace after Meals is that during the wedding ceremony, the blessing the wine is said before the prescribed six blessings as is usually same in rituals where wine is used. At the dinner table however, the blessing for the wine is said after the prescribed blessings. Saying the wine blessing at the very end is a clear indication that it is also meant to encompass the Marriage Blessings and should not mistakenly be associated only with the Grace.”

**FROM:** Tom Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2002 [P. 52, 53]

In particular, you may grasp the meaning of the strange phrase 'do this *in remembrance of me*'. That doesn't just mean 'remembering' Jesus and his death. We do not simply recall the events of Calvary with our minds and hearts in faith, and love, and awe—though we should certainly do that every time we come to Jesus' table. It means that somehow Jesus is present; that his one-off death is made contemporary with us. The unique past event rushes forward to accompany us on our journey... But how then *is* Jesus 'present'? In order to answer that, **we must look first at how the Jesus meal points forward. We show forth the Lord's death, says Paul, 'until he comes'**.

**FROM:** Fleming, Dr. James W. *Passover and the Last Supper*. Biblical Resources, Jerusalem, Israel, (1990) [P. 31]



Of great importance also is the proper understanding of the background to the blessing over the cup. The text simply states: "Then he took the cup and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them...and he said, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant shed for many...Never again shall I drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God,'" (Mk 14:23-25). There were four cups that were drunk during the Passover meal. Jesus said these words most likely with the third cup, the cup of redemption. He may be indicating that he is not going to have the fourth cup (vs. 25). **The fourth cup was the cup of joy, and he wants to drink it in the Kingdom of Heaven. The cup of wine was drunk as a seal of a covenant. Thus, with the third cup Christ seals the engagement with his church, the bride, but the fourth cup, the cup of joy he is going to drink only at the Great Wedding Banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven as the seal of the marriage covenant. Thus, the fourth cup, the cup of joy, may be pictured here as still being in the future for his followers.**

**FROM:** Feeley-Harnik, Gillian, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity*. Smithsonian Books, Washington, 1981, 1994 [P.108-111]

The heavenly marriage feast as an image of salvation was as popular among Christians as it was among other Jews. Paul explains the relationship of Jesus and His church in terms of conjugal love (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:2; see Isaiah 54:5-8; Hosea 2:16, 19-20). The author of the letter to the Ephesians also elaborates on this theme (5:22-33). Jesus is the bridegroom (Matthew 9:14-17, 25:1-13; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-39; John 2:1-11, 3:29), whereas the New Jerusalem, like Israel, but now including "men...from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" Revelation 5:9), is "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:9; 19:7-8, 21:1-3, 22:17).

"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb... These are the true words of God" (Revelation 19:9). Babylon, "the great harlot," "mother of harlots and of earth's abominations...drunk with the blood of saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Revelation 17:1, 6) will be destroyed. The wedding supper of the Lamb that is described in the final passages of Revelation will take place in "a new heaven and a new earth" as predicted in scripture (Revelation 21:1; see also Isaiah 65:17, 66:22). The book closes with the wedding invitation:

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come." And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price... He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! [Revelation 22:17, 20]

**The invitation is extended to everyone, for the wedding supper of the Lamb will be very different from the heavenly wedding feast anticipated by the Pharisee (Luke 14:15), and more like that anticipated by the fearful servant, who recognizes that the Lord reaps where he has not sown (Matthew 25:24, 26; John 4:37). Not only is the bride radically transformed to represent gentiles as well as Jews, but so are the rest of those present at the feast.**

All the social relationships traditionally expressed in the heavenly marriage feast will be reversed in order. The places of honor will become the places of dishonor: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11; see also Matthew 23:12; Luke 1:51-53, 16:14-15, 18:9-14; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-6). Tax-gatherers and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 21:31; Luke 7:29, 50, 18:9-14). The poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind are guests at the wedding supper, replacing friends, brothers, other kin, and rich neighbors (Luke 14:7-14).

The invited guests refuse to come to the marriage feasts described by Matthew (22:1-10), Luke (14:15-24), and Thomas (64). The angry master of the house sends his servant to bring in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame (Luke 14:21-22). And when there is still room at the table, he sends him out again beyond the city walls, which had been built in Nehemiah's time (ca. 444 B.C.E.) to protect the reconstructed temple and keep out unwanted Samaritans and other foreigners (Bowman 1965:54). He is to invite everyone he can find, "both good and bad" in Matthew's version (22:10). So the banquet table is packed with diners.

As the bridegroom at the wedding in Cana in Galilee distinguished himself by serving the poor wine first and the good wine last (John 2:1-11), so shall the first be last and the last first at the banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19:30, 20:16, 21:28-32; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). Isaiah's vision (65:13-14) has been completely reversed:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. [Matthew 8:11-12, immediately following the curing of the Roman centurion's servant]

According to Jeremias (1963:178-80), the parable attributed to Jesus is a transformation of a popular story of the time, which recurs in Aramaic in the Palestinian Talmud. Originally, it was an Egyptian folktale about reversals of fortune in the afterlife which Jeremias dates to before 331 B.C.E. Alexandrian Jews had brought it to Palestine, transforming it in the process to a story about a rich tax-gatherer and a poor scholar. When the tax-gatherer died, the whole city stopped work to attend his burial, yet when the scholar was buried, no one noticed. God was not unjust. The tax-gatherer, although a sinner by definition, had done one good deed in spite of himself, and because he had died and no subsequent evil could annul it, he had to be rewarded. Using his new and ill-gotten wealth, the tax-gatherer attempted to join the company of the city councilors by inviting them to eat with him. When they unanimously refused, he invited the city's beggars to eat the food so it would not be wasted, showing the councilors that he would have nothing more to do with them. As Jeremias says, it must have come as quite a shock to his followers to find Jesus in the role of tax-gatherer and to hear him say: "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" (Luke 14:24). The story recurs in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, also recounted by Luke (16:19-31). Here the conclusion of the story is transformed (Jeremias 1963:182-86). The scholar's colleague had a dream that revealed the ultimate fate of the two men: the

poor scholar wandered in well-watered gardens of heavenly beauty; the rich publican stood on the bank of a stream and strained to drink but could not. The rich man in Luke's second parable "feasted sumptuously every day," arrayed in the finest clothes (Luke 16:19). Lazarus begged in a heap at his gate while the dogs licked his sores. He would gladly have eaten what fell from the rich man's table, if only it had been offered to him (Luke 16:20-21). Lazarus's miserable condition would have suggested a sinner to Jewish listeners (Jeremias 1963:18). But when both men die, Lazarus joins the righteous at the heavenly banquet, occupying the most honored place at the right hand of Abraham. The rich man thirsts in hell. Even kinship with Abraham will not save him or anyone who ignores Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29-31).

**Comment:** Surprisingly absent from the 'customs' and 'traditions' discussion among scholars is the absence of references to Jesus' declaration, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine again until I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." It is referenced in most commentaries and other reference works in the form of a vague reference to His future kingdom or as an abstraction, which was clearly not Jesus' manner of communicating vital truths (of which this was certainly among His most important). Like virtually all His specific teachings, this was certainly something His disciples at the table that night clearly understood, since Jesus used what they typically related to make sure they got His point without question. The question is, what were they hearing? The disciples clearly believed that Jesus' kingdom would be a nationalistic takeover (whether miraculously or by the sword), while Jesus consistently countered their mistaken presumptions about how the Kingdom would come, not with references to strength and violence, but with parables and verbiage about a common Galilean wedding (all His disciples were Galilean, with the unlikely possibility of Judas Iscariot). The only typology relatable to the disciples that night (in a non-abstract manner) is the connection between a betrothal cup and the six covenant-cups presented at a wedding feast divided by a full year after the bridegroom and bride part to make preparations for their wedding (including the obvious wedding-preparation reference in John 14:1-4).

The cup of the covenant was and still is a common Jewish tradition and easy to document its current appearance in modern Jewish weddings. The ancient custom of the covenant cup with a year-delay I initially encountered in Barney Kasdan's book, *God's Appointed Customs* in the chapter about weddings. This is further referenced in David Gross' book, *Under the Wedding Canopy* and Dr. James Fleming's little book, *Passover and the Last Supper*. It is further encountered in the *IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament*, in the references on Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25:

"Vows of abstinence were common in Palestinian Judaism: "I will not eat any such and such until this happens," or "I vow that I will not use this until that happens." Jesus apparently vows not to drink wine again until the kingdom comes, and he perhaps abstains from the fourth cup. Jewish tradition commonly portrayed the time of the kingdom as a banquet, when the Bible had promised an unending supply of wine. Jewish blessings over the wine called it "the fruit of the vine."

Jesus, in His parables ('The Great Feast', etc.) and John (John 14:1-3 and Rev. 19) portrayed the kingdom 'banquet' as a wedding feast—a custom easily recognized in Scripture and desired by Jews of all eras. It is also interesting that Paul's instruction in 1 Cor. 11:26 concerning partaking of the communion cup was to proclaim 'the Lord's death *until He comes...*' Comes for what? For whom? Further, in 2 Cor. 11:2, Paul, expressing his concern for the Corinthian church, wrote, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him," revealing the inner consistency of his contextual typologies.

## THE BRIDE'S RIGHT TO RECEIVE OR REFUSE THE CUP

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**FROM:** Ratcliff, Don, *The Jewish Wedding in Bible Times*. Research paper, Jewish Wedding, Page 3, 2. *The Engagement*

If man agreed to the match suggested by matchmaker or parents (or if fell in love), a dinner was arranged at prospective bride's house. (Probably all four parents had worked out details). Brought contract of marriage. Man poured cup of wine and offered it to woman – symbolized his offer of marriage. If she drank it, she was accepting proposal (she & family read contract before deciding). After drinking, groom gave bride a coin. (During Middle Ages substituted a ring—the engagement ring)

**FROM:** Ratcliff, Don, *The Jewish Wedding in Bible Times*. Research paper, Jewish Wedding, Page 4, 4. *Week of Celebrating*

Seven days represent seven years of tribulation, Zola Levitt believes. Then wedding supper of lamb (Rev. 19:6-9) and eternity in heaven.

**FROM:** Chumney, Eddie, *Sources for the Jewish Wedding Ceremony*. Research paper, Page 4, 5. *The Bride Must Give Her Consent*

5. The bride must give her consent.

G-d betrothed Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai as stated in Jeremiah 2:2. Israel consented to the marriage proposal from G-d and said, "I do," as it is written in Exodus (Shemot) 24:3. Likewise, the personal application (*halacha*) to those who desire the Messiah to come into their hearts and lives is to accept His invitation to do so by faith (*emunah*), as it is written:

"What, then, does it say? The Word is near you in your mouth and in your heart: that is the word about trust [*emunah*] which we proclaim, namely, that if you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be delivered. For with the heart one goes on trusting and thus continues toward righteousness, while with the mouth

one keeps on making public acknowledgments and thus continues toward deliverance..." (Romans 10:8-10 Jewish New Testament Version).

So, even today, to become the bride of Messiah you must still say "I do" to Him.

**FROM:** Chumney, Eddie, *Sources for the Jewish Wedding Ceremony*. Research paper, Page 5, 5. *The Bride had a Mikveh*

7. The bride had a *mikvah* (water immersion), which is a ritual of cleansing.

*Mikvah* is a Hebrew word that means "pool" or "body of water." Mikvah is a ceremonial act of purification by the immersion in water. It indicates a separation from a former way to a new way. In the case of marriage, it indicates leaving an old life for a new life with your spouse (Genesis [Bereishit] 2:23-24; Ephesians 5:31). Immersing in the *mikvah* is considered spiritual rebirth. The reason is that a *mikvah* has the power to change a person completely.

**FROM:** Vander Laan, Ray, *That the Worth May Know*. The Marriage Cup

**LINK:** <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/seder-and-marriage>

### **The Marriage Cup**

During Biblical times, a young man who wanted to marry would go with his father to the chosen woman's house to meet her and her father. They'd negotiate a steep "bride price", the money or physical items that the woman's father would ask for in exchange for giving up his valuable daughter.

Then, the young man's father would hand his son a cup of wine. The son, in turn, would offer it to the woman and say, "This cup I offer to you." In effect he was saying, "I love you and I offer you my life. Will you marry me"? If she drank it (sealing their engagement), she accepted his life and gave him hers. If not, she simply declined.

### **The Passover Cup**

During the Passover liturgy of Jesus' day, participants would drink from four cups of wine at different times. The third cup was called the cup of salvation.

While celebrating the Passover with his disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus offered them the cup of salvation and said, "This cup is a new covenant in my blood." He was saying, in effect, "I love you. I give you my life. Will you marry me?"

Every time we drink from the communion cup and hear the words, "This cup is a new covenant of my blood," God is saying to us, "I love you. I invite you to be my spiritual bride." And every time we drink it, we are in effect saying to him, "I accept your gift, and I give you my life in return."

**FROM:** Baldwin, j., Puritan Board Post-Graduate, Citing Jamie Lash, from his book, *The Ancient Jewish Wedding: and the Return of the Messiah for His Bride*, Jewish Jewels, 1997

The cup of the covenant was part of the engagement ceremony. The bride accepted the bridegroom's proposal, and this covenant was sealed with the cup of wine that they shared. Lash claims that the words Jesus spoke at the last Passover He celebrated with His disciples (the institution of the Lord's Supper) were the same used in this ceremony.

**FROM:** Risk, William P., *Ancient Jewish Customs and Parallels to the Church*. A research paper, May 8, 1996, Table, column 2, row 1, Page 2

[Mr. Risk referenced the betrothal cup as,] “The Cup of Acceptance”

**FROM:** Reinckens, Rick, *What the Bible Teaches*. 1998. Chapter 205, point 20

**LINK:** [https://www.whatthebibleteaches.com/wbt\\_205.htm](https://www.whatthebibleteaches.com/wbt_205.htm)

Zola Levitt said of the cup ceremony during the Betrothal:

The Proposal—offering and taking the cup of wine.

“...the suitor would pour her a cup of wine; that was the act of proposal. She would accept the proposal by picking up the cup and drinking it, or she could push the wine away and thus reject the proposal.”

**FROM:** Levitt, Zola. *A Christian Love Story*. Zola Levitt Ministries. Kindle Edition, Page 6

The bridegroom would present himself to the bride with this agreement, offering to pay a suitable price for her, and she and her father would consider his contract. If the terms were suitable, the bride and groom would drink a cup of wine together and this would seal the bargain. This cup was most significant. It signified the bridegroom's willingness to sacrifice in order to have this bride. It was offered as a toast to the bride, and of course, it showed the bride's willingness to enter into this marriage.

**Comment:** As with many modern western wedding ceremonies, ancient weddings included a witnessed consent to the marriage by the betrothed—the “I do's”. Simply put, ancient Levantine brides had to receive or reject the bridegroom publicly, assuring the families and witnesses that the relationship was consensual. This format was vulnerable to coercion, especially in the case of political or royal marriages, and shameful to both families if she exercised her right to reject the bridegroom, though none would dispute her right to do so.

## **THE 'KINGDOM PRAYER' AT THE LAST SUPPER**

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**FROM:** Feeley-Harnik, Gillian, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity*. Smithsonian Books, Washington, 1981, 1994 [P. 115]

**The last supper is also a prefiguration of the heavenly wedding feast (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16, 18). Luke (22:27) depicts the disciples at the**

**last supper quarreling jealously over who should rank highest among them, just like the participants at the wedding feasts he describes.** As before, Jesus puts the highest in the place of the lowest, the servant in the place of the leader. In John (13:13-17), he washes his disciples' feet (see also Mark 10:35-45; Matthew 20:24). The disciples will be judges of Israel when next they eat together with Jesus at the fulfillment of this Passover meal in the kingdom of heaven:

You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [Luke 22:28- 30; see also Matthew 19:28-30]

**FROM:** Murray, Andrew, *The Lord's Table (Authentic Original Classic)*. Destiny Image. Kindle Edition [P. 27-28]

“Ye proclaim the Lord’s death till He come.” “I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” “I appoint unto you a kingdom, even as My Father appointed unto Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom.” —1 Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:29; Luke 22:29, 30. At the Supper, Jesus points us not only backward, but also forward. From the suffering He points to the glory; out of the depths He calls to the heights. Because the Supper is the remembrance, the communion of Jesus, the living Saviour, it sets Him before us in all that He was, and is, and shall be. It is only in the future that we can expect to have the full realization of what is begun at the Lord’s Supper. The Supper begins under the Cross with the reconciliation of the world; it is completed before the throne of glory in the new birth of the world. It is on this account that faith, according as it has experience of the power of the heavenly food, is irresistibly drawn on to the future. The true Christian has still to wait for his inheritance. “Till He come” is his watchword at every observance of the Supper. At the table his Lord speaks of drinking the fruit of the vine anew in the kingdom of the Father, and of eating and drinking at His table in His kingdom. The Supper, which is itself the fulfillment of the shadow of the Paschal Feast, is again in its turn the shadow of coming blessings, the pledge of the time when they shall cry: “Blessed are they that are called to the marriage Supper of the Lamb.” What a prospect is this. There sin is for ever put away. There the whole Church is eternally united without fault or division. There the whole creation shares in the liberty of the glory of the children of God. There the eye sees the King in His beauty; and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Blessed thought: it shall not always be as it is now. The blessings of the Supper are mere droppings. Jesus Himself comes once for all. Then shall I sit down with Him. Yes, He comes: and I shall see Him and know Him, and He shall see me and know me. And when I fall at His feet He will call me by my name and let me rest on His breast, and take me to be one with Him inseparably and forever.

## MARRIAGE COVENANTS

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**FROM:** Rose, Tov, *Jesus in the Jewish Wedding: Messianic Fulfillment in the Bible & Tradition*, Tov Rose, 2018 [P. 58-64]

### THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS AND THE WEDDING CONTRACT

Read Hebrews Chap 8, with special to verses 8 & 9: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not according to the covenant that I made with the fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." God was actually replacing the old system of laws with a new system quoting Jeremiah 31:31-32. This new covenant has to do with the Messiah's Coming. The new covenant had to be signed in blood. Abraham had to divide animals when he received the covenant from God that made the Jews a chosen people. And Moses had to sacrifice too. It is the blood that makes the covenant have effect.

The Messiah came like a sacrificial animal and gave His blood to seal the new covenant. John the Baptist called Him; "the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1 :29). Isaiah said the Messiah would come as a lamb to the slaughter. The relationship of God and Israel has always been a marriage. The book of Hosea spells that out clearly. And Jeremiah's language in announcing the new covenant is very interesting, he says; "My covenant they break, although I was a HUSBAND unto them" (Jeremiah 31:32b). God was a disappointed Bridegroom when the Jews failed to keep the old laws. But Paul, another Jew, explained the marriage by saying, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Messiah and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32).

The proper relationship between the believers and the Messiah would constitute a happy marriage for God. The Church is called the Bride of Messiah. The Gentiles in the Church have not always cared for the Jews as they were supposed to but the Messiah said; "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 14:24 NASB). Paul says Gentiles became grafted into the Jewish tree when by faith they come to the Jewish Messiah (Romans 11 :17-19). They become chosen like the Jews. They are called the spiritual seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:23-29)

### THE NEW COVENANT IS A WEDDING CONTRACT

1. The Messiah drank the cup at the Passover table, and He said; "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). In the new covenant, God promises, "I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more" Jeremiah 31 :34. Jesus put that into effect: when He drank that cup He redeemed us. That cup the Jews drink with the hidden piece of bread at the Passover meal: the Cup of Redemption.
2. The Crucifixion was the price Jesus paid for His Bride. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). And His



sweat fell like great drops of blood while he was contemplating the Cross. The Crucifixion was the highest price any bridegroom ever paid. He was obedient to His Father's will. Some Jewish bridegrooms came back to their father after learning the bride price and asked their Father's advice about whether it was worth it: "our will, not mine, be done."

3. The father sent an angel to strengthen His Son. That was His answer. Jesus paid the price for us. Then He left His Bride, and went back to His Father in heaven after His resurrection. He had even made the typical bridegroom's speech: "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2b). And He went like any Jewish bridegroom, back to His Father's house.

Jesus is still at His Father's house preparing our place. And we are waiting for Him to return. We are waiting in a consecrated way—set apart—bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We are to act like the covenanted Bride and be waiting at all times for our Bridegroom to come. We are to have oil in our lamps to be ready to travel, even at night (Matthew 25:1-12) OUR OIL IS THE HOLY SPIRIT! who came to the Jews at Pentecost, after the Messiah ascended. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be ready to go at any moment.

4. The Lord will return for His Bride. There will be a bridal chamber in heaven where Jesus and the Church will spend seven years - like the ancient seven days - and there will be a marriage supper like the Jews used to have. Every detail of Jesus' great wedding will be accomplished, and it will be carried out in the exact tradition of the Jewish people because Jesus is Jewish. Each person must respond to this proposal. The Messiah said His own sheep would hear His voice (John 10:14, 16).
5. The Bride must be waiting for the Bridegroom. The Jews knew when the trumpet sounded the harvest was over. There has to be a cut-off point somewhere. The bride who is ready goes to the wedding when the bridegroom comes. SHAVUOT, or Pentecost, is the harvest holiday. All summer following Pentecost the people plant and till the ground. But when the trumpet sounds, on what Jews call ROSH HASHANAH, the old Feast of the Trumpets the crops are in and the harvest is finished. Jeremiah, just to mention one prophet, could see that the Jews would not be ready - not all of them. "The summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jeremiah 8:21). Paul says: "Now is the accepted time" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Paul gave us a wonderful picture of that moment when the Groom will return for His Bride. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Messiah shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

That fulfills everything. You have the shout of the Bridegroom to notify the Bride of His coming; you have the trumpet to finish the harvest and to

proclaim liberty for God's people. The Jews used to blow the trumpet on each Jubilee to proclaim liberty (Lev. 25:10).

The New Testament equivalent of that is found in John 3:29. The Pharisees has been asking John The Baptist if he were the Messiah. In a way, they would have preferred him to say he was. They could put up with a "Messiah" who stayed out in the desert and preached repentance to a few ascetics. The One they could not abide was the gentle Carpenter of Galilee, with whom none of them could argue. But John set them straight: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29).

When the bridegroom's voice is heard, the marriage is accomplished. A Scripture like that one is much more clear to Jews who know their heritage than to Gentiles. Anyone who tells the truth about Judaism leads to Jesus Messiah. "When any man speak the truth, he is taking in some way about God. Jesus: "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:37).

6. The Judgement Seat of Messiah. The "honeymoon" in heaven. The Scriptures call it the judgement seat of Messiah. We will all go before the Messiah in heaven, and He will look at our works done for Him in the flesh. All of us on earth who believe in Him are His servants, and we do both good works and bad. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that men's works will be graded (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Some works are as valuable as gold, silver and precious stones, and some only amount to wood, hay and stubble. The Lord will use fire on these works, and we will all see what burns up.

The wood, hay and stubble may comprise acts that equal the overt acts of gold, silver and precious stones however, these are deeds that are done while the believer is out of fellowship. They are usually deeds that amount to 'human good' carried out for false motives.

The judgement of works is not to be confused with God's judgement of sin. All of men's sins were taken care of at the Cross. Jesus is not going to charge us for what is already paid for. Everyone's sins are forgiven if they accept the forgiveness. The Messiah has provided a "gift certificate". When someone gives you a gift certificate, you simply take it to the store and claim the gift. You do not have to pay anything, the giver has already paid. That is the message of the Gospel in simplest terms. This judgement seat is like the honeymoon. A honeymoon is where the groom removes the bride's veil and knows her secrets.

7. The Great Marriage Supper. When the announcement is made that the marriage is consummated - the saints have their crowns, and the Lord has examined them all. And then the celebrating begins outside the chamber. The marriage is now official and the guests can rejoice. All of the celebrating will culminate in heaven in a marriage supper - what we would call the reception. The Bride will be greatly honored. Revelation 19:7-8 states: "Let us be glad

and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arranged in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints."

Notice how the Scripture says "WIFE" instead of "BRIDE". The honeymoon is now finished, and we are now married to the Lord. Then, after the supper we will leave to live in our Bridegroom's Kingdom. We will leave His Father's house and claim our sweetest time on earth, and we will reign with our Husband in the Kingdom of God for a thousand years. What a moment to look forward to! There we are, arrayed in white linen, the queen of the Kingdom. Perfected saints. All our sins paid for, all our works rewarded. The Scriptures say that we will give our crowns to the Lord as a wedding gift. Even John, as an old man, looked forward to being a bride. How he longed for the Lord's coming. The Romans left him on a barren island Patmos, a stone quarry where practically nothing grew. He was supposed to slowly starve to death, when he saw the revelation of Jesus instead. And he said at the end of the wonderful revelation; "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

8. The Father Appoints The Time. It was not the bride who appointed the wedding day. The bridegroom's father, the host of the whole wedding picked the day. Jesus said; "No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36) It was the bride's responsibility to be waiting. She waited every day no matter how long it took.

The Bible is a Jewish Book. The prophecies were Jewish. They saw the Messiah coming, and He came. "Salvation is of the Jews", the Messiah said (John 4:22).

We all killed Him because of the extent of our crimes. He had to go to the Cross. It was the only way a just God could forgive us. Each one of us killed Him with our sin natures. Those who carried out the deed were unaware of what they were doing. Jesus said from the Cross; "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), but He chose to die for His friends, for all of His followers. That was the greatest single act of love which mankind has ever known.

The Example of Rebekah. The Bible says in Genesis 24 that when Isaac was to have a wife, a servant was sent to get her for him. The servant was like the Holy Spirit; he brought the things of the bridegroom to the bride, and he brought the bride back with him. The servant travelled to where Rebekah was and Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel (Genesis 24:15). And he brought her back, and Isaac went out to meet her, just as the Messiah will come on the clouds to meet all the believers, His Bride. Rebekah never even saw her bridegroom, and yet she came, believing what the servant told her.

## MARRIAGE COVENANT AND KINSHIP

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**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P. 134-135]

When the young Jacob went to his uncle Laban in Haran to find work and a wife, Laban, in acknowledging him as a member of his family, said, "Thou art my own flesh and blood?" The figure, so typical of the biblical style, was commonly used by the people of the Book, and it answered the factual reality. In Israel the family was the essential basis of society, the cornerstone of the entire building. In early times it had even, from the point of view of law, formed a distinct entity, a part of the tribe; by the time of Christ, it was perhaps less strong than it had been in the days of the patriarchs, when the individual counted for nothing in comparison, but it was still exceedingly important. Its members really did feel of the same flesh and blood; and to have the same blood meant having the same soul. Legislation had taken this principle as its base and had developed from it: the law had also multiplied its commands in order to uphold the permanence, the purity and the authority of the family. In so far as Jews wished to remain faithful to the Law (and this was almost universal) they never ceased to admit the predominant place of the family in society. Furthermore, the family was not merely a social entity but also a religious community, with its own particular feasts, in which the father was the celebrant while all the members took part. Some of the very important ceremonies which the Law required had a strong family character—the Passover, for example, had to be celebrated in the family. The religious family link was so strong that in the Gospels and in the Acts we find fathers who turned to the teachings of Christ brought with them all their household.

The word had a wider meaning then: in Aramaic the term *cha*, the Hebrew *ah*, meant brother, half-brother, cousin and even near relation; so Abraham, speaking to Lot, his nephew, said "Are we not brethren?", an expression that Laban also used referring to Jacob. In the first book of Chronicles the sons of Kish are described as the brothers of the daughters of Eleazar, whereas in fact they were their first cousins. This was undoubtedly still the usage in the time of Christ.

Good fortune for one member of the family meant rejoicing for all the others, who, furthermore, quite expected to profit by it. Successful Jews practiced nepotism on a great scale, without the slightest shame, whether they were high priests the Annas, kings like the Herods or simply influential men like Philo of Alexandria. On the other hand, a misfortune which struck one made them all unhappy, and a single dishonor would darken the whole family. The teaching of the rabbis repeated that not to "keep watch over one's brother" was in fact to behave like Cain, and it praised the example of Joseph who forgave his wicked brothers for having tried to kill him, and, on becoming Pharaoh's vizir, welcomed them and established them in the land of Goshen. That was how a true Israelite ought to behave. Nothing could break the tie of blood, and everybody benefited from it. It was therefore of the first importance for a man to make sure of the perpetuation of the family, that is, to marry.

**FROM:** Biblical Archeological Review, July/August 1999. *God as Divine Kinsman: What Covenant Meant in Ancient Israel*]

The covenant between God and the people of Israel "Must be understood on the basis of political and judicial categories," declares the highly regarded Harper Collins Bible Dictionary. Well, yes and no. In a groundbreaking new essay, Frank Moore Cross, one of the leading Biblical exegetes of our time and Hancock Professor Emeritus at Harvard, places the concept of covenant in a far broader setting--that of kinship relations--and teases out some important new implications.

The ancient covenant originated, says Cross, as a "legal means by which the duties and privileges of kinship may be extended to another individual or group" (emphasis supplied). By establishing a covenant, an outsider was brought into a kinship relationship--a kind of familial conversion process, resulting in what Cross calls kinship-in-law, as opposed to kinship-in-flesh. Through its covenant with God, Israel becomes the "kindred of Yahweh." Yahweh, in effect, adopts the people of Israel. Mutual obligations are thereby created.

Cross makes the case in the opening essay of his latest book, *From Epic to Canon*. Intended as a sequel to his widely influential *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, the new book consists of revised and expanded versions of previously published papers---except for the groundbreaking first chapter, "Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel," published here for the first time. The relationship between the two concepts (covenant and kinship), Cross claims, "has been little studied in recent years and is poorly understood." He brilliantly clarifies it.

"The social organization of West Semitic tribal groups was grounded in kinship," he says. "Kinship relations defined the rights and obligations, the duties, status, and privileges of tribal members."

Cross continues: "Kinship was conceived in terms of one blood flowing through the veins of the kinship group. If the blood of a kinsman was spilled, the blood of the kinship group, of each member, was spilled. Kindred were of one flesh, one bone."

When Jacob went to Paddan-aram to seek a wife among the daughters of his uncle Laban, he explained his kinship relation to Laban, who immediately embraced him and replied, "You are truly my bone and flesh" (Genesis 29:14); that is, you are my kinsman. This is kinship-in-flesh.

**It is in a kinship context that we are to understand ancient Israelite marriage: The bride enters a kinship relationship with the groom's kin. That is the original meaning of the famous passage in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man will abandon his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and [the two of them] will become one flesh." This does not refer to carnal union of the couple or the children that will be the issue. Obviously, offspring of the marital union will be of one flesh. That the couple are of one flesh establishes the wife as a kinsman of the first rank. This is kinship-in-law.**

Kinship extended not only to the family (in Hebrew, the *mishpahah*) but to the entire tribe. The duties of a kinsman include avenging the blood of a kinsman, redeeming

property sold by a poor kinsman, redeeming a kinsman sold into debt slavery and marrying the widow of a brother or near kinsman to secure his line. This last obligation is the central principle in the Book of Ruth, in which Boaz marries the widowed Ruth. Ruth calls him a *go'el* (Ruth 3:9). The common translation "next of kin" is not quite right. The word *go'el*, which means "redeem," really refers to one who acts as a kinsman, suggests Cross. (The New Jewish Publication Society version translates the term as "redeeming kinsman"; The New Jerusalem Bible has "You have the right of redemption over me.")

Many of the Biblical laws that apply to all Israel had their origin in kinship groups—the proscription against interest, for example. As applied to all Israel many of these laws may appear idealistic or unrealistic, but they are readily understandable in terms of their tribal origin.

The language of love (*ahabah*) is also rooted in kinship relations; it expresses the bond that holds together those in intimate kinship relationships. It is here that we find the original meaning of the Great Commandment (in New Testament terms), "Love your fellow (tribesman) [usually translated "neighbor"] as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Its application was originally limited to one's kinsmen. The preceding Biblical statement forbids one from taking vengeance on a fellow tribesman. Instead, you shall reprove him.

In tribal religion, Cross writes, God was the Divine Kinsman: "In the religious sphere, the intimate relationship with the family god, the 'God of the Fathers,' was expressed in the only language available to members of a tribal society. Their god was the Divine Kinsman...

"The Divine Kinsman fulfills the mutual obligations and receives the privileges of kinship. He leads in battle, redeems from slavery, loves his family, shares the land of his heritage (*nahalah*), provides and protects. He blesses those who bless his kindred, curses those who curse his kindred [see Genesis 12:3]. The family of the deity rallies to his call to holy war, 'the wars of Yahweh,' keeps his cultus, obeys his patriarchal commands, maintains familial loyalty (*hesed*), loves him with all their soul, calls on his name."

The covenant, accompanied by an oath, was a way in which an outsider could be incorporated into the kin group. The kinship-in-law may have been a legal fiction, but it provided a mechanism for extending the duties and privileges of kinship. Thus when David and Saul's son Jonathan made a covenant and Jonathan "loved David as himself" (I Samuel 18:3), it meant that the two were now as kinsmen, even though they were of different tribes. A lawyer might call this kinship-in-law constructive kinship; the kinship is treated as if it were a blood kinship.

Adoption of a son or daughter was another way in which non-kin could be engrafted in kinship-in-law. It is in this context that we are to understand the references in which the king is adopted as God's son. Speaking through the prophet Nathan, God tells David that his son Solomon will be God's adoptive son: "I will be a father to him, and he will become my son" (2 Samuel 7:14). Similarly with Israelite kings generally: "My son art thou; today I have begotten thee" (Psalm 2:7; see also Psalm

89:27-28 and Isaiah 9:5). Both God and king undertake the mutual responsibilities of kinship.

As Israelite society became ever more complex, the concept of kinship continued to be applied, albeit sometimes in attenuated form. To the prophet, all Israel is God's son: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11: 1).

The language of kinship is also used in parity and vassal treaties, essentially another form of kinship covenant. When Hiram of Tyre agrees to supply the materials and architects to build Solomon's Temple, he and Solomon enter into a covenant (1 Kings 5:26) and Hiram is called "a lover of David" (1 Kings 5:15; in English translations "lover" [*hab*] is usually softened to "friend"). Israel was not alone in this: In the seventh century B.C.E., the Assyrian monarch Esarhaddon required his vassals to swear in a treaty that they "will love [Esarhaddon's heir] as yourselves."

Observes Cross:

"Often it has been asserted that the language of 'brotherhood' and 'fatherhood,' 'love,' and 'loyalty' is 'covenant terminology.' This is to turn things upside down. The language of covenant, kinship-in-law, is taken from the language of kinship, kinship-in-flesh."

Early Israel was a somewhat fragile tribal league, or confederation. This league, says Cross, was "a kinship organization, a covenant of families and tribes organized by the creation or identification of a common ancestor and related by segmented genealogies." It was also a religious organization. The league was called the „am Yahweh (see judges 5:11; 1 Samuel 2:24; 2 Samuel 1: 12 et al.). This phrase is usually translated "people of Yahweh," but it would be more accurately translated "kindred of Yahweh." According to Cross, "Yahweh is the god of Israel, the Divine Kinsman, the god of the covenant." Each has obligations to the other.

This same kinship language is found in the kingdoms of Ammon and Moab on the other side of the Jordan River: The Ammonites are called '*am Milkom*, the "kindred of Milkon"; the Moabites are called '*am Kemos*, the "kindred of Chemosh."

The international treaties of the second millennium B.C.E. clearly establish the antiquity of covenant forms and the language of kinship-in-law. And yet this same language persisted after the establishment of the Israelite monarchy in the first millennium B.C.E. "The social context in which the covenant relationship was authentic and fully functional must be located in the society of the confederation of Yahweh, in the era of the league in the second millennium," Cross notes. That this kindred and covenant language continued to be used in texts that date to the Israelite monarchy has historical implications: Because mutual covenant and kinship obligations run counter to the interests of king and monarchy, they could not have been invented in late monarchical times. This, in turn, provides a sound historical grounding to the Israelite monarchy.

This is but a taste of the much fuller treatment in Cross's book. The essay provides a fine introduction to the collection of papers, each of which is itself a scholarly gem.

This book is surely destined to become a classic, a crowning achievement to a distinguished life of scholarship. —H.S.

1. *Harper & Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemcier, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 208 (the entry is by Jeremiah Unterman)
2. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973).

**FROM:** *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Freedman, Noel F., Editor-in-Chief. Doubleday, NY, NY.  
2. *Marriage as Covenant*, Vol. 1 [P. 1194-1195]

The Narrative of the covenant between Jacob and Laban mentioned above (Gen. 31:43-54) seems to combine two quite distinct acts, one of which involves marriage relationships. Nowhere else in ANE literature is marriage associated with a sworn oath, although it is certainly the most common social institution by which new relationships are created. However, it is interesting to note Malachi's use of the word "covenant" (Heb *bert*) in connection with references to "the wife of (one's) youth." (2:14-15). There, Yahweh is explicitly acknowledged to be a (third-party) "witness" between the two parties of the marriage, and there are clear allusions to (violated) obligations and to resultant curses (2:13). As we have seen, these elements also appear in LB suzerainty treaties.

Although marriage does not correspond formally to the covenant structure as we know it from LB suzerainty treaties, it was an important metaphor for expressing relationships that could also be expressed in political terms. For example, in biblical Hebrew verbs like "love" (*'ahab*) and "know" (*yada'*) have nuances of meaning in both conjugal and political contexts (Moran 1963; Huff-mon 1966), and biblical prophets often characterized Israelite foreign policy as a series of illicit sexual relations.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, in addition to the suzerainty treaty analogy, the relationship between God and Israel was also very frequently viewed as analogous to that of husband and wife (Hosea 1-3; Jer. 31:32; Ezekiel 16). This metaphor continued in use not only in early rabbinic Judaism but also in NT Christology, where Christ is portrayed as "bridegroom" and the Church as "bride." In conclusion, these other covenant traditions (banquets and marriage) are noteworthy because they demonstrate how pervasive covenant traditions generally were in the ANE, and how frequently they were utilized in any discussion or presentation of something so fundamental as "community" and "relationships."

**FROM:** *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Freedman, Noel F., Editor-in-Chief. Doubleday, NY, NY.  
a. *Covenant and Sacrament*, Vol. 1 [P. 1198]

There is no doubt that, in addition to the formal similarity to Iron Age loyalty oaths, the Christian Eucharist has significant formal connections to other ANE covenant motifs (see Herion 1982). First, its utilization of bread and wine is relevant not just because of general associations with covenant banquet imagery (see G. 1 above).

**Bread and wine appear in ancient Mari in connection with the resolution of**



**enmity and the restoration of personal relationships**, and they were associated with the internalization of a vassal's obligations in the Assyrian loyalty oaths: "Just as bread and wine enter the intestines, so may the [gods] let this oath enter your intestines" (ANET, 539).

Second, some of the Semitic terminology used in the Last Supper narrative (reflected in Gk translation) betrays patterns of thought also attested in early biblical and ANE sources. Specifically, the noteworthy appearance of the word "remembrance" (*Gk* anamnesis) has a significance in Semitic languages (root *zkr*) that is lacking in Greek (and in English). In the Code of Hammurabi the root *zkr* often means "to swear," and this root seems to convey that meaning in 2 Sam 14:11 (RSV "invoke"); its cognate is still used with this sense in modern village Arabic. The verb "to remember" in the context of (the new) covenant therefore does not mean merely "to call to mind", it implies recalling some benefit received (in this case the atoning death of Jesus) as a basis for present and future action and decision making. In this we see the revival of the central motif in the ideological matrix of the Sinai covenant (and the earlier LB treaties): the basis for a covenant relationship is the grateful recognition and response to the receipt of an undeserved favor.

Third, the identification of the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ ("this is my body/blood") in turn made possible the identification of the disciples (who eat and drink it) with the sacrificial victim (cf. Gal 2:20). This has a clear connection with the Iron Age treaties wherein the animal sacrificed is stated specifically to be not a sacrificial animal but the vassal being placed under the loyalty oath (cf. "this is the head/shoulder/etc. of Mat'ilu." ANET, 532-33). What is certain is that a central metaphor by which the early Church identified itself was "the body of Christ" (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12), and its individual members understood themselves to be the embodiments of the spirit of Christ (1 Cor 6:15ff.; 2 Cor 4:10-11). The "fruit" of this spirit that they were to manifest in their lives was typically those things that make it possible for a diverse body of people to live together in a community that transcends the typical culturally proscribed, parochial bases of social morale (Gal 5:22-25). In this respect, in contrast with the contemporaneous early rabbinic Judaism, there was no codification of culturally bound norms and practices to govern or regulate the behavior of persons in the community (and subsequent attempts to import such norms, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman, were met with strong resistance Acts 15; Galatians, esp. 3:31).

In the centuries prior to Constantine, when there was no social reward but often the threat of persecution and possible death for identifying oneself as a Christian, the Eucharist by and large could have been little else but the participants sacramentum ("oath") in which they actually submitted to the lordship of Christ (i.e., to a transcendent, extra-social authority; the "Kingdom of God"). This "submission" occurred not merely at the intangible "spiritual level or simply at the "liturgical" level—both of which Rome would probably have tolerated—but at the tangible level of ethics and values finding expression in the social realm of interpersonal relations. In short, participation in the ritual was an "index" of submission to the transcendent lordship of Christ (on "indexical" rituals whereby participants transmit information

about their own current physical, psychic, or sometimes social states, see Rappaport 1979, esp. pp. 179ff.). This would have been a concern to imperial officials, who would understandably want to monitor such a movement closely.

In other words, few Christians in those early centuries could have consumed the bread and wine unless they also really and tangibly became constituted as Christ's body in the world (i.e., they were, in fact, subject to something that transcended the interests of the major political powers of their day, or else they would not have taken the risks associated with being recognized as "Christians"). Thus, as in early Israel, the "new covenant" was a socially enacted historical reality that brought into existence a pluralistic community of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who were united by their commitment to some basic, transcendent values identified with "Christ." (The connection between this development and the OT hopes for the "ingathering of the gentiles" was not lost upon the early Church.)

The situation was, of course, radically reversed when Christianity (especially the church at Rome) became systematically associated with the institutions of political power after the time of Constantine. Under those very different social and historical circumstances, participation in the Christian Eucharist quickly became less constitutive of anything and became much more symbolic in nature. In other words, there were now tangible social rewards for participation in the Eucharist, and the distinction between a pledge of loyalty to a transcendent Christ and a pledge of loyalty to the temporal (but now "Christian") emperor in Rome became increasingly fuzzy. At the very least, the ritual was now an "index" of little more than the participants' acceptance of the rule of the new, "Christianized" Roman Empire, which could not be identical to the rule of Christ (on "symbolic" ritual and how it facilitates deception and hypocrisy, see Rappaport 1979).

In the following centuries the original meaning of the eucharistic sacramentum was entirely forgotten, and increasingly it came to be viewed either as a mysterious and mystical "communion" with Christ, or (particularly for the laity) as a sacrificial ritual that served to heighten the sanctity (and the authority) of the presiding priestly hierarchy. Despite its claim to transcendence, the bloody history that followed indicates that in practice Christianity by and large had now become the (parochial) handmaid serving the advance of Western culture.

**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Hebrew Word Study: The Four Loves: Ahav, Dod, Yichud, Racham*

דוד אהב , דוד יחד רחם , Jul 1, 2024, Devotionals

**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2024/07/hebrew-word-study-the-four-loves-ahav/>

Then there is *yichud* love, a uniting of two into one. This is known among the Jews as a marital love. It means together alone. When a couple completes their wedding ceremony and passes under the chupah, they are said to be born again, born into a new life, a life where your world no longer revolves around you but you and another person. The couple enters what is called a yichud room. In the past, this is when the marriage is consummated. Today it is a locked room where only the bride and groom

have the key. It is here they are allowed to be alone together to contemplate their new life together as *echad*—one.

**FROM:** *Fiddler on the Roof*; Lyrics, 'They gave Each other a Pledge'

**Tevye:**

They gave each other **a pledge**. Unheard of, absurd.

You gave each other **a pledge**?

Unthinkable. Where do you think you are?

In Moscow? In Paris? Where do think they are? America?

And what do you think you're doing?

You stitcher, you nothing! Who do think you are? King Solomon?

This isn't the way it's done, not here, not now.

Some things I will not, I cannot, allow.

*Tradition!*

Marriages must be arranged by the papa.

This should never changed.

One little time you pull out a prop, and where does it stop?

Where does it stop?

Where does it stop?

Do I still have something to say about my daughter,

Or doesn't anybody have to ask the father anymore?

## **THE BETROTHED BRIDE'S VEIL**

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**FROM:** Unterman, Alan, *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1991 [P. 128]

"Before the marriage ceremony begins the groom, chatan, goes to the bridal chamber to view his bride, *kallah*, before covering her face with a veil. This custom is based on an incident in the Bible where the Patriarch Jacob married the wrong woman because she was already veiled"

## **BETROTHAL PERIOD**

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**FROM:** Juster, Daniel, *Jewish Roots: A foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*, Davar, Beth Messiah Congregation, Rockville, MD, 1986 [P. 233]

"*The Vows of Betrothal*, which are today incorporated into the marriage vows themselves. However, in ancient times, the betrothal (engagement) took place a year before the marriage. It was as absolutely binding as marriage, even though the couple did not marry and consummate their relationship until a year later. Unfaithfulness during betrothal was considered adultery. Thus, we find that when

Joseph discovered his wife Miriam (Mary) was pregnant before they had come together, he was desirous of divorcing her privately..."

**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Second Jewish Book of Why*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 2004 [P. 22]

"The time between betrothal and coming together of the pair varies widely, according to tribal and national custom. The Talmud makes it a year for a virgin and a month for a widow. The reason for so long a time is that the girl may have her garments provided, says the Talmud. Meanwhile the girl is regarded as a wife from the day the betrothal is settled. Thus, Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife." So the betrothed maiden is called a "wife" in Mosaic law? And the man that had a betrothed maiden, though he had not taken her home, is called "a husband." And as the Scriptures imply, Joseph and Mary of Nazareth were regarded as husband and wife after betrothal."

**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 50-51]

Both bride and groom had their respective responsibilities in this betrothal period. The groom was to use this as a time of preparation. As the huppah symbolized a new household, so **the groom was to focus on preparing a new dwelling place for his bride and, hopefully, children to follow**. In biblical times, this was most easily accomplished by **simply adding another room to the family's existing home**.

As the groom prepared the home during the one-year betrothal period, the bride kept herself busy with her tasks. Specifically, **the bride was to focus on her own personal preparation as the wedding day approached. Beautiful wedding garments were to be sewn as a symbol of the joyous occasion to come**. More importantly, the bride was to consecrate herself in the true spirit of the betrothal time. For both bride and groom, it was to be a year of introspection and contemplation, readying themselves for this most holy covenant of marriage.

**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 60-61]

Since believers in Yeshua have consented to the conditions of the eyrusin, they enter into the betrothal period. This is the period of time (biblically, one year) between the solemn first cup of the eyrusin ceremony and the full marriage as symbolized in the second cup. Although the couple is considered married in a legal sense, they are not to live together as husband and wife. There is too much that still needs to be done. The groom has his own responsibilities, the most pressing one being the preparing of their future home. In the ancient Middle East, this was most likely to take the form of adding a room to the family's existing home.

The preparation of a future home fits with the teaching of Yeshua. The Messiah was trying to comfort his disciples concerning his impending death and departure from

the earth. As troubling as this was to those followers, there was great hope expressed when Yeshua said:

Don't let yourselves be disturbed. Trust in God and trust in me. In my Father's house are many places to live. If there weren't, I would have told you; because I am going there to prepare a place for you. Since I am going and preparing a place for you, I will return to take you with me; so that where I am, you may be also (John 14 1- 3)

Yeshua, our heavenly bridegroom, has taken the first vows with his New Covenant bride; that is, Jews and Gentiles who call on his name. He is now fulfilling his responsibility of preparing a special home for his wife-to-be. **It is understandable that the immediate reaction of the disciples to Yeshua's death would be one of fear and doubt. However, in God's wisdom, this temporary separation from the groom perfectly fulfills the purpose of the betrothal period.** It must have been a comfort to those disciples to realize that their redeemer and Messiah was simply completing the spiritual plan of the Father, as seen in the betrothal.

The bride also had her preparations. During the one-year betrothal period, she consecrated herself by her pure life and prepared holy garments for the upcoming marriage. She entered the mikveh (i.e., ritual water immersion) immediately before the marriage as a symbol of moral cleansing. In terms of eschatology, the spiritual application is clear. Believers in Yeshua, as his espoused bride, are to consecrate themselves and to keep their spiritual lives pure in preparation for the second cup. Saul amplified this truth in his letter to the believers in Ephesus:

As for husbands, love your wives, just as the Messiah loved the Messianic Community, indeed, gave himself up on its behalf, in order to set it apart for God, making it clean through immersion in the mikveh, so to speak, in order to present the Messianic Community to himself as a bride to be proud of, without a spot, wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without defect (Ephesians 5:25- 27).

The last two thousand years have been the betrothal period between the Messiah and his bride. As with any anxious bride, the wait has at times been difficult. Yet, the bridegroom is ready to return. Believers in Yeshua need to ask themselves if they are keeping their garments clean and keeping their ketubah promises.

**FROM:** *“Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled.”* Sermon No. 1741, Delivered on September 23rd, 1883, By C. H. Spurgeon, at The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington. [P. 673-674]

*“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”* (John 14:1-4.)

The next consolation was the promise of his sure return: “If I go away to prepare a place for you, I will come again.” Listen, then! Jesus is coming again. In the same manner as he ascended he will return—that is, really, literally, and in bodily form. He

meant no play upon words when he so plainly said, without proverb, "I will come again," or more sweetly still, "I go away and come again unto you." This is our loudest joy-note, "Behold, he cometh!" This is our never-failing comfort. Observe that the Savior, in this place, says nothing about death, nothing about the peace and rest of believers till he is come; for he looks on to the end. It is not necessary to put every truth into one sentence; and so our Lord is content to mention the brightest of our hopes, and leave other blessings for mention at other times here the consolation is that he will come, come personally to gather us in. He will not send an angel, nor even a host of cherubim to fetch us up into our eternal state; but the Lord himself will descend from heaven. It is to be our marriage-day, and the glorious Bridegroom will come in person.

When the Bride is prepared for her Husband, will he not come to fetch her to his home? O beloved, do you not see where our Lord's thoughts were? He was dwelling upon the happy day of his ultimate victory, when he shall come to be admired in all them that believe. That is where he would have his people's thoughts to be; but alas! they forget his advent. The Lord shall come; let your hearts anticipate that day of days. His enemies cannot stop his coming! "Let not your heart be troubled." They may hate him, but they cannot hinder him; they cannot impede his glorious return, not by the twinkling of an eye. What an answer will his coming be to every adversary!

How will they weep and wail because of him! As surely as he lives he will come; and what confusion this will bring upon the wise men who at this hour are reasoning against his Deity and ridiculing his atonement! Again I say, "Let not your heart be troubled" as to the present state of religion; it will not last long. Do not worry yourselves into unbelief though this man may have turned traitor, or the other may have become a backslider, for the wheels of time are hurrying on the day of the glorious manifestation of the Lord from heaven! What will be the astonishment of the whole world when with all the holy angels he shall descend from heaven and shall glorify his people!

For that is the next comfort-he will receive us. **When he comes he will receive his followers with a courtly reception. It will be their marriage reception; it shall be the marriage supper of the Son of God. Then shall descend out of heaven the new Jerusalem prepared as a bride for her husband. Then shall come the day of the resurrection, and the dead in Christ shall rise. Then all his people who are alive at the time of his coming shall be suddenly transformed, so as to be delivered from all the frailties and imperfections of their mortal bodies: "The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Then we shall be presented spirit, soul, and body "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"; in the clear and absolute perfection of our sanctified manhood. presented unto Christ himself.** This is the sweetest idea of heaven that can be, that we shall be with Christ, that we shall see him, that we shall speak to him, that we shall commune with him most intimately, that we shall glorify him, that he will glorify us, and that we shall never be divided from him for ever and ever. "Let not

your heart be troubled," all this is near at hand, and our Lord's going away has secured it to us.

## THE INVITATION

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**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

*(i) The Invitation.* The parents of the bride and bride-groom would make a list of all the people to be invited to the wedding. Armed with this list, two men, representing the two families, would go round delivering the invitation personally and by word of mouth. They would mention the day, on the evening of which the marriage festivities were to take place, but the *hour* would not be specified. On the appointed day, some guests might arrive fairly early in the evening; others, however, who entertained extravagant opinion of their own dignity, would not be in a hurry. They would wait until someone came to fetch them. So, it was necessary to send someone a *second* time to summon the invited guests telling them: "Behold, I have made ready my dinner (or 'supper'): my oxen and my fat cattle are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast" (Matt. **xxii.** 4).

Having accepted the invitation, if a man refused to attend, his refusal would be taken as a calculated insult to the person who invited him. No wonder, then, that in the parable of the Great Supper (Luke xiv. 16-24), the master of the house was "enraged" at the lame excuses that the invited guests offered for not attending. In the sister parable of the "Marriage of the King's Son" (Matt. xxii. 1-14), the King was so angry at the insult, that he inflicted condign punishment on the contemptuous defaulters.

At a great wedding banquet, both rich and poor, learned and unlearned, would be present. There might be even several who had come uninvited. Sometimes an ill-mannered guest, having arrived early, chose for himself the best seat in the banqueting hall. His behavior would place the host in an awkward position, if a more distinguished guest arrived, for the host could not ask him to take a lower seat; as it would be an insult both to his person and to his learning. The Pharisees, *e.g.*, expected the "best places at banquets and front seats in the synagogues" (Matt. xxiii. 6). So, the host would be obliged to ask the uncouth guest, who had occupied the chief seat, to "make room" for the distinguished scholar (Luke xiv. 7-9).

**FROM:** Knight, George W. *Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*. Barbour Publishing, Inc. Uhrichville, OH, 2007 [P. 182]

[Matt. 22:1-15] This is how banquets and parties were staged in Bible times. An invitation well in advance of the event determined how many people to prepare for. Then a second invitation went out on the day of the event to those who had agreed to attend. With this parable Jesus emphasized that His offer of salvation and eternal life went first to His own people, the Jews. But they refused to accept it. And just like

the king in this parable who invited people off the street to replace those who would not attend the wedding, Jesus now issued His invitation to the Gentiles.

This verse continues Jesus' parable of the wedding feast. The king had invited people off the street to attend the feast. He could not expect them to own the fancy clothes that were considered suitable attire for a royal wedding, so he provided such clothes for these guests. He was surprised to see that one guest had not put on these clothes. The message of this part of the parable is that Jesus offers salvation to all, just as the king provided generously for all of his guests. But each person must exercise faith through the act of the will and "put on" this salvation for himself before it becomes meaningful and effective in his life.

**FROM:** [Source unknown]

When there was a particularly important banquet, a wedding, for example, or a circumcision, the invitations were taken round by slaves or servants, as we see from the parable of the wedding-feast; and for these parties it was essential to put on ceremonial clothes-evening-dress, as we would say.

## **WEDDING CEREMONY TIMING**

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**FROM:** Greenberg, Rabbi Irving, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1988 [P. 82]

"The three days before *Shavuot* are known as the *shloshet yemay hagbalah*, the three boundary days. In the biblical account, Moses instructed the people to use the three days before the Sinai theophany for purification. The boundary days act out the historical image as if the contemporary Jews are encamped three days from Sinai. People get haircuts and buy new clothes, and mourning ceases in anticipation of the great day. **Weddings, another form of covenantal relationship, are scheduled during this period...**

**"The holiday is ushered in at nightfall on the fiftieth day.** Since *Shavuot* occurs in the summertime, the stars come out quite late. Thus, the dictum of the Torah, "You shall count... seven complete weeks," is fulfilled."

## **NIGHTTIME WEDDING**

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**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred j., *The Jewish Book of Why [Volume 1]*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 1981, Revised 2004 [P. 36]

"Why is the marriage ceremony sometimes held outdoors? In some Jewish circles, particularly ultra-Orthodox *chassidic*, the marriage ceremony is performed at night in de open, under the stars. This custom probably developed because the stars are



associated with God's assurance to Abraham: "I will bless thee...and multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the seashore" (Genesis 22.17)."

**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred j., *The Jewish Book of Why [Volume 1]*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 1981, Revised 2004 [P. 38]

"An essential feature of marriage among the Romans was the passing of a torch. (Light was a symbol of purity) Among the Jews of the first century, the bride was received by bridesmaids, who carried torches."

**Comment:** The nighttime arrival of the bridegroom for the bride is portrayed outright in the Gospels (especially in the parable of 'The Ten Virgins', who needed lamp-oil for their lamps when the bridegroom arrived by surprise at night). This is not to say that an actual Jewish wedding couldn't happen during daylight hours, but in the Gospel references it is never portrayed that way. The element of surprise and readiness is the warning, and nighttime is the overarching setting in Scripture.

## **PREPARATIONS FOR THE WEDDING**

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**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

(ii) **Preparation for the Wedding:** Virgins were married on Wednesdays, and widows on Thursdays.] On the previous Tuesday, the virgin bride, accompanied by her female friends and relations, paid a visit to the public bath.] to undergo the first instalment of her adornment. She was first washed and anointed, then her hair, the palms of her hands, her nails and the soles of her feet were stained with henna ("Song of Songs", i. 14, R.v.). This was a laborious process and required two or three hours for its due performance. While the ladies were still in the bath-house, a small procession, sometimes accompanied by musicians, carried on a tray the bridegroom's present for the bride. This consisted of articles of clothing, inwrought with gold or otherwise embroidered (Psalm xiv. 13, 14). With these and other ornaments, the bride-elect adorned herself (Isa. lxi. 10; Jer. xxi. 32) and returned to her father's house. In the evening an informal family party was provided by her father, at which the bridegroom was present. To this party the bridegroom's relations and the bride's friends brought their wedding gifts and presented them in person. About midnight, the bride-groom, accompanied by his "friends", *i.e.*, best-men, returned to his father's house. On the following day (Wednesday), the second part of the bride's adornment was taken in hand. Either professional beauty specialists or some expert members of the family undertook this task. In the first place, they *painted her eyes* (Ezek. xxiii. 40) for as the Rabbis said: "A bride that has pretty eyes requires no further examination."\* For this purpose a wooden bodkin was first dipped into some antimony (*Kohl*, in Arabic). then it was placed horizontally between the upper and the lower lashes of the eyes, and the eyes were

closed. The bodkin being drawn out, the eyelashes were darkened, and the eyes appeared larger (Jer. iv. 30, R.v.)t and with greater lustre. Then attention was paid to the *bride's hair* which, in the case of a virgin, was allowed to flow loose. Afterwards she was attired in her beautiful *garments* and girdle (Jer. ii. 32) and decked with all sorts of silver and gold ornaments, chains, bracelets, rings, anklets, necklaces. The most highly prized ornament was a chain containing *ten pieces of silver* (Fig. 2 D, facing p. 66) which, being a wedding gift from the bridegroom, was regarded as sacred and could not be taken for the husband's debt. This accounts for the diligent search made by the woman in the parable (Luke xv. 8), for the recovery of one of the lost pieces. The adornment of the bride being now completed, she was perfumed (Psalm xiv. 8) and her head was covered with a veil (Gen. xxiv. 65). The veil was a square piece of silk or other material, large enough to cover the whole head and the upper part of the body, and sometimes reaching to the ankles. The veil worn by Ruth was a wrap ample enough to hold six measures of barley (Ruth iii. 15). "The putting on of the veil marked the transition from girlhood to woman- hood." A virgin was married wearing a veil. At the actual time when the couple pledged their troth the one to the other, the bridegroom removed the veil from the bride's head and threw it on his own shoulder, signifying thereby that he had taken upon himself the responsibility (the "government" Isa. ix. 6), as the head partner in the joint concern (cf. 1Cor.xi.3).

We have so far been describing how the bride was "adorned for her husband" (Rev. xxi. 2; Isa. lxi. 10). No doubt the bridegroom "rejoiced over the bride" (Isa. lxii. 5), when in the evening he was allowed to see her face. Mean- while, the bridegroom was not neglected. On the Wednesday forenoon, accompanied by his friends, he went to the public bath. He washed himself and had the palms of his hands, the soles of his feet, and all his nails stained with henna. A small procession, preceded by some music, brought to him from the bride a present consisting of some wedding robes. After donning these, he returned home. Late in the afternoon, the bridegroom, with music and singing, was conducted by his relations and friends to the house of the bride for the purpose of drawing up and signing the *Kethubah*, i.e., marriage settlement (Tobit vii. 14) and being ready for the wedding feast in the evening.

**FROM:** NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition [P. 10343-10344]

**Ephesians 5:26** to make her holy...washing with water through the word. Paul might cite ancient customs here. Some relate the "washing" to the bride's normal washing before being perfumed, anointed and arrayed in wedding clothes in preparation for the wedding. Perhaps relevant to "make her holy," later Jewish teachers spoke of betrothal as "the sanctification of the bride," meaning setting her apart for her husband.

**Ephesians 5:27** radiant church. Some suggest that "radiant" might partly recall a similar idea in the description of God's bride in Eze 16:14 (though the Greek term is different).

## THE APPAREL OF GROOM AND BRIDE

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**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

When the night arrived for the wedding festivities to begin, and it was time to go for the bride, *the groom* was dressed as much like a king as possible. If he were rich enough to afford it, he wore a gold crown. Otherwise it would be a garland of fresh flowers. His garments would be scented with frankincense and myrrh, his girdle would be a silken one brilliantly colored, his sandals would be figured and carefully laced, and all of this would give effect to the "flowing drapery of the loose robes and to the graceful bearing peculiar to the lands of the East. For the time, the peasant seemed a prince among his fellows, and all paid him the deference due to exalted rank." This preparation of the groom for the wedding has been aptly described in the prophecy of Isaiah,

"He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments" (Isa. 61:10).

The adorning of the bride was a very costly and elaborate affair. Much time was given to the preparation of her person. Every effort was put forth to make her complexion glossy and shining with a luster like unto marble. The words of David must have been their ideal for her: "that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace" (Psa. 144:12). Her dark locks of hair were often braided with gold and pearls. She was decked with all the precious stones and jewels that the family had inherited from previous generations. Those who were too poor to afford much themselves would borrow what they could from their friends.

The wedding festivities, and especially the bride's adornment, would always be remembered by her. The prophet Jeremiah made reference to this thought, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" (Jer. 2:32). The Apostle John saw New Jerusalem "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

## THE 'PAINTED' BRIDE

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**FROM:** Kolatch, Alfred J., *The Second Jewish Book of Why*. Jonathan David Publishers, Middle Village, New York, 2004 [P. 27]

"The henna is bound with linen upon her hands and feet until morning, when they will be dyed a deep orange-red. Her guests also dye their own hands."  
[Egyptian/Indian weddings]

## DURATION OF WEDDING FEASTS

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**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P. 146]

**The rejoicings went on for seven days**, and sometimes twice as long. But on the first evening the young pair vanished and the marriage was consummated. According to a somewhat naive custom the blood-stained linen was kept as a souvenir of the marriage night, because the twenty-second chapter of Deuteronomy it was said that it was proper to have proofs against any insinuations on the part of the husband. Having done this, the young couple did not go off for a honeymoon but returned to share in the merriment, the songs and the dancing under the star-strewn sky.

**FROM:** Freeman, James M. *Manners and Customs of the Bible*. Logos International, NJ [P. 37]

### 57. MARRIAGE FEAST.

XXIX, 22. Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. The usual duration of a marriage feast was a week. Thus, "Fulfill her week," in verse 27, means, "Wait until the week's festivities are over." This was the duration of Samson's marriage feast. Judges xiv,12.

## SURPRISE WEDDING: WHY "ONLY THE FATHER" KNEW THE DAY OR THE HOUR

**FROM:** Daniel-Rops, Henri. *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*. New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1962 [P. 147-48]

In the same way the respect that his children owed him had a similarity to that which they owed to God. The famous commandment in the decalogue "Honor thy father and thy mother; so thou shalt live long" is clearly a transposition of a more absolute order--the son who does not honor his parents must be put to death. And in fact the Law condemned the disobedient son or he who "cursed his father and his mother" (Lev. 20:9) to lose his life. By the time of Christ this would only have been carried out in the most serious of cases. Yet He Himself never failed to insist upon the importance of the commandment, as, for example, when He told the rich young man the essence of the Law. Saint Paul, writing to his friends in Ephesus, goes so far as to say that honoring one's parents is the "first commandment" (Eph. 6:2)...

Were all sons as worthy as this? One has but to look into the Gospels to know that they were not: there were, to be sure, "sons obedient to their parents," with Jesus Himself as the first among them; but the story of the Prodigal shows clearly that in those days, as in all other times, there were youths who followed only their own desires. And Jesus too explained how undutiful sons would avoid coming to the help of their old parents by saying that they had made an offering, a corban, of their

goods at the Temple, a trick which the Pharisees connived at: so true it is that the best of possible laws are not enough to make men perfect.

**FROM:** O'Brien, Brandon J., Richards, E. Randolph, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*. IVP Books, Downers Grove IL, 2012 [P. 145-146]

As we mentioned before, the biblical authors, like many non-Westerners, were less concerned with clock or calendar time (chronos) and more concerned with the appropriateness and fittingness of events (hairos). You might say they were more concerned with timing than with time. Our preoccupation with the chronos of events means that when we read about the "Day of the Lord" in Scripture, we typically envision a literal calendar day, as if the Lord is scheduled to return on a Tuesday morning or something. It will come at the right "time" (hairos not chronos), under the right conditions and in the appropriate season. The day of the Lord will occur when God is ready.

Let's look at an example that Jesus used. "Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come'" (Mt 22:1-3).

We recognize that the would-be guests are making excuses, but why they were making excuses went without being said in Jesus' day. First, we assume those invited were making personal decisions. (Hopefully, you recognize now a community is involved in this.) Second, we commonly misread this parable because we assume the hot issue in the story is time. We assume the guests don't come because they don't have the time. Or perhaps the guests are insulting the king because they won't take the time to attend, or worse, they feel the banquet is a waste of time. What we are certain went without being said, though, was that the story was somehow connected to time. After all, banquet invitations note the day and time.

To understand what's going on here, we need to know a bit about the culture. When folks were invited, it was okay for them to decline the invitation. But these people had accepted the invitation, so preparations were made based upon their attendance.<sup>4</sup> In antiquity, one announced a banquet as happening "soon." The exact date was always a bit negotiable for several reasons. First, they didn't have five-day weather forecasts; who knew in advance if the weather would be conducive to banqueting? Second, some supplies had to come from out of town. When supplies were ready, you would let the guests know the banquet was "near." Finally, one did not kill the fatted calf until the day of the feast. There was no refrigeration. When all the preparations were made, the host looked outside. If the weather looked good, he'd give the order: "Today is the day." They'd kill the calf, and messengers would go to tell the guests to come. The feast happens on the right day (hairos). Likewise, Jesus tells us the time (hairos) for the kingdom is near (Mk 1:15).

Jesus consistently discouraged his disciples from trying to divine the "day and the hour" (chronos terms) of God's judgment or Christ's return. "But about that day or

hour no one knows," Jesus said, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mt 24:36). It is possible to be so worried about the time (chronos) for something such as the return of Christ—that we miss the time (hairos) for something—such as living like citizens of the kingdom of God.

**Comment:** Concerning the father of the bridegroom deciding the timing of the wedding, Jesus' statement in Matt. 24 is not an abstraction. Galilean Jews were militantly Hebraic, not Hellenized, and did not abstract well; they needed concrete verbiage and typology, which Jesus amply supplied and has been abundantly provided to the reader throughout the entire Bible. The Father sending the son bridegroom was a boldly picturesque parabolic reference to a specific wedding custom in a context of known Levantine wedding customs (V. 36-42, 25:1-13). Mark 13 reflects a more concise version of Jesus' vivid statement in Matthew.

When researching ancient Levantine weddings (Jews, Arabs, other Gentile groups), there was most often a set time when the wedding would begin (sunset, etc.), but Jesus' usage of wedding imagery indicated that the Galilean community (at least) included an element of 'abducting' the bride by surprise. Jesus used this to typify to His disciples (who were almost entirely Galileans and would relate well to regional wedding customs) His coming 'take'<sup>3</sup> His followers 'to be with' Him<sup>4</sup>.

## GOING OF THE GROOM TO 'ABDUCT' THE BRIDE

**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

Sometimes the bride's relations would conduct her from her father's house to the house of her fiancé, where her new home was to be. But more often, as was the case of the Ten Virgins in Christ's parable, the bridegroom himself went in person to bring her to his home for the wedding festivities to take place there. Before leaving the house that had been her home, she would receive the blessing of her relatives. Thus, Rebekah's relatives sent her away with a typical Oriental marriage blessing, "Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them" (Gen. 24:60). The bride left her father's house adorned and perfumed, and with a crown on her head. Ezekiel's description of the bride is very appropriate "I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head" (Ezek. 16:11, 12).

**FROM:** *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, National Geographic Society, 1967

At last the great day arrives. **The bride, in crown and showy dress, waits at her father's house, surrounded by friends. The groom arrives with his friends and best man, who serves as master of ceremonies. The girl takes her place in a litter and men jostle to carry it. Women sing of the bride's beauty; men chant**

**the groom's bravery. To the music of flute, harp, zither, castanets, and tambourines, everyone steps off, singing and clapping hands.** Celebrants pour oil, wine, and perfume, and scatter nuts and roasted grain - omens of happiness and fecundity.

At the groom's house, his parents pronounce a blessing and everyone enters. The groom presides, blushing bride at his side, while all eat and drink to the full. The feasting resumes the next day **and lasts for a week until all friends and relatives are entertained.** They bring gifts. We may forgive the groom if he calculates his expenses against returns.

**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

*(iv) The Friends of the Bridegroom and the Children of Bridechamber.* "The friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. iii. 29), in the Talmud is called *Shoshebin*, and is distinguished from "the children of the bride-chamber", who are called *bene huppah*.

The latter expression simply means the guests at a wedding-party, but especially those honored guests who participated in the seven days' marriage festivities in the presence of the bridegroom. In a scene of great rejoicing and feasting, mourning, or fasting would be out of place (Matt. ix. 15; Mark ii. 19). The "friend of the bridegroom" was what we may call the best man or the groomsman. His duties, however, were more onerous than a present-day "best man". "In Judea there were at every marriage *two* groomsman or friends of the bridegroom- one for the bridegroom, the other for his bride. Before marriage, they acted as a kind of intermediaries between the couple; at the wedding they offered gifts, waited upon the bride and bridegroom, and attended them to the bridal chamber, being also, as it were, the guarantors of the bride's virgin chastity."

It is this simile of groomsman that St. Paul is using in 2 Cor. xi. 2. He had acted as a *shoshebin* in betrothing the Corinthian Christians to Christ. He is now inspired with a Divine zeal to complete his duty in seeing that the "bride" remains chaste in order that she may be presented to the "Bridegroom" at His appearing.

In the Talmud, we read that in Galilee "friends of bridegroom" were not employed. It is in complete accord with this that in the report of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, no mention is made of any friend of the bridegroom. In John iii. 29, the "friend of the bridegroom" is used because the scene is laid in Judea (John iii. 22).

**FROM:** Ratcliff, Don, *The Jewish Wedding in Bible Times*. Research paper, Jewish Wedding, Page 3, 3. *Return of the Groom*

When groom's father gave the nod, groom and groomsman went to bride's house, usually unexpectedly at night. "Like a thief in the night". Called out and blew ram's horn before entering house to get bride and her bridesmaids. They would be

watching and waiting for him—probably for several days, or even weeks, as they saw bridal chamber completed and year ended.

## THE WEDDING PROCESSION

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**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

The bridegroom set out with the bride from the house of her parents, and there followed a grand procession all the way to his house. The streets of Asiatic cities were dark, and it was necessary that anybody venturing forth at night should carry a lamp or torch (cf. Psa. 119:105). Those invited guests, who did not go to the bride's home were allowed to join the procession along the way, and go with the whole group to the marriage feast. Without a torch or lamp they couldn't join the procession, or enter the bridegroom's house."

The Ten Virgins waited for the procession to arrive at the point where they were waiting; and five wise ones were able to proceed because they had a reserve supply of oil for their lamps; but the foolish virgins lacked that oil and so, not being ready, they were barred from the wedding feast (Matt. 25:1-13).

The lamps carried by these virgins have been described by Dr. Edersheim: The lamps consisted of a round receptacle for pitch or oil for the wick. This was placed in a hollow cup or deep saucer, which was fastened by a pointed end into a long wooden pole, on which it was borne aloft.

In going from the bride's house to the groom's house, the bride allowed her hair to be loose and flowing, and she had her face veiled. Some of her own relations preceded her in the procession, and scattered ears of parched grain to the children along the way. There were demonstrations of joy all along the road to the destination. Part of the procession included men who played on drums or other musical instruments. And there was dancing along the way. One of the punishments Jeremiah predicted for the Jews, because of their sins, was the taking away of wedding joys. "Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride" (Jer. 7:34).

**FROM:** Knight, George W. *Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*. Barbour Publishing, Inc. Uhrichville, OH, 2007 [P. 142]

Jeremiah declared that God's judgment would bring an end to the sounds of celebration throughout the nation of Judah. Even the songs of joy associated with weddings would be heard no more. Weddings of Bible times were of great celebration that included the entire community (see note on Matthew 25:1-3). The wedding party would march through the street to sounds of music, singing, and the



cheers of the people. Neighbors and friends would be invited to an elaborate wedding feast that lasted for several days.

## THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH VIRGINS

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**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

(iv) **The Wise and the Foolish Virgins.** The procession did not march to its destination the shortest way but moved at a very slow pace through all the main streets of the town. This was necessary. In the first place it was regarded unbecoming for the bride and bridegroom to appear as though they were in a hurry. Secondly, as the streets were unlit at night, it was for the convenience of the guests to accompany the illuminated procession until it reached some- where near their homes, and then to depart. Thirdly, it gave an opportunity to the daughters of Israel to "greet the joyous train and to show their respect for the newly married—a friendly action which, no doubt, would be reciprocated, when their turn came to be the happy brides in Israel. It was not an un- common thing for the friends and well-wishers to improvise, on the route, seats for the bride and bridegroom, and refreshments for all. From the Mishnah we gather that parched corn was distributed among the guests. Such friends would be honored among the distinguished guests in the house of the bridegroom during the seven days of the festivities that followed.

The Ten Virgins (Matt. xxv. 1-13), were not idle sight- seers, but persons anxious to welcome the bridegroom, and escort him to his new home, and, in return, to be allowed the privilege of being among those friends who participated in the Joyous festivities that continued for seven days\* in the bride- groom's house. These young girls had left their homes and had assembled at a convenient place on the route of the bridal procession. They had taken with them their lighted lamps. These were necessary, first of all, for their own guidance in the dark, cracked and badly paved streets, and for the period of their waiting at their rendezvous. In the second place, they were intended to add to the brilliance of the bridegroom's entourage. These lamps were tiny cups (Fig. 2, facing p. 66). In the opening (A) was placed some flax or cotton-wool to serve as the wick. Through the circular opening (B) they poured some in. The lamp when lighted, would burn about half-an-hour. Then the oil being exhausted, the wick would smoke and emit an unpleasant smell. In such a case, either the "smoking flax" is "quenched", *i.e.*, the light is extinguished, or the lamp is replenished. For this purpose a cruse of oil is always at hand. In addition to their lamps, the wise virgins had the forethought of taking with them an extra supply of oil in their vessels. Should the bridegroom's arrival for any reason be delayed, they would be prepared.

The foolish virgins, on the other hand, not anticipating delay, had not brought any more supply of oil than the quantity that was in their lamps. They lit their lamps, but made no provision for feeding them. "Now while the bridegroom tam ed they all

slumbered and slept." Their sleep was natural and there was nothing culpable in it. They might feel the fresher for their rest, and better prepared to enter in the joy.

When at midnight the cry was heard, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him", the prudent maidens were prepared; they arose and trimmed their lamps; but the foolish maidens became aware of their own lack of forethought. They said unto the wise: "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out." Alas! their request could not be granted. "Peradventure," replied the wise, "there will not be enough for us and you: go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves." The reply is not selfish. "To have divided the oil would have entirely defeated the purpose of the procession." (Schaff.) The advice to the foolish virgins to go and buy oil seems to us either foolish or mockery, or else grossly light-hearted, seeing that at midnight all shops are closed and those that sell are in their beds.\* But in reality it was nothing of the kind; it conveyed an oft-neglected truth that "personal character cannot be given by one person to another; it must be *bought* by personal experience". The real folly of the foolish maidens consisted in this that at the very hour that the bridegroom was at hand they left the scene in vain quest of oil. The main ground of their exclusion from the bridal hall was not lack of oil, but *unreadiness*. "And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were *ready* went in with him to the marriage festivities; and the door was shut." Prof. A. B. Bruce is reasonable when he says: "Had these absent ones been present and gone on with their sisters, they would, for anything that appears to the contrary, have been admitted also."

(v). **What the Foolish Lost.** In England, the newly married couple usually leave their home and go away for their honeymoon. In Palestine, the bride and bridegroom stay at home, receive their friends and enjoy a series of festivities, which generally last for seven days, and sometimes even for a fortnight. During this period, the bridegroom and his wife, wearing their marriage garments and ornaments, play the part of a king and queen, and are served and honored as such by all.\* They are garlanded and enthroned. They hold a festal court called *Diwan*, and issue commands. The friend of the bridegroom *i.e.*, his best man), "standeth and heareth him (and) rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice" (John iii. 29). Had the foolish virgins been "ready" to accompany the bridegroom, they would have formed part of this privileged and rejoicing company. They would have had many happy days in the society of the bridegroom, would have heard his voice and rejoiced greatly. But their "scrupulous regard to ceremony", their undue attachment to formality, made them more concerned about the oil than the presence of the bridegroom.

How tragic the consequence! "And the door was shut." This was necessary for keeping out intruders and for the security of those within. There are many "foolish" Christians in every age. They are not "lost", but they miss the fullness of joy and blessing that the risen and ascended Lord wishes them to have. Some have just enough religious feeling for a normal and uneventful mode of life, but their spiritual life is not deep enough for an abnormal, unexpected crisis. "It is in moments of surprise that a man's true self comes out to view."\* Neither have they any extra

supply of light to "shine before men". Their Christian profession does not add any lustre to the presence of their Lord. Others are like the lamp whose oil is well-nigh exhausted and in consequence is emitting unpleasant smoke. They are disagreeable, captious and so unfit "to help on others in their dark and doubtful way through this life". Others, again, in the Master's service, are unready. There are clear manifestations of the Spirit of Christ in the "mass movements" among many races, and yet professing Christians are not prepared to take advantage of it, until it will be too late and they discover that the door is shut.

**FROM:** Knight, George W. *Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*. Barbour Publishing, Inc. Uhrichville, OH, 2007 [P. 183]

These verses [John 25:1-13] are part of Jesus' parable about the wise and foolish virgins who were invited to a wedding celebration. In Bible times the groom went to the home of his bride and took her to his own home, accompanied by his friends as they celebrated along the way. These virgins were probably friends of the bride, who were supposed to join the procession at some point as it passed by. Since the wedding was at night, all ten virgins carried tiny oil-burning lamps (see note on Mark 4:21) to light the path as they walked with the rest of the wedding party. The wise virgins carried an extra supply of oil for their lamps, but the foolish virgins did not. When the wedding procession was delayed, the foolish virgins were unable to join in the celebration of this joyful occasion. Jesus' message in the parable is this: Be prepared. The second coming of Christ can happen at any moment, and we need to be ready at all times...

## **THE BRIDE'S 'ABDUCTION'**

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**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 51-52]

The culminating step in the process of the Jewish wedding ceremony is known as **nissuin**. This is **based on the Hebrew verb *nasa*, which literally means "to carry."** Nissuin was quite a graphic description, **as the bride would be waiting for the groom to carry her away to their new home.** There was great anticipation as the bride waited for the arrival of her betrothed one. This was to be expected, especially when taking into consideration an element unique to the biblical Jewish wedding; that is, **the time of the groom's arrival (and hence the whole wedding party) was to be a surprise. Any bride who took seriously the betrothal period would be expecting the groom at the end of their year-long engagement. However, the exact hour of the ceremony was uncertain, as it was the father of the groom who would give the final approval for the nissuin to begin.**

The bride and her bridal party would therefore be anxiously watching and waiting for the exact moment. Even in the late evening, the bridal party was to keep their oil lamps burning just in case the wedding was to begin. How would they know when

the time had arrived? One custom was for a member of the groom's party to lead the way from the groom's house to the home of the bride, and to shout "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" This would be followed by the sound of the shofar (ram's horn), which was used to proclaim Jewish holy days and special events.

At the sound of the shofar, the groom would lead a wedding procession through the streets of the village to the house of the bride. The groomsmen would then carry (nissuin) the bride back to the groom's house where huppah ("canopy") was once again set up. The couple would once again, as they did one year previous, say a blessing over a cup of wine (a symbol of joy). This cup was clearly distinguished from the previous cup, as is reflected in the traditional *sheva b'rakkot* ("seven blessings") that accompany it. This second stage of the huppah ceremony, as found in the nissuin custom, serves as the finalization of the earlier promises and vows. What was promised in the *eyrusin* ceremony was now consummated in the nissuin ceremony. For the first time, the couple was free to consummate their marriage by having sexual relations and by **living together as husband and wife** (see Genesis 24:66- 67)

The pinnacle of this joyful celebration was the marriage supper. This was more than just a sit-down dinner for all the guests, but included seven full days of food, music, dance and celebration (see Judges 14:10- 12). After all the wonderful festivities, the new husband was free to bring his wife to their new home and to live together within the full covenant of marriage.

## **ARRIVAL AT THE HOUSE OF THE BRIDEGROOM**

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**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

The most important moment of the entire marriage festivity was that in which the bride entered her new home. And as both groom and bride usually wore crowns, the Psalmist must have pictured this important moment in the marriage of the king:

She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needle-work: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace (Psa. 45:14-15).

After arriving at the bridegroom's house, some of the older women had the task of arranging the bride's hair. Her flowing locks were hidden beneath a thick veil. From this time on, the custom would dictate that her face was not to be unveiled in public. She was led to her place under a canopy, which was located either inside the house, or if the weather permitted, in the open air. Her place was beside her husband, where both would hear new words of benediction given by one of the fathers, or by some important person who might be present." In the wedding at Cana of Galilee, Jesus was the most prominent guest present, and doubtless He was asked to pronounce His benediction upon the newlyweds (John 2:1- 11).

## THE WEDDING & FEAST

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**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

(c) **Hup-pah** (or Nis-su-in), marriage proper. The word huppah (also written chuppah) is found in Psalm xix. 6 (xix. 5 in English version), and is translated "chamber". It means the bridal chamber, and among modern Jews it is the name given to the "canopy" under which the bride and bridegroom are married. It means also the marriage ceremony. The term *nis-su-in* means "taking" or conducting the bride to the bridegroom's home, hence, marriage proper.

Failure to distinguish between the *qiddushin* meal (which was of the nature of a family party and was provided by the bride's father) and the *huppah* festivity (which was a wedding banquet arranged in the house of the *bride* at the cost of the bridegroom), has been responsible for some fanciful and un-Jewish statements made by the commentators in their attempt to elucidate the parable of the Ten Virgins. We are, therefore, justified in discussing the details of the Wedding festivities somewhat more fully:

**FROM:** Wight, Fred H., *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, Sixteenth Printing, 1972 [P. 127-134]

Every guest that attended the feast was required to wear a wedding garment (Matt. 22:12). The wedding banquet was presided over by the ruler of the feast (John 2:8, 9). It was his duty to take care of the preparations, and during the feast he would get around among the guests and see to it that they lacked nothing. He instructed servants in carrying out all the necessary details." The expression, "children of the bride-chamber" (Matt. 9:15), used by Jesus, simply means the guests at the wedding. The governor or ruler of the feast returned gave thanks at the dinner and pronounced benedictions at appointed times. He also blessed the wine. It was customary to tell riddles at these feasts like Samson did at his wedding (Judges 14:12-18). During the meal mirthfulness prevailed, and the guests were expected to exalt the bride.

There was no religious ceremony at the feast. In place of this were the benedictions of relatives and friends. The benediction of those who witnessed wedding arrangements for Ruth and Boaz is a good example of what would be included in such a benediction (Ruth 4:11). It corresponds to the well-wishing of Western wedding guests. After the wedding feast was over the husband was escorted by his friends into the apartment where his wife had previously been conducted. These wedding festivities with relatives and friends lasted a whole week (cf. Judges 14:17), but the entire number of what was called "the days of the marriage" was thirty.

**FROM:** Keith, Khodadad E., *Social Life of a Jew in the Time of Christ*. Church Missions to Jews, London, 1959 [P. 69-82]

(iii) **The Wedding Feast** took place at night, in the house of the bride, but the expenses were defrayed by the bridegroom. Hence, in the account of the marriage in Cana, the manager of the feast made his remarks about the "good wine" to the *bridegroom*, and not to the bride's father (John ii. 10). The male guests were entertained in a room where the bridegroom occupied the place of honour. The ladies were in another room with the bride. A sumptuous repast was provided for all the guests, while music, song and riddles enlivened the marriage feast. Sometime between ten and eleven o'clock, the two best men and a few relatives conducted the bridegroom to the room where the bride and her guests were being entertained. There, over a cup of wine, the seven Nuptial Benedictions were offered and the actual wedding took place. The bridegroom removed the veil off the face of his bride and threw it on his own shoulder. **He** then claimed his bride to take her to his own home. Upon this a procession was formed. Torches and lanterns were lit and the happy couple were conducted to their new home with songs, music and dancing.

**FROM:** Gower, Ralph. *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*. Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1987 and 2000 [P. 52-56]

There were several important parts to the wedding itself. The wedding was essentially nonreligious, apart from a blessing that was pronounced over the couple ("Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies," Genesis 24:60). The marriage involved the drawing up of, and the acceptance of, a legal contract. This is still true of a Jewish wedding today. It may shock some Christians to realize that it was not until comparatively recent times that a rabbi or priest was required to be present at a wedding.

The wedding also involved dressing up. The bride was literally adorned like a queen (see Revelation 21:2) She was bathed, and her hair braided with as many precious stones as the family possessed or could borrow (Psalm 45:14-15; Isaiah 61:10; Ezekiel 16:11-12). The girls who had dressed her accompanied her as "companions." The bridegroom too was dressed in finery and jewelry (Isaiah 61:10) and was accompanied by the "friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29). The dressing up for the wedding was so important that it was unforgettable (Jeremiah 2:32). The bride and groom looked like and acted like a king and queen.

Another important element of the wedding was the procession at the end of the day. The bridegroom set out from his home to fetch his bride from her parents' home. At this point the bride was wearing a veil. At some point the veil was taken off and laid on the shoulder of the bridegroom, and the declaration was made, "The government shall be upon his shoulder." A procession then set out from the bride's home to the couple's new home, and the dark roadway would be lit with oil lamps held by wedding guests. In the story told by Jesus, the bride and groom were later than expected so the oil in the lamps began to run low. Only those who had brought a reserve flask of oil were able to refill their lamps and welcome the bride and groom (see Matthew 25:1-13, esp. vv. 8-9). There was singing and music along the

way (Jeremiah 16:9), and some- times the bride herself would join in the dance (Song of Songs 6:13).

**FROM:** Vamosh, Miriam Feinberg. *Women at the Time of the Bible*. Palphot, Ltd., Hertzlia, Israel, 2007 [P. 26]

### The Wedding Ceremony

A wedding ceremony *per se* is not found in the Bible. However, several elements of such a ceremony can be deduced from various passages, such as the farewell song to Rebekah (Gen. 24:60). Hosea 2:19 is believed to be a formula for a marriage ceremony because of the three-fold repetition of the phrase "I will betroth you..." In Ezekiel 16:8, the spreading of the garment is part of a tripartite "ceremony," the other two parts consisting of an oath, and the entering of a covenant. An oath as part of a ceremony is also hinted at in Malachi 2:14 and Proverbs 2:17. Some scholars believe that Psalm 45, subtitled "a wedding song," was composed for the wedding of a monarch, perhaps David and Maacah, because of references to a king (45:1) and princesses (45:9). However ancient wedding-day customs throughout the region treat the couple like royalty; the employment of a "bard," to describe in complex verse and song the attributes of bride and groom, is common in traditional Arab weddings to this day. This psalm reveals ancient customs, such as the bringing of weapons to the wedding, the escorting of the bride by her friends, and the expression of wishes for a fruitful union.

**FROM:** Vaux, Roland de. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. 1997 [P. 34]

The bride, escorted by her companions (Ps. 4 :15), was conducted to the home of the bridegroom (Ps. 45: 16; cf. Gen. 24: 67). Love songs were sung in praise of the bridal pair (Jr 16: 9), examples of which survive in Ps 45 and in the Song of Songs, whether we interpret them literally or allegorically.

The Arabs of Palestine and Syria have preserved similar customs—the procession, the wedding songs and the veiling of the bride. Sometimes, during the procession, a sword is carried by the bride or in front of her, and sometimes she performs the dance of the saber, advancing and retiring before it. Some have compared this with the dance of the Shulamite in Ct 7: 1. In some tribes the bride pretends to escape from the bridegroom, and **he has to make a show of capturing her by force. It has been suggested that these games are a survival of marriage by abduction; the story of the men of Benjamin and the girls who danced in the vineyards of Shiloh would be an example from the Old Testament** (Judges 21: 19-23). There seems to be little foundation for these comparisons. The brandishing of the sword is symbolic: it cuts away bad luck and drives off evil spirits. There is nothing to suggest that the Shulamite's dance was a saber-dance, and the incident at Shiloh is explained by exceptional circumstances which are recorded in the story.

Next came a great feast (Gen. 29: 22; Judges 14: 10; Tb 7: 14). In these three passages the feast took place at the home of the bride's parents, but the circumstances were exceptional. **As a general rule it was certainly given at the bridegroom's house (cf. Mt 22: 2). The feast normally lasted seven days** (Gn 29: 27; Jg 14: 12) and could even be prolonged for two weeks (Tb 8: 20; 10: 7). But the marriage was consummated on the first night (Gn 29: 23; Tb 8: 1). The blood-stained linen of this nuptial night was preserved; it proved the bride's virginity and would be evidence if she were slandered by her husband (Dt 22: 13-21). The same naive custom still obtains in Palestine and other Moslem countries.

## **THE BRIDE AND THE KINGDOM**

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**FROM:** Gross, David C. & Esther R. *Under the Wedding Canopy: Love and Marriage in Judaism*. Hippocrene Books, New York, 1996 [P. 96]

...At the conclusion of the festive wedding meal, an extended grace is recited, containing the same seven bridal blessings that were recited under the canopy.

**FROM:** Gross, David C. & Esther R. *Under the Wedding Canopy: Love and Marriage in Judaism*. Hippocrene Books, New York, 1996 [P. 44-45]

Toward the end of the wedding ceremony, the last blessing offered to the newly married couple voices the hope that "there will always be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem voices of joy and gladness, voices of the bride and groom, the joyous voices of those joined in marriage under the bridal canopy, the voices of young people feasting and singing."

This final benediction of the traditional seven blessings reflects the impassioned hopes of the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied a new age for the Jewish people, when they would return from exile and redeem the country that had been laid waste.

There is a hint of the messianic era in every Jewish wedding ceremony, which regards the land of Israel as the bride and God Himself as the groom.

A wit once commented that although it is true that a newlywed couple has to experience fusion in their married years, more often than not—at least for a while—there is more confusion than fusion. Some commentators state that every Jewish couple that marries in a Jewish religious ceremony is like Adam and Eve: untested, unknowing, with a whole world waiting for them.

One can say that a Jewish wedding ceremony is like a replay of Jewish history and Jewish teaching. The new couple is connected to ancient days, to Patriarchs and Matriarchs, to hope and prayer. When the couple steps away from the wedding canopy, now married and proclaiming to the world that they are husband and wife, they have established themselves as a new link in the long chain of Jewish history. When the two of them depart for their honeymoon and new life, they are alone of



course, but at the same time they are not alone. They are eternally connected to the Jewish people, past, present and future.

**FROM:** Tverberg, Lois and Spangler, Ann. *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009 [P. 142-143]

Now you can see why Jesus, at their last supper prior to his death, told his disciples to remember him by enjoying a meal together. The bread and the wine would remind them that his sacrifice made it possible for them to have unbroken communion with God and with each other.

Many groups in Jesus' day had strict rules governing table fellowship. Pharisees would only eat with *haverim* ("friends" who observed their strict rules). Essenes, who would only dine with other Essenes, had purity laws that made the Pharisees look lax by comparison. The early church, however, took the opposite approach, adopting the attitude Jesus had modeled. In fact, their table fellowship quickly expanded to include Gentiles. To many, the idea that God would invite Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ to eat together at his table was shocking. It showed a grace and love beyond comprehension.

The early Christians were beginning to live out the fulfillment of the ancient promise spoken in Isaiah:

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6- 8)

Once again, like the sacred gathering of the elders on Mount Sinai, Scripture depicts a meal on a mountaintop. But this time it is the meal to end all meals, the greatest of all banquets, to be held at the end of time. Not only will it be safe for human beings to feast in God's presence; no one invited to the meal will ever have to come down from the mountaintop. Instead, we will dwell with God forever. Furthermore, the guest list will include more than just the elders of Israel. Everyone who belongs to God will come to celebrate the feast!

No wonder the New Testament pictures heaven as a wedding feast—the celebration of the union of the Lamb of God with his people. In the meantime, every time we celebrate Communion, not only can we enjoy unbroken fellowship with God and others, we can also get a tiny foretaste of the feast to come.

### **WEDDING FEAST OF THE LAMB (Revelation 19)**

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**FROM:** Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2). Victor Books, [P. 974–975]

## Revelation 19

In Scripture, marriage is often used to describe the relationship of saints to God. In the Old Testament Israel is pictured, as in Hosea, as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh who is destined to be restored in the future kingdom. In the New Testament, marriage is also used to describe the relationship between Christ and the church, but the illustration contrasts with the Old Testament, for the church is regarded as a virgin bride waiting the coming of her heavenly bridegroom (2 Cor. 11:2).

The **fine linen** with which the bride will be adorned is explained as representing **the righteous acts of the saints** (Rev. 19:8). (In the OT the high priest's clothing included linen: Ex. 28:42; Lev. 6:10; 16:4, 23, 32.) While some think this refers to the fact that the saints are justified by faith, the plural expression "the righteous acts" seems to refer to the righteous deeds wrought by the saints through the grace of God. Though all this has been made possible by the grace of God, the emphasis here seems to be on the works of the bride rather than on her standing as one who has been justified by faith.

One of the false interpretations that has plagued the church is the concept that God treats all saints exactly alike. Instead, a literal interpretation of the Bible distinguishes different groups of saints, and here the bride is distinguished from those who are invited to the wedding supper. Instead of treating all alike, God indeed has a program for Israel as a nation and also for those in Israel who are saved. He also has a program for Gentiles in the Old Testament who come to faith in God. And in the New Testament He has a program for the church as still a different group of saints. Again in the Book of Revelation the Tribulation saints are distinguished from other previous groups. It is not so much a question of difference in blessings as it is that God has a program designed for each group of saints which corresponds to their particular relationship to His overall program. Here the church, described as a bride, will be attended by angels and by saints who are distinct from the bride...

Expositors have debated whether the wedding will be in heaven or on earth. While the difference is not that important, the interpretive problem can be resolved by comparing the wedding described here to weddings in the first century. A wedding normally included these stages: (1) the legal consummation of the marriage by the parents of the bride and of the groom, with the payment of the dowry; (2) the bridegroom coming to claim his bride (as illustrated in Matt. 25:1–13 in the familiar Parable of the 10 Virgins); (3) the wedding supper (as illustrated in John 2:1–11) which was a several-day feast following the previous phase of the wedding.

In Revelation 19:9 "the wedding supper" is phase 3. And the announcement coincides with the second coming of Christ. It would seem, therefore, that the wedding supper has not yet been observed. In fulfilling the symbol, Christ is completing phase 1 in the Church Age as individuals are saved. Phase 2 will be accomplished at the Rapture of the church, when Christ takes His bride to heaven,

the Father's house (John 14:1-3). Accordingly, it would seem that the beginning of the Millennium itself will fulfill the symbolism of the wedding supper (*gamos*). **It is also significant that the use of the word "bride" in 19:7 (*gynē*, lit., "wife,") implies that phase 2 of the wedding will have been completed and that all that remains is the feast itself.** (The word commonly used for "bride" is *nymphē*; cf. John 3:29; Rev. 18:23; 21:2, 9; 22:17.).

## WEDDING DANCE

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**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Aramaic Word Study—The Wedding Dance—Chadotha* חדוטה, Devotional, April 25, 2023

**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2023/04/auto-draft-11/>

**Hebrews 12:2: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."**

God's Word today. There were other things I needed to do but I just felt compelled to sit down and study a passage of Scripture. After about three hours of searching for a particular Scripture to study, I began to despair that I was wasting a lot of valuable time as I just could not feel that quickening of my spirit as I examined dozens of Scripture passages. But I just felt strongly that I must study something and in desperation, I cried out to God: "There are a half dozen tasks that are left undone that I need to attend to if I have to live in this world. If you want me to study something in your Word you have to show me, otherwise, I cannot sit here wasting time that I could use getting these tasks accomplished." And then an old song that I have not heard for years came to my mind and lips. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face and the things of the world will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." – Helen H. Lemmel. I was then led to Hebrews 12:2.

I have heard this verse many times throughout my life but I never really meditated on it. I went right to my Aramaic Bible. I knew the Greek had a very interesting insight but I wondered if the Aramaic would give me an ever greater depth of understanding. You see, in Greek the word for looking is *aphorontes* from the root word *aphorao* which has the idea of looking away from everything else to focus your gaze upon one thing. The Aramaic word is *nachor* from the root word *chor* which is reflexive and has the idea of making oneself transparent. It is a word that you would use when a bride and groom look upon each other when sharing their wedding vows. They are committing themselves, their lives, their whole being to each other for the rest of their lives, they are promising to forsake all others, to always be there for each other, to open their hearts to each other and bare no secrets from each other. A single English word for *chor* would be transparency. It is to look at each other with transparency.

Looking unto Jesus is not just looking at him but making yourself transparent to Him as he makes Himself transparent with you. It is like a bride and groom looking at each other as they commit themselves to each other for the rest of their lives. At that moment they become transparent, sharing something with each that they will not share with anyone else in the world.

The wedding motif actually carries on through this entire verse. Jesus endured the cross and the shame associated with the cross for the joy that would result from it. He did it not only for us but for the joy that the sacrifice would bring to Him. Just as the bride and groom sacrifice their personal lives and their singleness for the joy of being together. Yet, that word joy is an amazing word to use here in this passage. It is the word *chadotha* in the Aramaic. This is the word used for the joyful dancing at a wedding. This again carries that wedding motif. The vows have been said as we and Jesus gaze at each other sharing our vows. We tell Jesus that we are giving Him our lives and our hearts and now we enter that wedding feast where there is a wedding dance. In the traditional wedding dance couples line up opposite each other. Depending on the culture and whether traditional orthodox or not either men and women face each other or members of the same sex face each other, the symbolism still remains the same. They then move toward each other and then back away, always *chor*, gazing at each other, never taking the eyes off each other. Each time they back away, they move back to each other only this time drawing closer to each other. This is to declare that the bride and groom will have times when they will struggle in their marriage and they will momentarily separate from each other, but as they look *chor* or gaze at each other they will be drawn back to each other only this time a little closer. This is what the Apostle Paul is describing in this wedding motif that we will dance this wedding dance. It is a joyful time of expressing our commitment with Jesus and He with us. Even though we may sin and draw away from Jesus, He will always keep His gaze on us and we will be drawn back to Him only each time we return we will be drawn closer to Him. Jesus will use our human frailties that the enemy would seek to use to draw us away from Him only Jesus will use it to bring us closer to Him.

So we have the wedding ceremony where we gaze at Jesus in transparency leading us to the joy of the wedding dance and now the groom takes his place at the right hand of the Father at his *daqurasih* in Aramaic from the root word *quras* which is a chamber with an upholster chair or a divan, what we call a love seat, that is a chair made for two people to sit closely together. It could also be a bedroom and the way the syntax word suggest we could read this as the bedroom in His Father's house. This is where the groom Jesus would take us His bride to consummate our marriage to Him.

**So next time you hear this verse, stop and consider that the Apostle Paul might be sharing something even more intimate than we the surface understanding of this verse indicates. It is also speaking of our marriage relationship to Jesus and the intimacy that He longs so much to have with us that he endured the suffering of the cross in order to obtain it. [Emphasis in the original]**

## **THE RAPTURE AND THE JEWISH WEDDING** (Additional references to The Wedding of the Lamb)

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**FROM:** Rose, Tov, *Jesus in the Jewish Wedding: Messianic Fulfillment in the Bible & Tradition*, Tov Rose, 2018 [P. 65-73]

### **The Rapture and the Jewish Wedding?**

There were three groups of people present at every Jewish wedding: the groom, the bride and the invited guests. There will also be three groups of people involved in the marriage of the Lamb.

- The Groom: This is Jesus, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:23-27
- The Bride: This is the Church, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Eph. 5:22-32, Revelation 21:9-10
- The Guests: Those saved after the Rapture, Matthew 25:1-10

### **Three Aspects of a Jewish Wedding**

(If you accept the Pre-Trib Rapture view)

There were also 3 aspects of every Jewish wedding. The same is true with the marriage of the Lamb.

- The Wedding Contract (Betrothal) This is when a person is saved by accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. (2 Corinthians 11:2)
- The Wedding Ceremony (Groom receives Bride) This is the Rapture. John 14:2-3 and Revelation 19:7 literally reads, "The marriage of the Lamb came and His wife prepared herself." The wedding already occurred in heaven at the Rapture, and now the Lamb and the Church are about to return to earth for the wedding feast. This parallels what Jesus
- said in Luke 12:36, "And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding."
- The Wedding Feast (Guests are invited to the celebration) This is the Second Coming. Matthew 25:1-10. "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Revelation 19:9 A bride is not invited to her own wedding! The Church was married to Messiah at the Rapture and the wedding feast will occur on earth after the Second Coming. Those people saved after the Rapture will be invited to participate in the wedding feast.

### **Weddings of Ancient Israel**

#### **A Picture of the Messiah**

What does Scripture mean when it refers to the church as a bride and Jesus as a bridegroom? Is this just flowery language? Is it merely indicating God's love for His people? Understanding ancient Jewish wedding practices makes the meaning of Scripture clear. The wedding is a picture of the covenant Jesus made and reveals His

plans to return for His bride, the church. The people of ancient Israel understood what Jesus was going to do because they understood the model of the wedding. The analogy between a wedding and Messiah and the Church is described in Ephesians 5:31-32, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Messiah and the church." The following overviews the practices of an ancient Jewish betrothal and wedding. In parallel, it shows how Jesus has fulfilled the betrothal portion of the wedding and how He may fulfill the remainder when He comes again for His bride, the church.

### **L Ancient Wedding Practice: Marriage Covenant and Bride Price.**

When a young man desired to marry a young woman in ancient Israel, he would prepare a contract or covenant to present to the young woman and her father at the young woman's home. The contract showed his willingness to provide for the young woman and described the terms under which he would propose marriage. The most important part of the contract was the bride price, the price that the young man was willing to pay to marry the young woman. This payment was to be made to the young woman's father in exchange for his permission to marry. The bride price was generally quite high. Sons were considered to be more valuable than daughters since they were physically more able to share in the work of farming and other heavy labor. The bride price compensated the young woman's family for the cost to raise a daughter and also indicated the love that the young man had for the young woman—the young woman was very valuable to the young man! The young man would go to the young woman's house with the contract and present his offer to the young woman and her father.

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Marriage Covenant and Bride Price**

Jesus came to the home of His bride (Earth) to present His marriage contract. The marriage contract provided by Jesus is the new covenant, which provides for the forgiveness of sins of God's people. Jesus paid the bride price with His life. At the last supper, when breaking bread, He spoke of the price He was paying: "...This is my body given for you..." Luke 22:20. In Hebrews 8:15 it makes clear that Jesus died as the price for the new covenant: "...Messiah is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. Other Scriptures include 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Acts 20:28 and John 3:29. The marriage contract, the new covenant, is described throughout Scripture: "... This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people ...they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah 31:31-34

## **II. Ancient Wedding Practice: The Cup**

If the bride price was agreeable to the young woman's father, the young man would pour a glass of wine for the young woman. If the young woman drank the wine, it would indicate her acceptance of the proposal. At this point, the young man and young woman would be betrothed. Betrothal was legally binding, just like a marriage. The only difference was that the marriage was not yet consummated. A typical betrothal period was 1-2 years. During this time the bride and bridegroom each would be preparing for the marriage and wouldn't see each other.

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: The Cup**

Just as the bridegroom would pour a cup of wine for the bride to drink to seal the marriage contract, so Jesus poured wine for His disciples. His words described the significance of the cup in representing the bride price for the marriage contract: Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." The disciples drank of the cup, thus accepting the contract. Matthew 26:28-29

## **III. Ancient Wedding Practice: Gifts for the Bride**

Next, the bridegroom would present the bride with special gifts. The purpose of these gifts was to show the bridegroom's appreciation of the bride. They were also intended to help her to remember him during the long betrothal period.

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Gifts for the Bride**

The gifts that Jesus gave us are the gifts of the Holy Spirit: We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit 1 John 4: 13. Jesus described this gift in John 14:26: But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

## **IV. Ancient Wedding Practice: Mikveh**

The bride would next partake of a Mikveh, or cleansing bath. Mikveh is the same word used for baptism. To this day in conservative Judaism a bride cannot marry without a Mikveh.

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Mikveh**

The Mikveh, or baptism that Jesus provided for His bride was baptism in the Holy Spirit. On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father

promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. "Acts 1 :4

#### **V. Ancient Wedding Practice: Preparing a Place**

During the betrothal period, the bridegroom would prepare a wedding chamber for the honeymoon. This chamber was typically built in the bridegroom's father's house or on his father's property. The wedding chamber had to be a beautiful place to bring the bride. The bride and groom were to spend seven days there. The wedding chamber had to be built to the groom's father's specifications. The young man could go for his bride only when his father approved. If the bridegroom was asked when the wedding was to be, he might well say "it is not for me to know, only my father knows".

#### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Preparing a Place**

Just as a bridegroom would have told his bride that he would go to prepare a place for her, so Jesus told His disciples: "...In my Father's house are many rooms or mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 13:1-3). In ancient Israel the bridegroom could get his bride only after his father approved.

Similarly, Jesus said: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come (Mark 13:32-33).

#### **VI. Ancient Wedding Practice: A Waiting Bride Consecrated**

While the bridegroom was preparing the wedding chamber, the bride was considered to be consecrated, set apart or "bought with a price". If she went out, she would wear a veil so others would know she was betrothed. During this time she prepared herself for the marriage. She likely had saved money all her life for this time. She would purchase expensive cosmetics and learn to apply them to make herself more beautiful for the bridegroom. She wouldn't know when her groom would come for her, so she always had to be ready. Since bridegrooms typically came for their brides in the middle of the night, to "steal them away" (the groom would often come like a thief in the night, often around the midnight hour), the bride would have to have her lamp and her belongings ready at all times. Her sisters or bridesmaids would also be waiting, keeping their lamps trimmed in anticipation of the late night festivities.

#### **Jesus' Fulfillment: A Waiting Bride Consecrated**

We, God's people, are now consecrated, or set apart, waiting for the return of our bridegroom at The Rapture. We should be spending this time preparing ourselves for Jesus' return. Jesus used a parable of ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom to describe the need to be alert for His return. "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out



to meet the bridegroom... The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are gone out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' "But He replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

### **VII. Ancient Wedding Practice: Bridegroom Comes for His Bride**

When the bridegroom's father deemed the wedding chamber ready, the father would tell the bridegroom that all was ready and to get His bride. The bridegroom would abduct his bride secretly, like a thief at night and take her to the wedding chamber. As the bridegroom approached the bride's home, he would shout and blow the shofar (ram's horn trumpet) so that she had some warning to gather her belongings to take into the wedding chamber. The bridegroom and his friends would come into the bride's house and get the bride and her bridesmaids.

#### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Bridegroom Comes for His Bride**

Just as the bridegroom would come for the bride in the middle of the night, with a shout and the sound of a shofar, so the Lord will come for us. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17

### **VIII. Ancient Wedding Practice: Seven Days in the Wedding Chamber**

The bridegroom would take his bride to the wedding chamber where they would spend seven days. The bridegroom's friend would wait outside the door of the wedding chamber. When the marriage was consummated, the bridegroom would tell his friend through the door, and the friend would announce it to the assembled guests. The guests would celebrate for seven days until the bride and bridegroom emerged from the wedding chamber. At this time the groom would bring his wife out and introduce her to the community.

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Seven Days in the wedding Chamber**

Ancient Jewish eschatology taught that a seven year "time of trouble" would come upon the earth before the coming of the Messiah. During that time of trouble, the righteous would be resurrected and would enter the wedding chamber where they would be protected from the time of trouble. Today that seven-year period is referred to, by Believers, as the Tribulation, and as Birth Pangs by the Jews. After 7 years in Heaven the Groom, Messiah, will bring His wife to Earth and at the time of His Second Coming He will introduce her to the community on Earth.

### **IX. Ancient Wedding Practice: Marriage Supper**

After seven days in the wedding chamber, the bride and bridegroom would emerge and participate in a feast with friends and family. There would be joyous celebrating during this feast. The feast would conclude the wedding celebration.

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Marriage Supper**

As the bride and bridegroom celebrated with a joyous wedding supper, so Jesus and His bride, the church will celebrate the marriage. Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb'". (Revelation 19:6-9)

### **X. Ancient Wedding Practice: Depart for Home**

### **Jesus' Fulfillment: Depart for Home**

Just as the bride and bridegroom left the marriage supper to go to the home that the bridegroom had prepared, so Jesus and His bride will depart for their new home. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes ... One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me,

"Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. From the pattern of the ancient wedding practices, we see that, like the bridegroom of ancient times, Jesus came to the home of His bride for the betrothal, made a covenant

with His bride and sealed it with a glass of wine, paid the bride price with His life and sent His bride gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We, the betrothed (Messiah's Church) currently await the return of our Bridegroom to take us to the wedding chamber (the rapture) to spend seven years (while the tribulation occurs on Earth). We will then celebrate the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and depart with our Bridegroom for our new home, the new Jerusalem. (Revelation 21:1-4)

Messiah Said He Would Build One Church, His Church, And The Gates Of Hell Would Not Prevail Against It. (Matthew 16:18)

## **THE APOSTLE PAUL AND THE RAPTURE**

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**FROM:** Kasdan, Barney, *God's Appointed Customs*. Lederer Books, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore MD, 1996 [P. 62]

The nissuin tradition must have been on the mind of Saul as he wrote to those with questions about Yeshua's return:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a rousing cry, with a call from one of the ruling angels, and with God's shofar: those who died united with the Messiah will be the first to rise; then we who are left still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words (**I Thessalonians 4:16- 18**).

**This prophetic event, commonly called the "rapture" (the catching up of believers), is perfectly illustrated within the Jewish wedding ceremony. As those betrothed to Yeshua, his followers await the start of the second part of the huppah tradition. The sheva h'rakhot ("seven blessings") mark the completion of the marriage.**

At the close of the nissuin, there will be a jubilant celebration. At the end of the wedding feast, the Messiah will return to Jerusalem with his bride and establish his one-thousand-year earthly kingdom (see Revelation 20:4). The wedding party will continue in Jerusalem, as the rest of the resurrected believers from every age will join in the festivities...

**FROM:** Arnold, Clinton E. (2011-03-15). *Romans to Philemon: Volume Three, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition [P. 13823-13831]

To meet the Lord in the air (4:17b). The Greek word used here, *apantesis*, which lies behind the English translation "to meet," was a technical term in the ancient world. It referred to the meeting of a delegation of citizens from a city with an arriving dignitary in order to accord that visitor proper respect and honor by escorting him back to their city. Such processions of leading citizens going out to welcome and accompany a visiting ruler or official back to the city were common in Hellenistic times. **The term *apantesis* has this same sense in its two other New Testament**

**occurrences: The wise virgins with their oil-filled lamps meet the bridegroom and escort him back to the banquet** (Matt. 25:6); the Christians in Rome walk south to meet Paul on his prison journey and escort him back to the capital city (Acts 28:15). The picture that Paul presents, therefore, is of the church—consisting of both deceased (but now resurrected) and living Christians—meeting the descending Christ in the air and then escorting him back to earth.

**Comment:** The doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead, according to the 'Apostle's Creed', is considered essential doctrine. Recently it has become increasingly popular to declare that the rapture (or whatever one may call it) was invented in the 19th century by Darby and others, and that it did not exist as a belief until recent years. Unfortunately, this development is quite shortsighted and uninformed. An error that troubled the Thessalonian and Corinthian churches was a rumor that the Resurrection of the Dead as an end-times event had already happened, and that the church was stranded in a time of wrath. Their reasoning was simple—they had put their hope in the Resurrection of the Dead as a great upcoming event—but what would happen to them and their bodies if they were alive when that event occurred? This kindled the corrective and encouraging nature of Paul's comments in 1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor. 15. The issue at hand was the Resurrection of the Dead—but the *harpazo* was the contingency if one were alive when it took place. Paul reminded them that the Resurrection of the Dead had not yet happened and would not occur without directly involving them. As the Church, they were not facing, nor were they destined to endure, the Wrath to Come. Knowledge and anticipation of the *harpazo*/rapture is as old as the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead. I also found the final paragraph of the Didache enlightening, even though it is not Scripture.

**FROM:** *The Didache* [Modern Translation, Chapter 16]

Chapter 16. **Watchfulness; the Coming of the Lord.** Watch for your life's sake. **Let not your lamps be quenched**, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, **for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come.** But come together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you are not made perfect in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but those who endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth: first, the sign of an outspreading in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet. And third, the resurrection of the dead—yet not of all, but as it is said: "The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him." Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.

## MISCELLANEOUS

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**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Hebrew Word Study—Bridegroom—Katan* כַּתָּן, Devotional, Aug. 18, 2018,

**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2018/08/12743/>

Isaiah 62:5b: “And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” KJV

The word bridegroom here is *katan* which is another word for marriage. This word for marriage has the idea of joining together in complete truth and honesty. When God as the bridegroom is married to us, He is joined to us in complete truth. They that worship God must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.” John 4:24.

Ok, that is God’s side of the deal, he is the bridegroom, but what are we as the bride or *kallah*. In its Semitic root, the word *kallah* has a double lamed which means destruction and completion. In marriage your life as a single person is destroyed, no longer is it “my things” It is now “our things.” Yet, being joined with another person in a marriage is really a completion of the way God designed us. I know this sort of flies in the face of our modern thinking as we live a world where you look out for number one. As God said, “the two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Looking out for number one involves two people, but hey, I’m just the messenger.

I was recently reading in the Zohar and ran across a rather interesting thought. The sages teach that there are three types of prayer. There is the prayer of a child to a parent. That seems to fit the majority of us. “O God, please give me...”

Then there is a more mature prayer the wife to the husband. How can I help you serve you? There is much more on this but you have heard the sermons and read the books on what it means to be the bride of Christ. So will not rehash something you are familiar with.

Perhaps we have matured beyond a child always asking for things and advanced to that of a bride, seeking to serve God but maybe it is time to be the *katan*, the bridegroom, and seek to protect the tender heart of God.

However, there is a third way to pray to God and that is we as a husband and God as the wife. I know that sounds a bit creepy but consider. A husband wishes to protect his wife’s feelings, her heart. He does not want to offend her or wound her heart. God not only made Himself vulnerable coming to earth in human flesh to experience our suffering in the flesh, but He has also made Himself vulnerable by giving us His heart when we give Him ours.

Just as we can give our hearts to someone and if that person betrays us, ignores us, does not consider our feelings, only uses our love to get what they want they can deeply wound us, hurt us, and break our hearts. God has made Himself just as vulnerable to us, we can deeply wound Him, hurt Him, and break His heart if we just demand things from Him without considering His desires, His pleasure. We can break His heart if we seek other gods to meet our needs.

**FROM:** Vander Laan, Ray: The 10 commandments were like wedding vows: *katava* [ketuba]  
**LINK:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHHFjw7nDX0>

**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Hebrew Word Study—And He Gave to Moses His Bride*. Devotional, Feb. 10, 2014 [The 10 Commandments as God's ketubah]  
**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2014/02/word-study-gave-moses-bride/>

Hebrew Word Study – As His Bride – Kekalotho – Kap Kap Lamed Tav Vav

**Exodus 31:18:** “And he gave unto Moses when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.”

I was reading this passage in the Midrash Rabbah and discovered something I had not even noticed when I read this in my Hebrew Bible. The words when he had made an end of communing with him is just one word in Hebrew, *kekalotho*. The NIV says, “When the Lord finished speaking to Moses.” This is identical to the rendering by the New Living Bible which is a paraphrase. Yet, we consider the NIV to be a translation and not a paraphrase, yet this rendering from *kekalotho* is just as much a paraphrase (translator's opinion) as is the Living Bible.

The Midrash Rabbah puts an entirely different spin on this word *kekalotho* which really puts it into its proper context. Yes, see Moses has been with God now for almost a whole month, speaking with God face to face as a man would speak with a friend (Exodus 33:11). The word used for face is *pani* which is more than just face to face. God does not have a face, the word *pani* when used with God is a reference to His presence, His light, and His entire being. Literally, the entire being of God was *el* (unto) Moses and the presence or entire being of Moses was unto God. Then it adds, as a man would speak to a friend. The word for speak is *debar* [Aramaic: *davar*]. Translators simply render the word *dabar* and *amar* as speak and never really make a difference between the two words, but there is a significant difference. *Amar* is just simply speaking, sharing chit-chat, talking about the weather, how was your day, etc. It is everyday normal speaking. *Dabar*, however, is the speaking of a husband to a wife, a friend to a friend—it is sharing one's heart with another.

When Moses was on the mountaintop with God, he was not some guru in a lotus position contemplating his navel. He was directly interacting with God, sharing his heart with God as God would share His heart with Moses. They were sharing their hearts with each other as friends. The word friend here is *ra'ah* which is a consuming passion. The rendering of the English word friend is not your best word in today's English. Today we throw around the word friend like a worn-out baseball. We go on Facebook and see how many friends we have. We become friends with someone on Facebook with just a click of the mouse and end that friendship just as easily. No, we cannot use the English word friend anymore for *ra'ah*. The word friend in English has changed so much over the last four hundred years since the KJV was translated, so much so that we are now scrambling to find new words to fit

the context of the void lost in the modern use of the word friend. Today we call someone bro, best bud, or BBF.

Now when Moses and God spoke to each other as ra'ah's they were not speaking as friends as we know friends today, but as beloved as one who was their consuming passion, as a mother cooing to her baby and the little baby giggling and smiling at her, as two lovers sitting on a beach watching the moon rising thinking of nothing but each other, sharing their passion. That is why the Bible says, And He gave unto Moses kekalotho. You see the word kekalotho comes from the Semitic root word kalah, with a prepositional Kap as a prefix and a personal pronoun as a suffix which literally means as His bride. He did not give the ten commandments to Moses when he finished speaking to him, come on, He gave the ten commandments to Moses as His bride.

Such an unfortunate word used in English, commandments. God did not consummate his marriage with Moses by giving him ten orders to follow, cook dinner, wash his clothes, keep his house, etc. God chose his words very carefully here to show us clearly what the Ten Commandments were all about. He did this by calling Moses His bride. Sure, the word kalah also means finished or complete. Jewish literature clearly teaches that man is not kalah (complete) until he gets married then he is kalah (complete). The word kalah means both complete and bride because a bride makes a man complete. On their wedding night, a bride will often ask her new husband what she can do to show how much she loves him. The new husband will then reveal his heart to his new bride and reveal some of his deep longings and desires. Perhaps he will tell her not to have any other husband but him. Maybe he will ask that she never uses his name in vain or in a derogatory manner. Perhaps he will ask her to have one day during the week that will be reserved for just their selves. He will ask that she not commit adultery, or bear false witness, that is lying to him. Sure, on their wedding night, both will form a covenant between them with a list of rules that they will follow, rules that will keep declaring their undying love for each other.

That is why when Moses descended from the mountain God gave to Moses, kekalotho, His bride, a list of things he could do to declare his undying love for God, things that were very precious to the heart of God and if you truly love Him you will follow this list very closely. We call them the Ten Commandments, but they are really ten ways to express your love for God.

**FROM:** Chaim Ben Torah, *Aramaic Word Study—Be Joyful Always*. Devotional, Jan 12, 2024

**LINK:** <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2024/01/aramaic-word-study-be-joyful-always-chavav-chada-kulzevan/>

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice evermore. (KJV)

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice always, (NIV)

I Thessalonians 5:16: Always be joyful. (NLT)

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice at all times. (Berean Study Bible)

I Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice always and delight in your faith (Amplified Bible)

I suppose it is safe to say that all modern English Translations of the Bible pretty well walk in lockstep with each other. We are to always be joyful. That is not an easy task, especially in these days.

I suppose we should understand what Paul meant by rejoicing. In English, Webster says that rejoicing is a great joy; jubilation. So, what more can we say, we all know what it means to rejoice but to do it always is troubling. Paul did not put this in the Bible to take up space, he must have meant it. In Greek, the word is *chairete* which simply means to *be glad*.

It is in the Aramaic where we get some kind of picture. Like Hebrew, Aramaic is a picturesque language, and understanding of the ancient world, at least what the ancients thought when they heard a word, can best be described in pictures. So, what is the picture of this word in Aramaic? The word is *chada'* which means to rejoice and be glad, but this word is usually associated with something else. **It is associated with a bridal dance.** Not the *word* for a bridal dance, but the *joy* of a bridal dance.

You never hear of a *groom* dance. I guess in this woke generation the groom should be getting equal billing but traditionally, the focus is the bride dancing with her father and brothers. Everyone is always gushing over the bride wanting to dance with her. Even during the ceremony, the groom sneaks up to the front and no one stands or goes *ooh* and *ahh*, no one really notices him. All attention is turned to the rear and all stand when the organist strikes up the chord for the bridal march to ooh and ahh for the bride. Ah, the bride, she's the star of the show, the poor groom seems to be there just to fill in a space.

I am not sure why it is the bride that is showcased in Western weddings. I could not find anything on the internet to explain why the groom is almost an afterthought in a wedding. There is a universal opinion that it should not be that way and that the groom should be just as celebrated as the bride, but the bride still gets all the glory and no one cares to explain why. I guess that many cultures in ancient times treated a woman as property and the wedding was a legal procedure to seal a contract between the bride's father and the groom and the bride was adorned and made as beautiful as possible for the groom to show off his new possession, sort of like an auto dealer detailing a new car so the new owner can drive it around and show off his new acquisition.

But to get back on topic, when Paul says to rejoice what is going through the minds of the people of his day, if they heard this in Aramaic, they would hear Paul say to rejoice like it is your wedding day and you are dancing the bridal dance.

A wedding can be a pretty scary event. You are committing yourself to someone for the rest of your life. You are giving up your freedom, you are now going to have to share everything, no more this is mine that is yours, it is now this is ours. Not only that, you have no idea what you are tying your knot to. It is for better or is it going to be for worse, will it be richer or poorer, health or sickness? Yet, you dance *chada'*, a joyful dance because no matter what you will share it with someone you love and



who loves you in return. People mocked the old song that sang: “Love is all you need.” But, really, with Jesus, love is all you need.

Now let’s put this word in its context. Paul tells us we are to rejoice evermore. Evermore in Aramaic is *kulzevan* which is a merchant’s term for buying and selling. You are to rejoice as if you made a good sale or purchase. I believe that this adverb associated with *chada’* for rejoice is painting a picture of a bride rejoicing over having been part of a purchase agreement to be the bride of a man who has promised to love her, at least it was in a Jewish wedding. The bride and groom enter into a covenant to love each other no matter what the future throws at them. This is a picture of our relationship with Jesus. He has paid a tremendous price to make us His bride, he paid with His life.

Not only has He purchased us as His bride, He has promised to love us no matter what life throws at us. He will be there with us through sickness and health, richer or poorer, and for better or worse. Maybe war is in the future, starvation, poor health we do not know but what we do know is that we will not go through it alone, there will be someone who loves us, who will always be there for us and He will be someone that we will love and He will always be longing to receive that love from us.

The bridal dance shows the joy of not just being loved but to have someone who longs for us to love. The human heart longs to be able to say “I love you” and have that person respond in love. Jesus has died to give us that chance to say; “I love you.” He gets just as much joy in hearing us say it as we get in being able and free to say it. We get to say: “I love you” whenever we can.

Of course, if you married Jesus just because He is rich and powerful and can give you whatever you want, then just delete this study, it doesn’t apply to you, you’re just some gold digger.

## **ADDITIONAL TESTIMONIES AND INTERVIEWS**

**FROM:** Pastor Jack Hibbs, *Before the Wrath*. DVD, Ingenuity Films, 2020

“Jesus assembled these Galileans together, and I think there’s a great reason why—the Galileans being present—His disciples—future Apostles—would be spoken to by Christ in the Galilean vernacular...He used words and symbols and analogies and parables for them to understand...”

“The first-century believers had such a clear understanding of what Jesus was saying

“When you think about the Galilean disciples, they knew exactly what He was saying regarding these things—they were familiar things

**FROM:** Amir Tsarfati, Middle Eastern Correspondent and Commentator; President, Behold Israel Ministries. *Before the Wrath*. DVD, Ingenuity Films, 2020

“You see it in the sermon on the mount, speaking to them in ways they could understand—speaking to them about being fisher of men...why would you use that analogy unless you knew that these are fishermen? Everything He said was based on the life that He lived, the culture that He belonged to...”

“...two-thirds of the Gospels took place in a little strip of land by the sea of Galilee... It actually makes no sense if you think about it—most of the Jews didn’t live there, yet two thirds of the Gospel took place right there—so you cannot ignore the culture, the people, the life and the habits of those days...”

“This is exactly why, when He gave them the cup—He actually says, “This is the new covenant in my blood—I’m about to pour out my blood. It’s a promise—we’re going to be together again, and we’re going to mark it by drinking the wine. It’s something important.”

**FROM:** Jan Markel, President, Olive Tree Ministries, *Before the Wrath*. DVD, Ingenuity Films, 2020

[Concerning Second Temple Period wedding customs noted in the New Testament]  
“The parallels to the rapture are incredible—it’s so brilliant!”

**FROM:** Pastor J.D. Farag, *Before the Wrath*. DVD, Ingenuity Films, 2020

“When the groom now presents the cup, she now has the choice as to whether or not she will accept or reject his proposal for marriage”

“In my Arab culture, we eat from the same bread and you drink from the same cup. The thought is that that which is in you is in me—it is a common union—a communion—no longer two but one. When Jesus says—at that Last Supper, “This is my body given for you, broken for you, He’s talking as a bridegroom to His bride. When He says to them, this is the cup of my blood of the new covenant, that’s how they would seal the betrothal in the ancient wedding...”

**FROM:** Q & A session with Jordanian Bedouin tour guide Jihan Al-Rababy, en route from Petra to Madaba (King’s Highway), Jordan, 2015

Tourist’s question to Jihan: Why are there so many unfinished houses in Jordan?  
[The group had observed many large houses, some 4-5 stories high, most of which were in an unfinished condition]

Jihan’s answer stated that in Bedouin culture, when a young man becomes betrothed to his bride, he adds a room onto his father’s family’s house, where, from their wedding day onwards, they will dwell. The unfinished condition of the house constituted an ongoing construction project that would span decades and accommodate a generational family arrangement.

Jihan's comments were immediately followed by my description to the group of a Second Temple Period Levantine wedding [which this entire document addresses], to which she expressed genuine surprise and delight that her cultural traditions were confirmed in John 14: 1-4. Jihan was at that time a seminary student at Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary.

**FROM:** A conversation with the Pastor Nizar Touma of the Church of the Nazarene, Nazareth, Israel, January 2019

As I was about to present a Biblical Dinner (a historical re-creation of the Last Supper), I became quite concerned that the entirely Arab audience would find my data laughable, since they still practice today the greetings, hospitality, table manners, etc., practiced by Jesus and His disciples at the Last Supper (or any gathering for that matter). Pastor Nizar, who was also to be interpreter, told me this would not be a problem and encouraged me to hold back nothing. When I entered the room, I was horrified to see for young Arab men 'reclining' at the table (a truly Biblical position) at the 'seats of honor'— an arrangement that I intended to explain to them as if they knew nothing about their own thousands-year old traditions. My words would be insulting to them, if not utterly clownish. Again, the Pastor encouraged me to be bold—so I began. The surprising result was astonishment from the audience and Pastor both—they practiced daily those ancient traditions, but until that presentation, never noticed them being practiced in the Bible.

The next day, while at lunch with Pastor Nizar and his wife, we entered into a discussion about wedding traditions among the more modernized, westernized Arabs in Israel. Pastor Nizar confirmed betrothal and generational-family household arrangements (doweries, bride-price, future living arrangements—usually with the groom's family). When I pointed to these in the New Testament, he and his wife were surprised—they had read the passages countless times, but through a western lens of spiritual abstractions. They confirmed these traditional procedures as part of their own culture, now aware of the simplicity and vividness of how Jesus cited them to illustrate and simplify his teachings.

**FROM:** Answer to a question to Israeli tour guide Ronnie Cohen, transiting the Samaria (the 'West Bank') near Beit-El, date unknown, from a tourist concerning the rubble of a destroyed house:

Ronnie pointed out that the (formerly) large and luxurious house was razed by the Israelis in retaliation for the lethal actions of a terrorist who was a family member of that household and lived in the house along with his entire generational family. The destruction, it was explained, forcibly divided the large generational family unit—a worst-case scenario for a traditional Arab family—indicating the adherence to ancient household traditions clearly represented throughout the Bible. This further supports the practice of bridegroom-bride-father's house scenario and can be easily verified by a casual conversation with any indigenous Arab.

**Comment:** These accounts testify to the westernization of traditional eastern culture, where biblical traditions are still regularly practiced in the Levant (especially in the Christian communities), but not recognized by westernized Levantine Christians as represented in the Biblical record. Western (Hellenized) thinking and methodology has expanded and permeated theological groups and educational institutions for more than seventeen centuries, causing eastern peoples to intellectually separate their inherently Biblical traditions from the Bible. This duality is the assured result of viewing the Bible—especially the New Testament—through abstractions and Hellenized logic, supplanting the vivid, more concrete lens of a non-Hellenized expression accessible to peasants and illiterate peoples. <sup>5</sup>

### **FURTHER READING REFERENCES**

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**FROM:** Van Geldermalsen, Marguerite, *Married to a Bedouin*. London, UK; Virago Press, 2006, Section: A Bedouin Wedding, P. 22-68

#### **Concerning 20-21<sup>st</sup> century Bedouin wedding customs and similarities to ancient Levantine wedding customs**

1. New name for potential family members; named after honorable, famous people (P. 24-25)
2. Wedding certificate containing bridegroom's name listed with his, his father, grandfather and tribe to legitimize the certificate; same with the bride (P. 38)
3. Bride price paid to her parents (P. 47-48)
4. Divorce procedures (P. 33)
5. Negotiations for the bride and bride-price (P. 47-49)
6. Elaborate wedding dress; decorating it took weeks (p. 58-59)
7. Bride escorted from her father's house to her husband's tent (P. 65-66)
8. Climax of wedding feast and celebration (P. 68)

### **SOME QUESTIONS and ANSWERS**

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**Q:** What is the difference between dowry and bride price?

**A:** *Sometimes none, other times it is distinct, depending on regional, local and familial traditions*

**Q:** Why are there different opinions among scholars concerning the duration of a wedding feast?

**A:** *'Seven days' seems to have been the traditional standard since differentiations were contrasted with 'seven'. It could also vary depending on regional, local and familial traditions, including economic hardship*

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**Note:** Some of the listed authors embrace a rationalist view of the Bible known as Textual Criticism, a position that today rejects the possibility of miracles and of God speaking to people. **I profoundly disagree with this position.** They are included in this bibliography due to their excellent empirical data even though their contextual interpretation of such is questionable at best.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> **FROM:** Fleming, James, Ed.D. *The Life of the Shepherd, Farmer and Village in Biblical Times*. La Grange, GA, USA: Biblical Resources, 2007, Appendix [P. 127-140]

**Comment:** The following endnote is copied here in its entirety. It is a brilliant summary of the thought processes and logic-distinctions of non-Hellenized Second Temple Period Galilean and Perea people—namely, the people to whom Jesus spoke and how He communicated with them in the context of their ancient Levantine logic. This is the basis for understanding Jesus' use of metaphors and parables peculiar to these people, and is the picklock to His didactic use of their own wedding customs.

### **Biblical Theological Background**

The writer of this book has wished to show respect for those interested in ancient history and archaeology through more secular disciplines. However, good scholarship should treat the ancient sources the same whether the research is done by a person from a religious perspective or not. The emphasis of this book, however, also seeks to understand the ways the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth often used the material culture of their day (archaeological artifacts) as metaphors about what they understood God to be like. This appendix seeks to present the philosophical, theological and biblical background of these insights. Rather than hit the reader with this heavy subject at the opening of the book, it seemed more appropriate to include it here in an appendix.

### **Respect Earlier Thinking**

One of the most important disciplines for the student to cultivate when interpreting the Bible is not to read a later way of thinking into an earlier text. This would be entirely unfair to the early writers. We are now living in a time when we know far more about the way ancient people thought in biblical times. An interesting course on the history of ideas is offered on this subject at many universities in their philosophy departments.

One of many examples of later thinking relates to the study of the unconscious mind. Many people presuppose that before the advent of modern psychology people had postulated the notion of the subconscious mind. Today they read into ancient documents, perhaps without realizing it, an understanding that would not have been the way people thought in antiquity. There is no evidence that ancient people knew of the subconscious mind.

Perhaps the most common mistake in biblical studies is reading a (later) Greco-Roman way of thinking into the (earlier) Hebrew way of thinking. Most primitive areas of the world better understand the Hebrew Bible than do developed Western societies. This is because most cultures in the world think functionally. They think in terms of what something does.

Very few ancient cultures and very few primitive societies today think metaphysically. The Bible is not a metaphysical book. People raised in Western culture think metaphysically. They read metaphysical thinking into the mind of the biblical writer. Some have observed this to be "murdering" the intended meaning of the text. One should let the text speak in its own categories of thought, and then think how to communicate the functional ideas to a society that often thinks metaphysically.



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A common mistake many Protestants are more likely to make relates to the long period of time between the Old and New Testament, known as the Intertestamental Period. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians are less likely to neglect this period because their scriptures include the Intertestamental literature. Many things changed in the way people expressed themselves between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament periods. There were important cultural changes in the Babylonian, Persian and Greek Periods.

### **Function and Image**

The basic change was between function and image. Western cultures can be illustrated as a river that has two streams of origin. One stream is Judeo-Christian while the other is Greco-Roman. One distinction that characterizes Western Civilization is that it is the union of the Judeo-Christian heritage and the Greco-Roman heritage. We need to understand that these two streams have quite different ways of thinking. To understand this distinction is a task of this book. Amazing archaeological discoveries and their reconstructions at the Explorations in Antiquity Center will help us with this task.

Generally, the Judeo-Christian world thought in terms of function. *What does something do?* The Greco-Roman world thought in terms of image. *What does it look like?* The reader may have heard someone say, "I wonder what Jesus looked like?" The ancient Judeo-Christian mind did not focus on how anything or anyone looked. Modern Western societies are visual cultures. One of the first things that comes to our minds is what something looks like. We find ourselves trying to visualize in an ancient document the appearance of a structure, a gate, a house, a city, or a temple.

Most scholars today agree that there is not one truly "Western" description in the entire Bible. Rudolph Bultmann, for example, believed there was only one Western description in the Bible--the statue in the Book of Daniel 2:31-45. You may recall different parts of the statue were described as made of different metals. In Bultman's opinion, Daniel was a Second Century B.C.E. document, written after the Greek conquest, so the Greek visual description was less problematic.

Greek culture described how things looked. It would be incorrect, however, to think that the "description's" purpose was to simply convey what the statue looked like. Each of the parts of the statute stood for a different conquering nation. The statue's purpose was far more meaningful than a description itself.

There are many places in the Bible where the reader may believe Western descriptions are evident, but they are not. One such place is several chapters of what seems to be endless descriptions of the various parts of the Tabernacle (Ex 26) or Temple (I Kings 6:14-7:50). If, however, someone wants to know what the Tabernacle or Temple looked like, they should never consult more than one Bible dictionary for a picture. If you look in two Bible dictionaries, you will find there are three different pictures!

Descriptive words were not meant to convey structure and form. They had a much deeper meaning. Did you know that all numbers in Hebrew are actually letters and can have a double meaning because they often also spell a word? Many colors also have a symbolic meaning.

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When we say "biblical imagery," the word image might convey how something Quick view: looks. Whereas, in the ancient mind, what things do and what they are for is basic to "biblical imagery." For the Western mind, The Statue imagery is a photo image of what something in Daniel looks like. It is true that what something looks like may help us understand what it does. However, the purpose of the ancient writer was not to simply convey what something looked like.

### **Appearance in Greek Culture**

What aspects of culture were new in the Greek Period? Important new developments were the Greek language, the Greek pantheon of deities and Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy was metaphysical. It described the gods within the gods' own world "above." The definition of metaphysical is beyond or above the physical world.

The Greeks postulated what the gods were like high above within the worlds of the gods. On the other hand, the Bible described God within our world. God was a revelatory God.

Most important for the theme of our descriptions discussions is that the Greeks stressed how something looked; appearance, image, structure, and form were important. In their art and architecture, for example, things needed to look pleasing to the eyes. The Greeks wanted nice lines and realistic statuary that looked beautiful. To the Greeks, a perfectly square building seemed visually boring. They wanted structures that were a certain number of columns long by a different certain number of columns wide, which would present a pleasing shape.

The Greeks understood the notion of perspective. If the columns were tapered inward, they would appear to look higher. Did you know that the Parthenon in Athens has no two parallel lines in its construction? All of the columns in the Parthenon lean slightly toward the center of the building. Theoretically, they would all meet at a point several miles in the sky above the building. Without this slight inward slant, they would appear to slightly lean outward. Even the floor is slightly higher in the middle of the building than at its ends. Had it been made exactly horizontal, it would appear like it was slightly sagging in the middle. How something looked was very important to the Greeks.

### **Function in Hebrew Culture**

The biblical mind did not visualize how something looked in terms of image, structure and form. In general, the biblical mind was more concerned with what something does. One of the best illustrations we can give to demonstrate that the biblical mind did not think in terms of how something looked is this love poem from the Song of Solomon, chapters 4-7:

*How beautiful you are, my love...  
Your eyes are doves behind your veil.  
Your hair is like a flock of goats...  
Your temples are like...pomegranate...  
Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus.  
Your teeth are Like a flock of lambs...  
Honey and milk are under your tongue,  
Your lips are like a crimson thread,  
Your neck is like the tower of David... on it hanging a thousand shields*

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*Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle feeding in the lilies...  
Your belly is like a heap of wheat.  
You are altogether beautiful, my Love; there is no flaw in you.*

If we understand this poem as a Western description, the woman might look something like this drawing, pictured at right, adapted from the Wittenberg Door magazine!

The modern reader had better hope this poem was not a description of her appearance--for either the lover or the lovee's sake! What did this kind of "description of the "true love" mean? Remember that we need to move beyond what something looked like to its function—what it did. Many of these associations are too ancient and obscure to fully understand today. But perhaps we can make a few suggestions.

When the poem's author likened his love's neck to the tower of David, it may have had two meanings. If the tower of David was a tall, slender tower, the reference may have been to her grace and poise; meaning when she walked, she held her head up high. On the other hand, if the tower of David was a squat but very strong tower, it may have meant that she could really haul water! Because of the many seeds in a pomegranate, you could say one had a pomegranate mind, meaning it was full of beautiful, sweet ideas. The eyes like doves may have been associated with the bird's function as a symbol of innocence, appropriate for a sacrifice. Perhaps she had innocent eyes. The tongue of milk and honey may be more of a reference to her words than taste. Guesses on the functional associations of other parts of this poem are probably too speculative. But we might summarize by saying this poem happily celebrates more what his love does than what she looks like.

When one reads a text in the Bible, or other ancient document, that seems to be describing what something might look like, a warning light should begin to flash. Slow down, the text probably has a deeper meaning related to function rather than appearance. In the "descriptions" of the Tabernacle, every color stands for something. The dimensions have deeper meanings because numbers stand for something. To have something with a dimension of seven or divisions thereof may be a perfect dimension. To have three repetitions probably means continually. There is something more meaningful in the "description" than just what it looks like. Again, what it looks like is not important to the biblical mind. What it does is more important.

When someone is described in the Bible, the purpose was for the reader to be able to understand something in the narrative. Its purpose was not just to let the reader know what they looked like. For example, we need to know that Absalom had a big head of unkept, wild hair. How did Absalom die? He died by riding under a branch of a tree and getting his hair caught, thus hanging himself.

To know that David was short and skinny while Saul was tall and big helps the reader to understand the David and Goliath story. King Saul was described as standing head and shoulders above the Israelites. He was chosen as the leader because of his stature. The prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem to ask Jesse to line up his sons because among them would be the new king of Israel. Jesse brought out his big sons, who may have looked like they were on steroids, (I Samuel 16:6 ff).

"When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord. " But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the

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height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see: they look on the outward appearance. but the Lord looks on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one. Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one. Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all of your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep. And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here. He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah."

David was the youngest son who seems, from this and other texts, to have been a "sawed off little squirt" who could not be out in the sun too long because he freckled easily. The difference between the Hebrew culture and the Greek culture was beautifully summarized in the text: "*The Lord does not see as mortals see. They look on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart.*"

This verse epitomizes the tension we feel living in Western culture which stresses appearance and with Judeo-Christian values which stress virtues within the heart.

The book "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek" by Thorlief Bowman, published in 1960, was one of the first modern books on theology that tried to present the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek mind. James Barr wrote a book in 1961 which serves as a corrective to Bowman's work entitled, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. Bowman had made the mistake of thinking that the syntax of the language, (differences in structure between the Hebrew and Greek languages) also illustrated his point. Barr rightly pointed out that any language could use words that indicate either metaphysical or functional thought.

### **God is Like What God Does**

Traditionally there are three approaches to understanding what God is like. Let us examine them. The first is the discovery approach, which could be illustrated thus:

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The arrow on the diagram goes from left to right along the human plain.

The second is the philosophical approach, which postulates ideas [vertical *ascending* arrow image] from the human level (the arrows point up, figuratively) to what the divine is like. Adjectives are used to describe God's world within itself.

The third approach is the one found in the Bible. The Bible [vertical *descending* arrow image] postulates a revelatory God. The arrow comes from God's realm to the human. The Bible postulates that God is like what God does. The God Most High is aware of the human condition and has acted in time and place=the history and geography of our world. Only through a revelatory God can we understand what God is like by what God has done.

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The Greek mind was illustrated in the diagram in the center with the arrow pointing to God's world. This approach is a union of theology and metaphysics. Adjectives are used to describe what God is like within God's self:

God is omniscient  
God is omnipresent  
God is omnipotent.

None of these words can be found in the Bible, of course, because the ancient Hebrews did not speak of God-within God's-self. However, historically, most clergy and students studied theology this way, so it is the preconception most Western students bring to the Bible.

The Greek mind is interested in what something-is-within-itself. If I asked the reader to write five sentences about the book you are holding in your hands, the Western mind would tend to write sentences about structure and form and describe it within itself using adjectives. One might have written something about its dimensions (8 ½ x 11 x ½ inches), about the material it is made of (paper from wood fiber), about its color, (cream), the chemistry of the cover (laminated plastic), etc. This is the way we have described God in the Western mind.

Now, this is not how the biblical mind would have done it. The biblical mind did not speak of anything within itself, but rather spoke about it in terms of subject-in relation-to object...what it does for you, a living subject. The Hebrew mind would speak of the book in terms such as, what it does (shows full restorations of ancient discoveries) and what it is for (it helps explain the artifacts in a practical way). The biblical mind is concerned with subject (the reader) in relation to object (the book). The Hebrew mind was a very practical mind. Most cultures in the world understand the practical mind (like that of the ancient Hebrews) but not all cultures understand the notion of what is something's essence within itself.

The Greek philosophers tried to explain the world-within-itself and God-within-God's distant that all the Greek philosopher had was adjectives. People were not even sure that the gods were aware of them. The static verb "is" was followed by an adjective. The god of the Greeks *is*...

However, biblical religion postulated that there was a revelatory God, a God who has self disclosed to humans what some aspects of what God is like. In this approach, verbs become more important than adjectives in relation to God. The God of the Bible *does*. God gives, forgives, loves, blesses, curses, etc. These were aspects of God and God's relation with humans. The Greek "attributes of God" were what God is like, statically, within God's self. The Hebrew mind would speak of the "aspects of God's dealings with humans."

The Greek mind understood God-within-God's-self. The Hebrew mind did not feel comfortable speaking of God within God's self. It wondered how could we, as puny humans with a speck of intelligence, be so audacious as to believe we could describe and speak directly of God within God's self? The Hebrew mind felt it could speak of God-in-relation-to-persons. The Greek attributes of God are far above anything a person could understand. The Hebrew mind felt more comfortable reserving statements of God to that which humans could understand.

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Philosophical works began to appear which has been influential in causing changes in the schools of philosophy to move from the radical empiricists, who tried to describe the scientific world within itself, to the importance of the living subject. One example was *The Divine-Human Encounter* by Emil Brunner published in 1943. It observed that one cannot speak about God as an object in the same way one would speak about other objects in the universe. Brunner also wrote *Truth as Encounter* published in 1964. These books are called epistemological works. They ask the question "What is truth?" How do humans know what is truth? Is the subject always in some sort of contact point with the object being questioned? If so, we all have subjective views of objects. The Hebrew mind, in this sense, is aware of being subjective. It does not claim objectivity because it is hesitant to speak of any object-within-itself. A description is not of something within itself and what it looks like. A more honest description, rather, considers one's relationship with the object and what it does in-relation-to the subject. With this approach, it is more proper to ask, "*How am I, a living subject, related to this object?*"

There is also a branch of philosophy known as linguistic analysis. There are two publications by Frederick L. Moriarty, *Word as Power in Ancient Near East*, published in 1974, and *The Language Gap and God*, published in 1970. These works are examples of theologians struggling with the proper use of language in theological studies.

We can illustrate the importance of language by looking at the two words subject and object. If God began everything and will wrap up everything, God is the Subject of the universe. Matter, including humans, are objects, created by God the Subject. Something seems very much out of balance if an obscure being such as a human (an object of creation) speaks of the Entire Subject of the universe as though this Subject is an object. God is a mysterious Subject-within-God's self which we, as mere objects, cannot fully understand. The Hebrew mind takes a relational approach, both when speaking about the world and when speaking about God. The biblical mind asserts that it can only properly understand the world when realizing the limitations of its perception of it.

In the history of philosophical ideas in the 20th Century, the phenomenologists first helped clarify this. Edmund Husserl, Edward Leed, M. Mandelbaum, and William A. Luijpen were phenomenologists who published on this subject. Husserl was the founding father of this movement. Phenomenologists affirmed it was wrong in the scientific approach to believe one could describe any object within itself or that a scientist could be truly objective. It was probably equally wrong of the existentialists to say everything was subjective. It would be hard to speak directly of the objects around you within themselves.

The phenomenologists' major contribution to the study of truth was to say the subject's experience of the object was what was true. They tried to find a way to unite the subjective world of the beholder with the scientific objective world around us. The contact point between the two was one's life experience-contact with the object. There is an objective world out there and each of us has a contact point with it (our experience of that object.) We are, however, all subjects.

No scientists can be truly objective. Scientific experiments must be set up in a manner to remove as much subjectivity as possible. However, a good scientist is aware that there were probably predispositions as to what was likely to happen in the scientific experiment.

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They also understand that these predispositions have likely influenced the way the event was understood by the scientist. In the sociological and psychological sciences this predisposition was particularly influential. The way a survey or experiment was set up, was probably influenced by some bias of the scientist. Therefore, the survey may not have been completely unbiased. Good scientists continually question whether or not they are being as objective as they can be. If someone believes he is completely objective, this is an indication that he is not objective. No human being has enough awareness of himself and his disposition to be completely objective.

Immanuel Kant, more than two centuries ago, wrote the two books: Critique of Pure Reason (in 1781) and Critique of Practical Reason (in 1788). He observed that no one could be completely objective. The Hebrew mind, however, took into consideration the problems behind this issue although far earlier than Immanuel Kant! Scientists in the 1900's responding to Immanuel Kant's work began to clarify the problems. The Hebrew mind asserted, "how can I know what anything is fully within itself? It is other. I can tell you how I am related to the other, what it does, what I use it for, and how I understand it."

We are limited by our (subject's) perception and understanding of the object. This notion is far more complex than many imagine. The geometry of subatomic particles and the quantum physics developed in recent years in the field of molecular science are breaking new ground in our understanding of the mysteries of life.

The Hebrew mind felt safer in speaking about the mysteries of creation-in-relation-to-me. This ancient approach took into consideration (without realizing it) the work of Immanuel Kant on "the subject-object split." This notion proposed that there is a split between "me," a living, perceiving subject, and an "object." If we, as subjects, can remain aware of the mysteries in the atomic world, we will be humbled. But, how much more mystery is there when one subject tries to fathom another human subject? Those readers who have been privileged to live in a life-time human relationship know that one can continuously be surprised! We cannot imagine the further compounded mystery, within the subject-object split, when we as frail human subjects try to speak of God as though God is an object, when God is the SUBJECT of the universe!

The biblical materials assert that God has self-disclosed certain aspects about what God is like by acting within history. The biblical mind postulates that what God has disclosed in our world is consistent with what is like within-God's-self. But God is far greater than we can comprehend. In a way the Greeks jumped in where angels have feared to tread and described what God was like within God's metaphysical world. The biblical mind was not comfortable doing that.

There is a word similar to the meaning of "metaphysics" in the Hebrew language, however. It is the word, "holy" (kodesh). The best English word for the meaning of "holy" is different or set apart. God is holy, within-God's-self. What this means is that God is above our understanding. God is different than anything we can understand.

The biblical mind affirms God-within God's self but does not feel comfortable speaking directly of that holiness. God is metaphysical. There are aspects of God which go beyond the physical world and the history that we can understand. The greatness of God is affirmed, but it takes bigger and better creatures than we are (perhaps the notion of "angels?") to

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talk about it in detail. In the Post-exilic Period, the concept of angels developed to remind humans that God's creation is not limited to humans on the top of the intelligence chain. This notion was to keep humans from being insufferably arrogant.

When humans speak metaphysically of God-within-God's-self, to the biblical mind, this borders on arrogance because it limits God. The biblical mind feels more comfortable in reserving what is said about God to what God has self-disclosed in our world. Greater aspects of God should be allowed to remain mystery.

This same humility about God-within-God's-self probably should also apply to the Trinity. When it comes to a functional theology of the Trinity, for example, God functions as Father, Son and Spirit. Where does the biblical mind look to understand this mystery? The biblical mind looks to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs for understanding God functioning as Father/parent.

God functioning as Son through Jesus of Nazareth means that there was a thirty-year period when the Eternal Ship sailed alongside the human ship. Christians are able to understand aspects of God the Son by looking at the Jesus of history. Aspects of God that could be understood by humans could be understood through what "the Son of God" said and did in our world.

However, the "Son of God," defined as the Byzantine Christians defined it, in classical Greek metaphysical categories of the Christological councils, may have gotten carried away. Their structure-form-essence approach viewed the Trinity metaphysically as Trinity-within-the-Trinity's self. It would have been far more biblical to ask, "what does Christ do?" Christians should understand the divinity of Christ by what God has done in Christ. Modern Christologies, aware of biblical expressions of thought, understand who Jesus was functionally: He functioned as a prophet, a priest, and a king. The New Testament mind allowed to remain as mystery how God, Jesus and Holy Spirit fit together. For this reason, there was no need in the New Testament community for the word *Trinity*.

As an example of the way modern biblical scholars try to express biblical thought, the book *Christology in the Making* by James D.G. Dunn published in 1980 is a good example. It reflects the way serious Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox theological seminaries teach Christology today if they are informed by biblical thought processes. One should not understand who Jesus of Nazareth was by thinking metaphysically of Christ-within-Christ's self. A proper Christology takes into consideration the uniting of the person of Christ with the work of Christ. The biblical writer understood who Christ was by what he had done.

In the Byzantine Period the Greek trained mind tried to understand "Son of God" metaphysically within itself. It was often communicated far too literally to include implications for what was said about Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph. In the very practical biblical mind, what was the difference between a servant and a son? What do they do? "Only begotten, unique, Son of God" should be understood in contrast to "servants of God" in the mind of the writer. For example, in biblical culture the son more likely resembled the father than a servant. It would not be appropriate to think of this only in terms of physical resemblance. The character of the father and the son also had to be taken into consideration. And, of course, the difference authority. The son had the authority of the



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father and, if the son was the only begotten, it also meant the inheritance of the father. There was no other son (a brother) to contest the inheritance.

In the parable of "the Prodigal Son," the younger son asked to be taken back into the family as a servant. There were four signs of sonship shown by the parents, which were different than taking him back as a servant. First, they put shoes on his feet. Slaves and servants went barefoot, while sons and daughters wore shoes (as the African spiritual states, "all of God's children got shoes"). Second, they put the best robe on him--not just any robe. The ancient robe had one's symbol of authority, embroidered in the tassel. This robe may have been understood as the father's robe. Third, they put a ring on his finger. Servants do not have a ring with the family seal on it. Sons and daughters have rings. The seal was another symbol of authority. Fourth, they killed the fatted calf to welcome the son back. These four examples are very practical ways of understanding the uniqueness of Christ as Son of God in New Testament Period theological language.

One way that some scholars speak about this uniqueness is called "the finality of Christ." If Jesus was understood as the "only begotten," it meant that there were no others understood as having more authority. For Jesus' early followers, although there may be other great prophets and teachers in the spirit of Christ, all others were to be measured as servants as compared to the authority of the only Son of the Father. This is a sensitive matter when engaged in Interfaith dialogue, as one does not want to convey there is any lack of respect for other servants of God.

In proper New Testament theology it would be as limiting to title Jesus "God" as to entitle Jesus "man." The biblical phrase is Son of God, the God-man. It would be wrong to say God, because there are aspects of God metaphysically that we do not understand. Jesus himself prayed to God and taught his disciples to pray "holy (metaphysical) is your name." For the New Testament community it would have also been wrong to call Jesus only human, because they understood him as having more authority than any other servant of God.

Some thinkers have considered it less presumptuous to talk about what God does than to talk about who God is-within-God's self. They feel it is less presumptuous to speak about God when one limits one's statements to an understanding through the divine-human encounter of experiences where it was believed that God was present.

It is true that all history was recorded as a history with an interpretation. This record was a subjective re-telling of the event. When one stops to think about it, there is no such thing as truly objective history. History always comes with an interpretation by a living subject.

How do we understand the history of a revelatory God? As we consider the biblical narratives, first came revelation (the act of God). Then came the interpretation of that revelation by the community of faith. Then followed the recording of that interpretation in their faith document.

Today, there is an additional task for followers of the monotheistic religions of the Middle East (Jews and Christians and Muslims). If they live within another language and culture, they must seek to interpret and apply their faith document to their lives in the modern world. No interpretation of an event, or its recording, is as great as the original events of their faith in the same way that no description of a sunset is as great as the sunset. Many

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writers have emphasized that there are still "leaps of faith" into the ancient world that need to be made by the modern mind.

What would be the way the ancient mind spoke of the authority of Scripture? The Greek mind was caught up in the words within themselves. This is true of many Christians today. The biblical mind was more interested in what the "Word of God" does for the reader and hearer, who were living subjects.

Note the functional expressions about the Word of God:

*"It is a lamp to my feet.  
It is a light unto my path.  
It is... powerful as a two-edged sword."*

The Greek mind was concerned with the words themselves, as "the Word of God." The Hebrew mind understood that it had to become the "Word of God" in one's life. The biblical writers understood that the Word was dynamic, not static.

### **A Comparison of the Greek and Hebrew Mind**

It might be helpful at this point to make a comparison between the ways the Greek and Hebrew mind would speak about persons, objects, goals, attitudes, procedures, and language.

**Person:** The Greek mind was a theoretical, abstract thinking mind. It would speak of a person-within-themselves through description and form. The Hebrew mind would have thought of a person in terms of subject-in-relation-to-object. The Hebrew mind spoke in terms of its perception of and relationship with that person.

**Object:** The Greek mind would discuss the chemical elements (for example) as objects classified according to the atomic number and atomic weight (as per the Periodic Table of the Elements). The Hebrew mind would understand the elements as classified according to color, smell, taste, feel, etc. These aspects are understood in terms of subject-in-relation-to-object. Both ways of thinking are valid. The chemistry of the elements is the object within itself. The seeing, touch, taste and smell is-subject-in-relation-to-object.

**Goal:** Let us consider "love." The Greek mind would try to understand love. There are great plays by Aristotle and Virgil trying to understand the nature of love. What is love within itself? It is the goal of the theologian to try to understand love. The Hebrew mind would have thought in terms of being in love. This is subject-in-relation-to-object. It is the goal of the religious person to love God. It is the goal of the theologian and the philosopher to understand love. One discipline helps the other. Being in love helps understand love. Better understanding love might help one to better be in love. Both are important. For the Hebrew mind, one does not say, "God is a shepherd" but rather "the Lord is my shepherd." The writer understands one's self as being a sheep in loving relationship with a shepherd.

**Attitude:** The Greek mind was more like the attitude of a physicist writing thermal dynamic equations to explain heat. He is rather detached at a desk with his papers and formulas. This is also the attitude of an art critic looking at a picture on a wall of a museum.

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Both the physicist and art critic are trying to look at the equation or the picture in an objective manner. The Hebrew mind pictures the attitude of a forest ranger fighting a forest fire (subject in relation to object). The subject experiences heat from the fire. Instead of an art critic, picture the attitude of the artist looking at his/her own picture. This attitude is, "what it means to me," rather than the perspective of the art critic.

**Procedure:** The Greek mind is the procedure of the grammarian. Sentences have to be diagrammed word by word. Also, picture the procedure of a medical doctor examining a patient. The Hebrew mind thinks in terms of the procedure as a poet rather than a grammarian, and considers what the words and their order "mean to me." The Hebrew mind thinks more in terms of the wholistic medical practitioner than the procedure of the pure medical model doctor. Perhaps he is someone involved in a more holistic view of the patient. How are you doing? What quality of life do you have? How is your family? How are things going at work?

**Language:** The Greek mind is more theoretical, expressed in a more technical language. It might be illustrated with this sentence: "the infinite cause conditions the operations of all finite causes." In the Hebrew mind language is simple and practical, stated in terms of subject-in-relation-to-object, such as "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Another example of technical vs. practical language could be illustrated with this formula:  $T_b = T_a / \sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}$ . If given reference-frame B moving with velocity  $v$  relative to reference-frame A, the elapsed time shown on a clock in B as observed from A,  $T_b$ , is given by the equation, where  $T_a$  is the elapsed time shown on a clock in A, as observed from A, and  $c$  is the speed of light. This is, of course, is Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Perhaps a more simple (humorous) choice of words to state the Theory of Relativity in the practical and relational Hebrew mind would be:

"There was a young lady named Bright  
Who traveled much faster than light.  
She set out one day,  
In a relative way,  
And came back the preceding night. "

Both ways of thinking are important. The task of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim student is to make the transition from faith documents from a pre-Greek way of thinking and apply those documents to the modern world which thinks metaphysically. We have to make sure we are fair to the ancient document by interpreting them within their categories of thought.

Let us take a look in more detail at the words used by the Greeks to speak of God within-God 's-self and ask how that concept is spoken of in the Bible. Some of these questions might be a little upsetting at first.

**Omniscient:** Are we sure we know the God of the Bible is omniscient? This word does not appear in the Bible. Perhaps God has chosen to limit God's knowledge by choosing to create a being which has free choice of thought and action.

**Omnipresent:** Are we sure the God of the Bible is omnipresent? Maybe there is a state of human consciousness that could be called hell or despair, where someone is completely

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unaware of the presence of God. How does the Bible speak about such notions as omnipresence? "Though fly like an eagle to the utter most part of the sea, the Lord is there. Though I go to the depths of the earth, the Lord is there." For the biblical writer, there is no place or time that the writer can be without God's presence (subject-in-relation-to-object) also there. Speaking this way is different than being so audacious as to say that in God's world (beyond my awareness) God is omnipresent. What is important is God's presence-in-relationship-to-humans.

**Omnipotent:** Are we sure that the 'God of the Bible is omnipotent? Maybe God has chosen to limit God's power. This would still be the Divine's choice. Perhaps, to keep us from withering in God's presence, God has limited God's power.

Perhaps God chose, with the creation of a being with free will, to limit God's power and to allow humans to have far more power than they often handle very well. This choice is important because of the value of being able to choose our belief, and not to be forced through intimidation to our belief.

There is an unassuming side to God in the Bible. One of the phrases for "the Word of the Lord" in Hebrew is "daughter of the voice." Hollywood movies use a loud, deep, resonated male voice from an echo chamber when God speaks. One knows this is God! However, often in the scriptures the Word of the Lord is the daughter of the voice, (bat Kol, Heb.) the still, small voice.

Many biblical theologians caution the student to be careful with the Greek "*orannis*." Perhaps some of them result in all sorts of subsequent metaphysical theological problems.

### **Organizing these Thoughts**

The task of the biblical theologian is to try to organize, in an understandable way, the memories of the acts of God in history. Of the many examples of biblical theologians we could take, let us summarize this appendix by looking at one. George Earnest Wright of Harvard University was both an archaeologist and a biblical theologian.

Two of his publications were, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, published in 1952, and *The Book of the Acts of God*, published in 1957. Dr. Wright has organized the major acts of God in biblical sequence. Each "act of God" was given a word that began with the letter "C:" Creation, Covenant, Commandments, Conquest, Coronation, Captivity, Christ, Church, and Consummation.

**Creation:** One knows what God is like through creation. "The heavens declared the glory of God ..." This is God's handiwork. This discipline is called natural theology. Subject-in-relation-to object, it includes things that relate to our ability to reason, to discern right and wrong, and innate human abilities such as perception.

**Covenant:** The next act is covenant. God makes agreements (covenants) with humans. This was not a wise thing for any god to do. If someone ever got legal advice as to whether they should make a legal agreement with a party which was notorious for not keeping agreements, one would certainly be well-advised not to make legal agreements with humans. The only case in the ancient world of a treaty between a God and humans is that in the Bible. Other gods were far "too smart" for that. The real meaning here is that the other

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gods were "less forgiving." The agreement was "hot off the press" as Moses came down the holy mountain and the Hebrews were already dancing around the golden calf. The agreement was already broken before they had even accepted and ratified it. In Exodus 34:6-7, when Moses went back up the mountain to receive a new set of tablets the Lord proclaimed,

*"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation..."*

The merciful nature of the God of the Bible makes the covenant possible. God is a covenant keeping God. Humans, however, need to constantly renew the covenant agreement. The Day of Atonement is the annual renewal of the covenant ceremony. It is still observed annually in synagogues around the world today. Another place one can experience the annual covenant renewal experience is during the Saturday night Easter Eve Vigil in a Roman Catholic Church. Part of the service involves everyone renewing the vows of their baptism. (This renewal probably wouldn't hurt with marriage vows as well!) As humans we all need reminders to renew agreements and covenants. The notion of a covenant keeping God was remarkable in antiquity.

**Commandments:** The unchanging commandments for living were good news to people in the ancient world. The gods around the ancient Hebrews were capricious, changing the "goal posts" all the time. (See the discussion on the commandments son pp. 92-98.) One never knew what would be pleasing to the gods. Before one went on a journey, it was wise to open up a sheep and looked at the spleen to see where it was red or purple, and then decide whether or not the gods would be with you on your journey. Before an army went into battle it looked for a sign of nature as to whether the gods were going to be for the army or not. The ancients were not sure what behavior would please the gods. It was a relief to know that certain behavior would be blessed by God and other things could lead to wrath.

**Conquest:** There are bloody chapters in the Bible and these are difficult for us to understand. George Ernest Wright was correct in saying, however, that they were also important theologically. The ancient Hebrews needed a space of geography where there was enough safety to develop institutions and to have schools of prophets, etc., so their traditions about God could be passed on to their children. Thus, we have the concept of a land so the people could be "landed."

However, their notion was not "my land, right or wrong." The Lord said to the ancient Hebrews, "If you obey my laws, you will be blessed in your land." Being landed was not an unconditional promise for any nation. The treatment of the widows, the orphans and the strangers in the land was important. According to the book of Joshua, not caring about injustices would cause the land to "vomit you out." If they did not treat the widows, the orphans and the strangers well, the Book of Joshua continues, "that the Lord would cause to happen to you what you did to the Canaanites." Wright points out that the theology of the conquest narratives was "Israel as agency." The task of both the ancient Israelites, as well as the church, was to bring light to the Gentiles. Chosen-ness was never to be understood as privilege. It was always to be understood as responsibility.

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**Coronation:** The people wanted a king. According to the book of Samuel, God did not want them to have a king. The Lord said, "I want to be your king." The people said, "But, everyone has a king." This is not a good enough reason to have a king! The coronation of the king was permitted on two conditions. First, the title of the king had to be Shepherd or Father (parent,) both caring roles. Most kings, however, thought only of themselves and their power.

At the coronation of the king, the king became, symbolically, the adopted "son" of God and the "father" of the people. The king's job description was to represent God to the people, and to help organize the society in such a way that would encourage those with more than they needed to share with those who had less than they needed.

**Captivity:** The years that the ancient Israelites suffered in captivity in Babylon contributed a very important development in biblical theology. The hardship and injustice they experienced lead to "reversal of fortune spirituality," which was the essence of the thought behind the beatitudes in the teachings of Jesus. This theology affirms that even if life's circumstances cause us to "weep by the waters of Babylon," ... yet God was still with us. One does not judge prosperity and blessedness by the shallow notions of comfort and ease. One can still know the presence of God while experiencing the hard side of life. The difference between the person of faith and the person without faith is not whether or not things are easy. Rather, in biblical religion when life is rough, the person of faith can call upon God for comfort and understanding.

**Christ:** Historically, Christians have believed that the most unambiguous act of God--the most normative act of God—has been in Jesus Christ. His life and teachings revealed, perhaps more clearly, what God has self-disclosed in history.

**Church:** The followers of Jesus believed that the Spirit of Christ was alive and well in the community of faith. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles to the church served as faith documents for the life of early Christians. Even these texts show that there were problems within and problems outside the church. As the church became the predominate power in the ancient world, injustices entered its walls. All Christian denominations admit that during the Middle Ages in particular, the community of faith often did not behave in the Spirit of its founder. The lesson to be learned was that there must be constant renewal.

**Consummation:** Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament teach that history is not doomed to endlessly repeat itself. They affirm that God continues to work in the world. God's Spirit remains alive and well in the hearts of people of faith. Wrong is still strong in our world. But humans have not yet seen the whole picture. God will fully be able to make all things right in End-Time.

These ten words beginning with the letter "C" are just one way a biblical theologian has tried to organize the acts of a revelatory God in history, using categories of thought that take into consideration God-in relation-to-persons.

### **Clarification of Thought**

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The systematic theologian, unlike the biblical theologian, tends to organize the attributes of God differently. They may be organized logically, but they will also be more abstract, according to Greek categories of metaphysical thought. Sometimes the modern mind more easily appreciates the organized themes of the systematic theologian over the historical approach of the biblical theologian. In most larger theological schools, one faculty person teaches biblical theology and another person teaches systematic theology. In a small school, where the same person might have to teach both subjects, the task is extremely difficult. How does one put these two approaches together?

What is the big difference between saying *God loves persons* and *God is love*? The Greek mind uses the static word "is." God is the attribute love. The Hebrew mind would say, below the heavens in our world, "God so loved the world that God gave God's son." The problem in modern society is that many people upon hearing the phrase "God is love" understand it to mean "love is God." Their perception is of a God who is equal to a sentimental notion of love. Is it sufficient to say that if one believe in love, one believes in God.

The problem with the phrase "God is a shepherd" is that it does not necessarily follow that the Lord is my shepherd. The biblical mind understands a relational God and speaks of God-in-relation-to-persons. Some have wondered if it would be wise to think through how some of the church's creeds could be more practical and relational. It is possible to be doctrinally correct about God-within-God's-self and yet spiritually dead in understanding a relational God. One can have the right formula, but not necessarily understand that formula practically in relation to God.

For Christians, one of the main tasks of the church is to help people understand the Lordship of Christ, a notion which, perhaps, should unite all Christians. What does it mean for Christians that Jesus Christ should be Lord (have influence) over their lives?

Perhaps one of the important notions that could unite people of faith in the God of the Bible is the importance of trying to understand the functional thinking in the biblical texts. It is true that how these notions are phrased theologically has divided denominations.

How the Trinity is discussed and how the humanity and divinity of Christ are understood have often separated Eastern Christians from Western Christians. But it is interesting to note that when the biblical phrases are used (rather than traditional metaphysical creeds) one can have in the same conversation an Armenian, a Coptic, a Catholic, and a Protestant, and they would be able to be united. Certainly there remain unresolved Interfaith issues.

But, believe it or not, biblical functional language also would be uniting in many Interfaith discussions involving Christians with Jews and Muslims. Sure, there remain many important differences between the three major monotheistic religions of the world. But it should be refreshing to observe that there are ways of expressing notions about God that do not need to be as divisive as they traditionally have been.

### **What it Looks Like...What it Does...What it Means**

These three phrases have characterized the way most of the archaeological reconstructions in this book have been discussed. Perhaps this short appendix about the way the ancient peoples in biblical times spoke of things around them will help the reader better

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understand why we have discussed these three phrases when trying to explain the various exhibits in the museum.

It is our hope that these materials have helped you "step into the sandals" of the people who gave us the Bible. We hope you have seen these ancient people's refreshing, practical view of a God of history, who was understood through the rich variety of human metaphors from the daily life of the shepherd, farmer, and the people of the village.

### **Additional Endnotes**

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<sup>2</sup> 1:13-14. A wax seal would have a mark of ownership or identification stamped in it, identifying who was attesting what was inside the container that had been sealed. Because it was commonly understood that the \*Spirit would be made especially available in the time of the end, Paul here speaks of the Spirit as a "deposit" (NIV) - a term used in ancient business documents to mean a "down payment." Those who had tasted the Spirit had begun to taste the life of the future world that God had promised his people. [IVPBBC]

<sup>3</sup> John 14:3

<sup>4</sup> John 14:1-4

<sup>5</sup> **FROM:** Fleming, James, Ed.D. *The Life of the Shepherd, Farmer and Village in Biblical Times*. La Grange, GA, USA: Biblical Resources, 2007, Appendix (see above)