



The Zion Letter

The Monthly Newsletter of For Zion's Sake Ministries, Inc.
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Jesus & The Jewish Wedding Ceremony, Part 1

I have officiated at several Messianic Jewish wedding ceremonies. A Messianic Jewish wedding ceremony is very similar to the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony except in the Messianic ceremony, Yeshua (Jesus) is the center of everyone's attention; this is because the Jewish wedding is really all about the Messiah and His bride! Some may find it interesting that the couple who renewed their vows is not Jewish. This leads to the obvious question, "Why would a non-Jewish couple choose to be married or to renew their vows by having a Messianic Jewish wedding?" To understand this, you must familiarize yourself with the ancient Jewish wedding. Read on.

The Arrangement:

During the Biblical period, it was customary for the father of the groom to select a bride for his son. In Genesis 24:1-4, Abraham sent his servant to choose a bride for Isaac from among Abraham's people. That bride's name was Rebekah. The arrangement is called the *shiddach* in Hebrew, and the matchmaker is referred to as the *shadkhan*.

The Ketubah:

Once the bride has been selected, a marriage covenant, or agreement, is made between the bride and the groom in which the groom promises to provide and care for his bride. The name of this covenant is called ketubah. In the Torah (five books of Moses), God betrothed Himself to Israel at Mt. Sinai; there He promised that if Israel would keep His covenant (as in ketubah) He would make them His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (see Exodus 19:5-6). In the Brit Hadasha (New Covenant) God renewed his vows to Israel. In His new ketubah, He promised to put His Torah (law / instruction)

in the people's hearts and minds; He promised to be their God and that Israel would be His people; He promised that we would all know Him and that He would forgive our sins (see Jer. 31:31-34, Mt. 26: 27-29). In a sense, the entire word of God is His ketubah with His bride.

The Bride-Price:

A bride price is paid to the father of the bride and gifts are given to the bride-to-be (see Gen 24:52-53). The name of the bride price is *mohar*. The bride always had a choice whether she wanted to accept the terms of the ketubah and the mohar that was offered for her: "So they called Rebekah and asked her, will you go with this man? I will go, she said." (Gen 24:58). In the same way, we who are betrothed to Messiah had a choice to accept or not to accept our New Covenant Ketubah and the mohar (bride-price) which Yeshua paid for us by His atoning death.



The Mikva (Immersion):

Once the bride-to-be has accepted the terms of the Ketubah and then agreed to the mohar, both she and the groom are immersed in the ancient ritual purification bath called the *Mikva*. Customarily, the Mikva would take place before the betrothal ceremony occurred. In ancient times and even to this day devout Jewish people enter the Mikva prior to Sabbaths, holidays, weddings, before going up to Jerusalem, and many Jewish women will go to the Mikva upon completion of their menstrual cycle. Converts to Judaism are also required to immerse in the Mikva. The ancient ceremony of the Mikva is where the concept of baptism originates. John the Baptist was really preparing people to be betrothed to Yeshua when he baptized them.

Betrothal:

Following the Mikva, a ceremony of betrothal takes place which is called *erusin* or *kiddushin* (sanctification). Sanctification is another way of saying “being set apart” or “being made holy.” The bride and groom are now officially set apart for each other for a period of time.

Miryam (Mary) and Joseph (Yosef) were betrothed for a time before they wed each other: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother, Mary, had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:18).

The betrothal (*erusin*) period is not just a time of engagement, but it is as legally binding as marriage itself and would require an official divorce to be broken. In Matthew 1:19, Joseph considered divorcing Mary, but an angel of the Lord convinced him otherwise; the difference between *erusin* and marriage is that the bride and groom are not permitted to cohabit with each other during the period of *erusin*. During this time the groom goes off to prepare a home for his bride-to-be while the bride begins preparing her wedding garments in order to make herself look lovely on their wedding day. This ceremony takes place under a “chuppah” (canopy). The bride and groom would exchange items of value such as rings and they would seal their betrothal covenant by sharing a cup of wine with each other. The canopy is symbolic of the new home which awaits the happy couple.

Let’s Review:

Yeshua walked us through each step of the Jewish wedding in the Gospels and throughout the Brit Hadasha (New Testament): #1 The Arrangement: Yeshua said to His disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you...” (Jn. 15:16). However, in John 14:24, Yeshua said, “These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent me...”, and in John 8:27, Yeshua said, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” Yeshua spoke only the words of His Father, so if He chose us to be his bride, then the Father must have told Him to. God the father chose His son’s bride! The arrangement of the marriage is called the *shiddach*, and the matchmaker is called the *shadkhan*. God the Father is the “*shadkhan*” between Yeshua and His bride.

#2 The Ketubah: The *ketubah* is the marriage covenant or agreement in which the bridegroom promises to take care of and provide for his bride-to-be. The promises in the

ketubah are sealed when the bride and the bridegroom share a cup of wine together. Earlier we saw that God’s first “*ketubah*” was made with Israel at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 19:5-6). God promised to renew His marriage covenant to Israel in Jeremiah 31:31. Yeshua fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophecy to Israel when he spoke of the renewed covenant in Matthew 26:20, 27-28, “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’.” The central promise of Yeshua’s *ketubah* was to forgive the sins of His bride-to-be. I encourage you to stop and read John 13-17 which contains Yeshua’s other promises to His bride.

#3 The Mohar (bride price): By pouring out the cup of the New Covenant (*ketubah*), Yeshua demonstrated that he was about to lay down His life and pour out His blood as the “*mohar*” (bride-price). Paul reminds us of this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, when he said, “Or do you not know that...you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body,” and again in 1 Corinthians 7:23, “You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.”

#4 Mikva (ritual bath): Yeshua referred to the Mikva which He and His disciples partook of before the last Passover meal: “Yeshua said to him, ‘He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean’...” John 13:10. As I mentioned earlier, it is customary for Jewish people to have a mikva before celebrating a holiday, Sabbath, or wedding.

#5 Erusin / Kiddushin (betrothal): The Apostle Paul wrote, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Messiah I might present you as a pure virgin.” (1 Cor. 11:12). The Last Supper was actually Yeshua’s betrothal ceremony. During this Passover meal, the Lord read the terms of His *ketubah*, promising His broken body and His shed blood for the remission of His bride’s sins (Mt. 26:26-28); He promised them a kingdom (Luke 22:29), He promised them the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16), and He promised to come back for His bride (Jn. 14:3). Yeshua even sealed the *erusin* ceremony by sharing a cup of wine with His bride-to-be, just like it’s done in most Jewish betrothal ceremonies; “and when He had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’.” (Matthew 26:27-28). We receive the benefits and promises of Messiah’s betrothal when we receive Him as Lord of our lives.

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#6 I go to prepare a place for you: After the betrothal ceremony, the bridegroom would always depart to begin preparing a new home for his bride-to-be. After Yeshua's erusin, He said, "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 to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3). While the bridegroom was off preparing a place for his bride-to-be, the bride would be busy making ready her wedding garments: "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," (Rev 19:7-8). In the time of Yeshua, the bride and bridegroom would go their separate ways for up to a year to begin preparing for their wedding day!

Conclusion:

We haven't even gotten to the wedding part yet, but you can see that throughout the *shiddach*, *ketubah*, *mohar*, *mikvah*, and *erusin* process, throughout the New Testament, Yeshua demonstrated a picture of the ancient Jewish wedding. He betrothed Himself to his bride, He gave her the terms of the *Ketubah* (wedding contract), He told her to make ready, He then went away to prepare a place for us promising only to come back at an hour known only to the father or as the bible says like a thief in the night (Thess. 5:2) to receive his bride.

Next month we will continue looking at the Jewish wedding by examining the wedding ceremony and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Behold the King is coming like a thief in the night. Are you ready? May God richly bless you!

In His Love,
Rabbi Joe & Dawn

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