

## The Jewish Wedding Ceremony as a symbol of the Plan of Jesus' Relationship to the Church

We are told in Scripture that Christ is the Bridegroom and that the Church is the Bride (Ephesians 5:22-32), and that the first event to be celebrated when the Church arrives in "heaven" is the Marriage-Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9). However, most commentators and expositors fail to draw the obvious conclusion; that the Biblical "Jewish" Wedding Ceremony has very significant meaning to our understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and that the ceremony (with its' sequence of events) is a DIRECT parallel to the sequence of events in the life of the believer (including FUTURE events). Drawing primarily from Scripture, and filling in some of the details with Jewish historical writings that date from the time of Christ (such as the Mishnah), we can see that the story of chosen love, preparation, and fulfillment of the wedding ceremony is the story of Christ's love for the Church. We will take each element of the this process, IN SEQUENCE, and show the Biblical connection with the Church.

### *The selection of the Bride for the Groom by His Father:*

In Genesis 24:1-4, we see that Abraham established the criteria for his son's "wife-to-be". Isaac would not select his own bride, but the Father (or his representative) would do the selecting for him. See John 6:44, John 17:24, Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:3-6, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:1-2 (speaking of the apostle Paul).

### *The Free-Will acceptance of the offer of marriage by the Bride:*

Although Jewish culture was patriarchal (male dominated), women had the right of refusal when it came to marriage. No force could be used to persuade her to marry the prospective groom. We see this in Genesis 24:5-8 and 24:57-58. According to the Mishnah, once a woman had refused the offer of marriage, she could not expect ANY benefit from the Groom, such as being able to keep part of the "bride-price", or usage of any lands owned by the groom. In Christian terms, when we have rejected Christ, we should not expect God to give us ANY of the benefits of the eternal kingdom, including eternal life. Speaking of the "bride-price", the price for a chaste virgin (as established in the Mishnah) was 200 dinars (100 shekels), which was enough to purchase 3 slaves for up to 50 years (until the Year of Jubilee) with some left over. This was a VERY valuable price, and demonstrates the value of finding a suitable bride. See John 3:16, John 12:48, Acts 2:40-41, Romans 10:16, Proverbs 31:10, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:20, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:23, and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:17-19.

*The establishment of the KETUBAH (the marriage contract):*

EVERY Jewish marriage was preceded by a contract that bound the 2 people together. See Matthew 26:28. It is interesting to note that the woman was under the control of her father until she was officially betrothed, at which point she came under the authority of the Groom. See John 8:44. The contract included the following items:

- A) The Groom is to provide for the bride's needs during the engagement period, as well as after. See 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:21-22 and Ephesians 1:13-14. The HOLY SPIRIT is given to us to "meet our needs" until we fully come into the marriage.
- B) The Bride attests to her purity. In cases of "true love", a "fallen woman" (one who had been with another man) could be brought into marriage IF the Groom's father agreed to "waive" the requirement of virginity for his son. We see this in the Old Testament story of Rachab, a prostitute who married into the Tribes of Israel to become an ancestress of Jesus (Joshua 2:1 and Matthew 1:5); and we also see it in the entire Book of Hosea, in which a prophet is commanded to marry a prostitute in order to demonstrate God's love for fallen Israel. As Christians, we are in the same position of not being able to present ourselves to Christ as being pure when we first met Him, but He overlooks that deficiency, and cleanses us Himself (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11).

*The MIKVAH (baptism) for spiritual cleansing:*

After the terms of the KETUBAH are agreed to, the couple would separately take a ritual immersion (MIKVAH) as a symbol of spiritual cleansing. This MIKVAH is where we get the concept of BAPTISM. See Matthew 3:13-17, Matthew 28:19, Acts 22:16, Ephesians 5:25-27.

*The EYRUSIN ceremony:*

After the MIKVAH, the couple would have a public ceremony to express their betrothal (or engagement). The word "eyrusin" means betrothal, but a secondary name for this ceremony is Kiddushin, meaning "sanctification". This second term expresses what the EYRUSIN period (of at least one year) was all about; that is, setting oneself aside for the other person for the covenant of marriage. During the ceremony, some items of value were exchanged, and a cup of wine was shared to seal the vows. See Matthew 26:27-29, Luke 22:19-20, 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:3-4, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:13.

*The time spent apart until the final wedding ceremony:*

During the indefinite time between the EYRUSIN and the actual wedding ceremony, the bride and groom were considered married, but were not allowed to live together. The relationship was official, and could only be broken by 1 of 2 things; by the groom divorcing the bride (the bride could not divorce the groom), or by the death of the groom. During this time, the couple were expected to accomplish the following.....

- A) The groom was to be preparing the home for the bride. See John 14:1-3.
- B) The bride was to be learning how to be a good wife by learning the skills necessary to keep the home for her husband. See 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15.
- C) The groom would provide a “helper” or friend to care for the bride in his stead during this period of time. See John 14:15-18.

*The Father of the Groom must give His approval for the Groom to retrieve His Bride:*

The work that the groom was doing in preparation of his bride’s new home was supervised by the groom’s father. It had to be the very best that the groom could do, as anything less was considered to be a shame on his fathers name and family. The groom could not go to get his bride until the father inspected the new home, and gave his approval. This is why the EYRUSIN period was of an indeterminate length (but at least a year) See Matthew 24:36. What is the place that OUR Groom is preparing for US? See Revelation 21:9-22:2 to find out.

*The Procession to retrieve the Bride:*

Once the father has given his approval of the groom’s preparations, he would give his permission for the groom to go get his bride. This would be done in a processional of the groom and his friends and servants to the home of the bride, where she was supposed to be waiting for him, and be prepared to go with him. There were 4 main factors to this event, as follows:

- A) It would occur at an unknown time, usually at evening. See Matthew 24:36-44, Matthew 25:1-13.
- B) It was accompanied by the blowing of the shofar (ram’s horn trumpet). See 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:16.
- C) The bride was carried to the wedding, she would never be allowed to walk. See 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:17.
- D) The bride was supposed to be prepared and expecting the coming of the groom, even though she didn’t know exactly when he would come for her. See James 5:7-8, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:1-9.

*The Wedding Feast:*

Once the Bride had been retrieved, the procession would return to the new home that had been prepared by the Groom. At that point, a feast (as extravagant as the groom and his father can afford) would begin. The feast is a time of joy, food, music, dancing, and celebration. See Revelation 19:7-9.

*The Bride and Groom begin their life together, forever:*

Although the time of waiting between the KETUBAH and EYRUSIN ceremonies until the Marriage Supper probably seem like an eternity for the anxious Bride and Groom, they can now look forward to a full life together in married bliss. See Revelation 22:3-5 and 22:16-17.

***EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!***