

Session 2

The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ

This session covers:

- An overview of the ancient Jewish wedding system
- How the ancient Jewish wedding system relates to our call as the bride of Christ
- How the Holy Spirit is moving to prepare a bride for Jesus

This session corresponds to:

- Session 2 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Bridegroom Is Coming

1. Jesus is returning for His bride.

- As the shout of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet fill the air, the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven. Graves will open up and the dead in Christ will rise from their tombs. Others who are alive at His coming will begin to defy gravity and head toward heaven.
- We get a glimpse of this glorious scene in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

- Most likely, the parable of the ten virgins reveals the meaning of this shout and accompanying trumpet blast. It reads: "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him'" (Matt. 25:6).
- Jesus is coming back to judge the nations. He is returning to establish His kingdom and to rule the earth. But He is also coming back as a Bridegroom for a bride.

The Bible reveals that Jesus' second coming will be similar to ancient Jewish wedding customs.

Ancient Jewish Wedding Customs

1. The ancient Jewish wedding system paints a beautiful picture of the coming wedding between the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride.

- According to Jewish wedding customs at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the bridegroom came at a day and hour that his bride did not know. As he came, the friend of the bridegroom went before him and shouted, "Behold, the bridegroom comes."
- This shout would be accompanied by the blowing of a shofar—a trumpet made from a ram's horn. As the shout was heard, the bridegroom would get his bride and take her back to his father's house, where the ceremony and celebration would take place.
- These customs sound a lot like Jesus' description of His second coming from the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).
- To really understand the Lord's second coming and our calling as the bride of Christ, let's look back in history to see the Jewish wedding customs during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- Five customs comprise the traditional Jewish wedding system. These are:

1. The arrangement of marriage
2. The betrothal ceremony
3. The preparation period between the betrothal and the wedding
4. The wedding ceremony
5. The wedding feast

2. The arrangement of marriage was the first custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- The arrangement, called the *Shiddukhin*, was the first step in the process and refers to the arrangements that were made prior to the legal betrothal.¹

- The arrangement was the time of matchmaking, often decided upon between the father of the groom and the father of the bride. Often, the couple did not know each other before the arrangement. In some cases, they would not have even *seen* each other before the betrothal ceremony.²
- Though this was the case, the bride-to-be was normally required to approve the marriage before the families agreed to a betrothal ceremony.³
- Once the selection had been made, the parents prepared the *ketubah*. The *ketubah* was normally a written contract that depicted the terms and conditions of the marriage arrangement, the price to be paid by the groom, the responsibilities and obligations of both parties, and the dowry to be offered by the bride.⁴

3. The betrothal ceremony was the second custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- Once the arrangement was made and the *ketubah* agreed to by both parties, the couple would move on to the betrothal (*eyrusin*) ceremony.
- To prepare for this, the bride and groom would take part separately in a ritual immersion in water, which symbolized a spiritual cleansing.⁵ The ceremony would include vows promising to be married, the exchange of rings or something else of value, and the sealing of the agreement by sharing a cup of wine.⁶
- After this ceremony, the couple was legally married even though they did not live in the same house or have sexual relations.
- Instead, the groom and bride maintained separate dwelling places, both remaining under their fathers' roofs.⁷
- Because a betrothed couple was legally married, a separation or parting of ways for any reason would require a legal divorce.
- The Jews used to refer to the act of betrothal as "taking a wife" by using a form of a Hebrew word that meant "purchase." The betrothal ceremony was considered an act of purchasing or acquiring a wife for the purpose of marriage.⁸
- The betrothal ceremony would end with a feast to celebrate the occasion, and following the feast, each party would return to his or her parent's house.⁹

4. The preparation period was the third custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- During the betrothal period, the groom remained at his father's home and prepared a place for the two to live. This was normally done by adding a room to his father's house.
- While the groom was busy building, the bride was preparing herself for the upcoming wedding. This usually involved three things.
- First, the bride was observed for her purity. This custom required at least a full nine months to pass in order to ensure that the bride was not pregnant and to attempt to assure that she was a virgin.¹⁰

- Second, the bride consecrated herself. She examined everything in her life and changed whatever was necessary in order to be ready for the holy covenant of marriage.¹¹ In fact, Jewish leaders began to use the term *mekadesh* (consecrated) for the act of betrothal. During the betrothal ceremony, the groom would often say to his bride that you are *mekudeshet* (consecrated) unto me.¹² Therefore, the bride made sure that she was totally set apart from all other relationships and activities and that she was completely separated for her groom.
- Third, the bride made her own wedding garments. Ancient Jewish women did not have the luxury of going to the nearest bridal shop and purchasing a premade dress. They had to spend hours and hours making their wedding garments and adorning them with the special touches to make them beautiful.¹³

5. The wedding ceremony was the fourth custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- Toward the end of the yearlong betrothal period, the bride waited with great expectancy for the groom to come and for the ceremony to take place. Even late in the evening, the bride and her wedding party would keep their oil lamps burning in case it was time for the wedding to take place.
- The day of the ceremony was a surprise to both the groom and the bride.¹⁴ When the bridegroom was asked the date of the wedding, he could only say something like, "No man knows except my father."¹⁵
- When the time was right, the groom's father would issue the approval for the ceremony to begin. The groom and his wedding party would leave the groom's house to go get his bride. The friends of the bridegroom would shout, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" and then they would blow the shofar. The groomsmen would lead the wedding party through the streets and bring the bride back to the groom's home where the wedding canopy or *huppah* awaited.
- The wedding ceremony, or the *nissuin*, was performed under the *huppah*. The vows made during the betrothal ceremony were completed in the marriage ceremony. The ceremony was once again sealed with a cup of wine to indicate the great joy that would accompany the festive celebration. After the ceremony, the couple consummated the marriage with sexual relations and lived together as husband and wife from that point forward.¹⁶

6. The wedding feast was the fifth custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- The wedding feast was the highlight of the wedding ceremony. It was much more extensive than what Westerners are accustomed to today. It consisted of seven full days of food, music, dance, and celebration.¹⁷
- The primary purpose of the wedding feast was to honor the groom. All of the guests were expected to compose poems or sing songs to the groom.

- Now that the blessed bridegroom had received a wife, he was supposed to display her beauty and grace to all who were present.
- To honor the groom, the bride would put on her beautiful wedding garments that she made during her year of preparation and would display her beauty to the bridegroom's friends, and the attendees, in return, would show her respect and admiration.¹⁸
- Following the wedding feast, the bridegroom and the bride would live together as husband and wife for the remainder of their lives.

The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ

The parallels between the ancient Jewish wedding system and the wedding between Jesus and His bride are amazing.

1. Jesus' first coming was like the arrangement of marriage in the Jewish wedding system.

- If you are a born-again believer, you are the recipient of an arranged marriage. Your heavenly Father so loved the world that He arranged a marriage between His Son and mankind.
- He sent Jesus to explain the terms and conditions of a life with Him. He offered a heavenly *ketubah*, or marriage contract, to describe what marriage to Him would include.
- Jesus, the Bridegroom, gave His life on the cross to purchase His bride.
- The heavenly Father also sent His matchmaker, the Holy Spirit, to invite us to become the bride of Christ by saying "yes" to His invitation.

2. Every born-again believer is betrothed to Jesus as His bride.

- For all who have said "yes" to the Holy Spirit's invitation to be the bride of Christ, a betrothal ceremony has taken place. Paul said, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2).
- As His betrothed bride, we have also partaken of a ritual bath similar to an ancient Jewish bride. Our baptism symbolizes our spiritual cleansing, our separation unto our Husband, and our vow to be prepared for our future wedding.
- When we entered the New Covenant with Jesus, we exchanged vows with Him as our Husband and we sealed the agreement with a cup of communion wine.¹⁹ In fact, each time we partake of the bread and the wine, we look back with joy to our betrothal ceremony and, at the same time, look forward to our upcoming wedding.

3. While we wait for the Bridegroom to return, we live in the period of preparation.

- Jesus has gone back to His Father's house to prepare a place for us. Jesus said:

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 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 14:3).

- We are called to wait expectantly for His return, to make ourselves ready, to prepare our wedding garments, and to be consecrated as we look forward to our life together with our Bridegroom, as seen in these Scriptures:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Eph. 5:25-27).

But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" And the man was speechless (Matt. 22:11-12).

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut (Matt. 25:10).

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev 19:7-9).

4. The preparation period is coming to an end and the wedding celebration will take place soon.

- Sometime in the near future, we expect the Father to say to His Son, "Go and get Your bride. Consummate your marriage."
- At that time, the friends of the Bridegroom will be shouting, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes," the shofar will sound, and the bride will be caught up in the air to be with Him.

- The Bible says:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

- The wedding ceremony will be held under the *huppah* and the marriage supper of the Lamb will commence. Look at these Scriptures:

In that day [in the Millennial Kingdom] the Branch of the LORD [Jesus] will be beautiful and glorious....then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion [in Jerusalem] and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; *for over all the glory will be a canopy [chuppah]* (Isa. 4:2-5).

Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev. 19:9).

The Days of Elijah

1. The question that naturally arises is, "Will we be ready when He comes?"

- Soon the midnight shout *will* come and the trumpet of God *will* sound, calling the bride who *has made herself ready* to go with her Bridegroom.
- When this happens, will we be living in expectancy with sufficient oil in our lamps (Matt. 25:8-10)?
- Will we have made our wedding garments (Rev. 19:8)? Will we have made ourselves ready (Rev. 19:7)?
- Will we be a worthy bride for Jesus (Rev. 3:4)?

2. The good news is that the Holy Spirit is moving throughout the earth to prepare a worthy bride for Jesus.

- The book of Malachi asks the question, "Who can endure the day of His coming?" (Mal. 3:2). Malachi is referring to Jesus' second coming. Because Jesus will come as a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap, Malachi wants to know who can survive this intense period of history.
- As troubling as this sounds, Malachi offers us some good news. He tells us that God will send a messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord's return (Mal. 3:1-5).
- Later in the book, Malachi reveals that this messenger is Elijah. He will come before the great and terrible Day of the Lord to turn people back

to God—much like Elijah did in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal (Mal. 4:4-6; 1 Kings 18).

- At Jesus' first coming, John the Baptist partially fulfilled Malachi's prophecy (Matt. 17:10-13). John, operating in the spirit and power of Elijah, functioned as a friend of the Bridegroom and was a forerunner who prepared the way for Jesus' earthly ministry. The Bible says about John:

It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

3. We live in the days of Elijah when God is raising up forerunners to prepare the bride of Christ for the Lord's return.

- Like Elisha and John the Baptist, who were anointed with the spirit of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9), these forerunners will also be anointed with the "spirit and power of Elijah" to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."
- In the days preceding the second coming, the Holy Spirit is unlocking ancient mysteries of the bride of Christ and revealing these secrets to forerunners who will be used to prepare the bride of Christ.
- These modern-day John the Baptists will function as "friends of the bridegroom" (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15) to prepare a worthy bride for Jesus.

By God's grace, our willing cooperation, and receiving from ministries who function as friends of the Bridegroom, we can be made ready as a worthy bride for Jesus. Just as an ancient Jewish bride had to make herself ready for her wedding, the Holy Spirit is calling us to make ourselves ready for our Bridegroom.

Notes

1. Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs* (Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publications, 1996), pp.48.
2. Mendell Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994), pp. 41.
3. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp.49.
4. Ibid, pp. 49, 51-56.
5. Ibid. pp.49.
6. Ibid. pp. 50.

7. Ibid. pp. 50.
8. Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, pp. 67.
9. Ibid. pp. 73.
10. Ariel Ministries, www.ariel.org/ffruit.htm#top, *The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ*, referenced May 12, 2009.
11. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp. 51.
12. Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, pp. 67
13. Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, pp. 83-84.
14. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp.51.
15. John Hagee, *The Final Dawn Over Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), pp.184.
16. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp.52.
17. Ibid, pp. 52.
18. Hagee, *The Final Dawn Over Jerusalem*, pp. 186.
19. See my book *Understanding Your Inheritance in Christ* for more details of our covenant relationship with Jesus.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. In many aspects, the Jewish wedding system is very similar to our relationship with Jesus and His second coming.
- _____ 2. In the days that Jesus walked the earth, very few Jewish people entered into an arranged marriage.
- _____ 3. There are two customs that comprise the Jewish wedding system.
- _____ 4. Jesus' first coming was like the arrangement of marriage in the Jewish wedding system.
- _____ 5. While we wait for the Bridegroom to return, we live in the period of preparation.
- _____ 6. The betrothal ceremony closely parallels the events surrounding the Lord's second coming.
- _____ 7. The betrothal ceremony is also called the time of matchmaking.
- _____ 8. The *ketubah* was a written contract that depicted the terms and conditions of the marriage arrangement.
- _____ 9. During the preparation period, the groom went to his father's house to prepare a place for the couple to live while the bride waited patiently for him with no real duties to perform.
- _____ 10. Once a couple was betrothed, they were legally married and could consummate the marriage and live as husband and wife.

Fill in the Blank

11. The _____ took place after the approximate year-long betrothal period.
12. When we are _____, we are betrothed to Jesus as His bride.
13. While we wait for the Bridegroom to return, we live in the period of _____.
14. The wedding ceremony was performed under a canopy called a _____.

15. As we compare the Jewish wedding system to the bride of Christ, the _____ is the heavenly matchmaker.

From the list to your right, choose the corresponding letter that matches the Scripture reference on the left.

- _____ 16. 2 Cor. 11:2
- _____ 17. Matt. 22:1-14
- _____ 18. Matt. 25:1-13
- _____ 19. Rev. 19:7-9
- _____ 20. Mal. 4:4-6

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Behold, the Bridegroom comes.
- b. I am going to send you Elijah.
- c. The bride will make herself ready.
- d. Believers are betrothed to Jesus.
- e. Wedding clothes are needed for the marriage supper.