

## Biblical Marriage Ceremonies : Part 1

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Some time ago, a longtime Christian friend and member of the now-defunct "EDGE Mailing List" wrote to me with the following question:

----- Begin Quote -----

"How were marriage ceremonies carried out, according to God's Word?"

----- End Quote -----

In spite of how long I have been studying the Bible, I must confess that this is an issue which continues to mystify me as well. Because, to be honest, the Bible is rather vague about it; at least insofar as the actual marriage event is concerned. We are given a few hints in both the Old and the New Testament regarding what occurred at these events, but

nothing very specific. Also, we must keep in mind that what we are told is based upon Jewish customs and traditions of those times. That being said, in addition to gleaning what we can from the pages of the Bible, probably the best way to find out how early Jewish weddings were performed would be by asking a Jewish rabbi, which I am not. Neither am I an expert when it comes to Jewish traditions. In other words, as a modern-day Christian, my beliefs are based upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, and not upon the Jewish rituals and customs of the Old Testament, which have little bearing on modern Christian living. As the Apostle Paul tells us:

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Romans 7:4, KJV

In fact, as I have pointed out on a few previous occasions, Jesus Himself verbally chastised the Jewish religious leaders of His day due to their rigid adherence to some of the Old Testament traditions, as we see by the following examples:

"Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition."

Matthew 15:1-6, KJV

"He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother,

let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

Mark 7:6-13, KJV

Concerning the very first marriage between Adam and Eve, it seems obvious that contrary to the way that modern marriages are performed, God didn't stand in the Garden of Eden with a Bible in His Hands and say to Adam and Eve "I now pronounce you man and wife". In fact, the Bible didn't even exist back then, because God was, and is, the Living Word. Furthermore, there were certainly no church buildings in Eden in which to perform the wedding; or organists playing Felix Mendelssohn's well-known "Wedding March" or Richard Wagner's equally-famous "Bridal Chorus" from his opera "Lohengrin", which is known to many people today as "Here Comes The Bride"; or blood tests; or fertility tests; or prenuptial agreements; or any of the many other things which have become associated with weddings in our modern day. Probably the closest thing to a marriage pronouncement might be when God gave His blessing to Adam and Eve after creating them, when He is recorded in Genesis as having stated the following:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

Genesis 1:27-28, KJV

As far as we know, that was basically it. God blessed them, and said in so many words "Go and fill up the Earth with your children. Make lots of babies." Now just watch a few people write to me and complain because I dare to make such an obvious statement. But honestly folks, isn't that what the Lord was saying to them? Now, if you are wondering why that was, and is, so important to the Lord, you might want to consider reading my series "Is Jesus the Only Begotten Son of God?". In that particular series, I propose a few rather revolutionary ideas regarding what this marriage and sex thing is really all about, and why God told Adam and Eve

to fill up the Earth with their children. Trust me; God has a plan.

Being as there was no one else in the Garden of Eden at the time, it obviously makes sense that there was no expensive marriage celebration, filled with family members and other invited guests. Neither was there anyone throwing rice at the newly-weds, or someone tossing a bouquet of flowers into the air in order to determine who might possibly be the next bride-to-be. There was no loud band playing, or superficial people impressing each other with their fancy clothes and fine jewelry, and no one was drinking alcohol to the point of becoming inebriated. All of these things -- and the steep expenses associated with them -- came much later, once this blessed and holy event was commercialized, and became an annual multi-million dollar business venture.

In fact, it might interest you to know that the actual word "marriage" is only used twice in the KJV Old Testament. That is, in Exodus 21:10 and Psalm 78:63, which state the following:

"If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish."  
Exodus 21:10, KJV

"The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage."  
Psalm 78:63, KJV

In the first verse, the word "marriage" is derived from the Hebrew word "ownah". Pronounced o-naw', the Hebrew lexicon states that it is derived from an unused root word meaning to dwell together. This is in agreement with several verses which I have shared in a number of my other articles which deal with this same topic, namely these:

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."  
Genesis 2:23-24, KJV

"And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one

flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Matthew 19:5-6, KJV

"But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Mark 10:6-9, KJV

"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

Ephesians 5:28-31, KJV

Thus, we clearly see that according to God's Word, marriage is defined as two persons of the opposite sex -- or male and female -- who dwell together and share their lives together, and have children, with the blessing of God. As Adam stated, and as Jesus would later confirm in the Gospels, these two people would cleave together as one. In the Book of Genesis, the word "cleave" is derived from the Hebrew word "dabaq". Pronounced daw-bak', it means to cling, stick, stay close, stay with, follow closely, and to be joined together. Now, it seems to me that after taking some time to observe the behavior of the animals in the Garden of Eden, Adam knew exactly what he was supposed to do, and what God expected of him, once Eve was presented to him. It probably didn't take him very long to figure out what "Be fruitful, and multiply" meant.

As I point out in a few other articles, Adam must have felt rather lonely at first, being the only human, because all of the creatures in the Garden had mates, whereas he had none. Being the loving Father that He is, the Lord was of course concerned about this, as we see by the following verses:

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see

what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."

Genesis 2:18-22, KJV

While Adam and Eve may have been on equal footing when the Lord first created them, it is my personal belief that this relationship changed to some degree after The Fall. In my opinion, this change in Eve's status seems to be suggested rather strongly in the following verse:

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

Genesis 3:16, KJV

While some women libbers may bristle upon reading that verse, its meaning seems rather clear to me, particularly when we look at the Hebrew origin of the word "rule". It is the word "mashal". Pronounced maw-shal', it means to rule, or to have dominion over. In other words, following Eve's sin of being the first one to eat of the forbidden fruit, God placed her on a shorter chain, and made Adam responsible for her future actions, and keeping her under control. Adam of course loved his wife, Eve, but after The Fall, God also placed Adam in a position where Eve owed Adam her obedience and respect, just as we Christians owe Christ our obedience and respect, being as we are His spiritual bride, and Jesus is the Head of our Spiritual Church, as we see by these verses:

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."

1 Corinthians 11:3, KJV

"Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all

things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,"

Ephesians 1:20-22, KJV

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"

Ephesians 4:15, KJV

"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."

Ephesians 5:23, KJV

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Colossians 1:18, KJV

"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

Colossians 2:10, KJV

"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,"

1 Peter 2:7, KJV

Being as I fully address marriage relationships and spousal responsibilities in other articles, such as "The Fruit of the Womb", "Churchianity Or Christianity: Which Do You Practice?" and "Women Shepherds and Pastors: A Biblical Perspective", I will not be going into great detail in this current article. Instead, I simply wish to address the question that was posed to me by my friend.

At some point in time, after Adam and Eve had begun to have children, the union of a man and a woman became a celebrated event. Marriage wasn't only considered a very solemn contract that bound two people together, but it was a joyous event as well. For example, when Laban gave his daughter Leah to Jacob in marriage -- after Jacob had worked seven years for Rachel, who was Leah's sister -- we are told that Laban held a feast to which he invited all of the men, as we see here:

"And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her."

Genesis 29:22-23, KJV

In the previous verse, the word "feast" is derived from the Hebrew word "mishteh". Pronounced mish-teh', it refers to a feast or banquet at which drink is present. In his famous commentary, British Methodist theologian and Bible scholar, Adam Clarke, suggests that given the very solemn nature of a marriage contract, it is probable that sacrifices were made during such events as well. Clarke states:

----- Begin Quote -----

"Mishteh signifies a feast of drinking. As marriage was a very solemn contract, there is much reason to believe that sacrifices were offered on the occasion, and libations poured out; and we know that on festival occasions a cup of wine was offered to every guest; and as this was drunk with particular ceremonies, the feast might derive its name from this circumstance, which was the most prominent and observable on such occasions."

----- End Quote -----

For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the practice, a libation is a drink which is poured out as an offering to a particular deity. In fact, in researching the Books of the Old Testament, I discovered that the phrase "drink offering" is used a total of thirty times. Drink offerings were a very integral part of the Israelite sacrificial system, and were mandated by the Lord, through Moses, in the Books of the Law. While the word "Mishteh" is used in the previous set of verses, in all of the other verses that I looked at, "necek" is used instead. Concerning this word, the Hebrew lexicon states that it refers to a drink offering, libation, molten image, or something that is poured out. The first time that we see a clear mention of a drink offering is shortly after God speaks to Jacob at Bethel, as we read here:

"And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up

from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel."

Genesis 35:9-15, KJV

What we can learn from these verses is that even before the time of Moses, whenever an important contract was agreed to, it was customary to pour out a drink offering. It would seem then that Clarke may be correct in his assumption regarding drink offerings being made at early Israelite weddings. But other than the fact that drink offerings may have been made at the wedding feast of Jacob and Leah, we really know very little else regarding what occurred at such weddings. We're simply told that Laban had a feast, and that later that same evening, he took Leah to Jacob and Jacob "went in unto her". The Hebrew words that are used here are "laqach", "bath" and "bow", which mean that Jacob possessed Leah in marriage.

In the New Testament, we find a similar example with Jesus' first famous miracle where He converted water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. It is obvious from the story that some of the wine was drunk by the wedding guests. But perhaps some of it was also used for drink offerings as well. Following is the full story:

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth

his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

John 2:1-11, KJV

As with the previous example concerning Jacob and Leah, you will notice again that scant details are provided regarding exactly what occurred at these ancient wedding ceremonies, or what specific steps had to be taken before the couple could "officially" be declared man and wife. In the New Testament, four different words are used when referring to marriage and getting married. These words are "gamos", "gameo", "ekgamizo" and "ekgamisko". But other than referring to the process of getting married, they offer little information in regards to what actually occurred at such wedding feasts.

As in our modern day, there are also a few verses in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy which discuss the custom of being betrothed. Similar to the marriage contract itself, the Hebrew words "ya'ad" and "'aras" convey the idea that betrothals were serious contracts. They were fixed or set agreements to be married at an appointed future date. In other words, they were engagements. One particular law which many modern folks in our liberal society would probably find distasteful, states that if a man had sex with a virgin who was not yet betrothed to anyone, he was obligated to marry her. It says:

"And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife."

Exodus 22:16, KJV

While the King James Bible uses the word "maid" in the verse, according to the Hebrew lexicon, the word "bethuwlah" refers to a virgin more often than not. The word "entice" is derived from the Hebrew word "pathah", and in this case is referring to the act of seduction.

But that's not all. If for some reason, the woman's father refused to allow the man to marry his daughter, the man was still financially obligated to support her. While I may be wrong concerning this, I suspect that the reason for this law was that once a woman lost her virginity, she became a less attractive candidate for marriage; and thus, the man who was responsible for putting her in that state, needed to support her as if they were married. The law states:

"If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins."

Exodus 22:17, KJV

It is possible that the previous verse means something else. The word "dowry" is derived from the Hebrew word "mohar". It is defined in the Hebrew lexicon as a purchase price for a wife, or wedding money. In other words, if the verse is not referring to alimony, as I suggested a moment ago, then maybe what it is really saying is that if a father refused to give his daughter to a man after they have had intercourse, then perhaps the man should try to convince the father to give his daughter's hand in marriage by paying the "mohar", also known as the "bride price". This second interpretation concerning Exodus 22:17 seems to be in agreement with other verses in the Old Testament which likewise discuss the "Mohar", or "bride price", such as the following:

"And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things."

Genesis 24:53, KJV

"And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter."

Genesis 29:18, KJV

"If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days."

Deuteronomy 22:28-29, KJV

"And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired. Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife."

1 Samuel 18:25-27, KJV

"And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth Saul's son, saying,

Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines."

2 Samuel 3:14, KJV

"Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley:"

Hosea 3:1-2, KJV

In Deuteronomy 22:28-29, please notice the last phrase which states "he may not put her away all his days". Just imagine if such rigid laws were still in effect in our modern day. Undoubtedly, there would be considerably fewer cases of date rape, promiscuous sex and single motherhood, because people would have a stronger motivation for being more responsible with their actions, particularly with their private sex life.

Concerning the issue of adultery, as I explain in my series concerning abortion -- that is, "Abortion: The Slaughter of the Innocent" -- the Mosaic Laws of the Old Testament were very unforgiving. When a married woman freely engaged in sex with another man other than her husband, both were to be put to death. The very same law also applied to a virgin who was engaged to be married. If she voluntarily engaged in sex with another man other than her fiancé, she was to be put to death, as we see by these verses:

"If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you."

Deuteronomy 22:22-24, KJV

On the other hand, when it came to instances where a woman who was betrothed didn't give her consent to engage in sex, but was forced against her will by a stranger, the penalty was less severe. While the offending man was to be put to death, the woman was allowed to live, as we see by these

verses:

"But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die: But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter: For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her."  
Deuteronomy 22:25-27, KJV

While some of these laws were very strict and unforgiving, as we learn from the New Testament, and as I also discuss in the article "Love, Mercy, Forgiveness and Chastisement", the Lord taught us that forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation are the much better -- and more godly -- option. For example, you may recall the story of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The self-righteous Jewish leaders demanded that she be stoned to death according to the Mosaic Law. But how did Jesus react to their demands? Consider this:

"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."  
John 8:3-11, KJV

Please take care to notice the condition that Jesus set for the woman's forgiveness. He said "Go, and sin no more". In other words, as I have pointed out before, Jesus wanted her to know that He too considered what she had done to be wrong and a sin. However, unlike the Scribes and the Pharisees, He was willing to extend God's Love, Mercy and Compassion to

her; but she must do her part by refraining to fall into the same kind of sinful actions again. In other words, it would seem that true, sincere repentance and forgiveness must go hand-in-hand. There cannot be one without the other.

Please go to part two for the conclusion of this article.

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Biblical Marriage Ceremonies : Part 2

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Roasted Meat And Wedding Feasts, Jewish Weddings Were Both Solemn And Joyous Occasions, When Does Marriage Truly Become Official? Jesus' Puzzling Comments Concerning Marriage In Heaven, Jewish Law Of Redemption, Judah Onan And Tamar, Boaz And Ruth, The Lion Of The Tribe Of Judah, Fallen Angels And The Nephilim, Sex In Heaven And The Power Of God, Adultery, Polygamy And Sexual Promiscuity, Abortion And Birth Control, Legal Paperwork And Jewish Bill Of Divorcement, Scriptural Silence Regarding Marriage Documents, The Jewish "Kesubah" Jewish Wedding Ceremonies Web Links, What Is Really Meant By Fornication?, Closing Remarks, BBB Suggested Reading List

In addition to drinking, we also learn from the Scriptures that a large part of ancient Jewish marriage feasts was spent eating, and that included eating roasted meat. In the Parable of the Marriage Feast, Jesus mentioned the culinary delights that were to be had at some of the more grandiose marriage banquets, when He said the following:

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king,

which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."

Matthew 22:1-4, KJV

Thirteen chapters earlier, in Matthew 9:15, Jesus also said the following:

"And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast."

Matthew 9:15, KJV

In his commentary on Matthew 9:15, theologian Adam Clarke also makes the following remarks regarding the "children of the bridechamber" who are mentioned in the verse:

----- Begin Quote -----

"These persons were the companions of the bridegroom, who accompanied him to the house of his father-in-law when he went to bring the bride to his own home. The marriage-feast among the Jews lasted seven days; but the new married woman was considered to be a bride for thirty days. Marriage feasts were times of extraordinary festivity, and even of riot, among several people of the east."

----- End Quote -----

So putting all of these pieces of the puzzle together, we can determine that ancient Jewish weddings, while viewed as very solemn contracts between men and women, were also an extended time of rejoicing in which plenty of food and drink was present, and undoubtedly, song and dance as well.

But the question still remains: At exactly what point did an ancient marriage actually become "official"? For that matter, when does a marriage become "official" in our modern day? Is it when a priest or public official declares it so? Does a piece of paper -- the marriage document -- make it official? What does one have to do in order to really be married? Well, while I believe that I may have shared this thought before, some of you may still find my answer a bit shocking. While

the Bible may not seem to offer us a clear answer regarding this question, I believe that it does, if we recognize the hints that it offers us.

If you carefully study the verses that I have shared in this article, they suggest -- at least to me -- that the attitude of the ancient Israelites -- and maybe of God Himself -- is that the actual moment of marriage is not when a priest says "I now pronounce you man and wife", or when a man and a woman sign a marriage document in a public office;. It is when a man and a woman become one flesh. In other words, it is when they consummate their relationship by engaging in sex for the first time.

Please re-read some of the verses that I shared earlier from the Book of Deuteronomy. In my view, they seem to convey the attitude that the minute that a man and woman engage in sex, that's it; they are married. If a man had sex with a woman, particularly with a virgin, who was not yet betrothed, that was it. That man was obligated to go the full mile with her, because they had already become one in the flesh. That man was obligated to take care of her and support her for the rest of his life. Because from the moment that they had sex, she became his wife. You may not agree with me, but that is the attitude that I personally sense in some of those verses.

But there is another reason why I feel this way, and it has something to do with what Jesus said in the New Testament. I am referring to the following verses:

"The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

Matthew 22:23-30, KJV

In the previous verses, the Sadducees were referring to the

"Law of Redemption" which can be found in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, as we see here:

"If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed."

Deuteronomy 25:5-10, KJV

As I explain in other articles, it was because Judah's son, Onan, refused to fulfill this very same obligation to Tamar, that the Lord struck Onan dead. In the end, Tamar gave birth to two sons by her own father-in-law -- Judah -- one of whom was Pharez. As you may already know, Pharez was a biological ancestor of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is interesting to note that centuries later, a very similar situation occurred when another kinsman refused to fulfill the Law of Redemption. As a result, Boaz married Ruth, and they had a son named Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who in turn was the father of King David. Following is a key part of that story, taken from the Book of Ruth:

"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders

of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it. Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephrath, and be famous in Bethlehem: And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman. So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron, And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David."

Ruth 4:1-22, KJV

So as you can see, all of these men -- from Judah forward -- were the biological ancestors of Jesus Christ; which is why the Book of Revelation refers to Jesus as the "Lion of the tribe of Juda", as we see here:

"And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."  
Revelation 5:5-10, KJV

But returning to our main topic, the previous verses from the Gospel of Matthew have puzzled theologians and others for many centuries. What did Jesus mean? More specifically, what did He mean by "marry" and "given in marriage"? And equally perplexing, what did the Lord mean by the statement "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." The power of God to do what exactly?

To understand what I really mean, we need to sort of reverse engineer some of those questions. In other words, what can we humans do here on Earth that the Angels in Heaven are not allowed to do? The answer to my question can be found in a controversial series that I wrote some years ago entitled "Nephilim: The Giants of Genesis". In that series, we find out that the grave sins of the Fallen Angels were that they lusted after human women, they abandoned their habitation in Heaven, they took on human form, and they had sex with human women, which resulted in the birth of the Nephilim. That is, the giants of the Old Testament. What the rebellious Angels could not do in Heaven, they came to Earth to do: have sex.

I suspect that this is what Jesus meant when He said "marry" and "given in marriage". When Laban gave Leah to Jacob that

night, what happened? As we saw earlier, the Scriptures tell us that Jacob "went in unto her". He engaged in sex with her and she became his wife. She literally gave herself to him, just as Laban had given her to Jacob. Ruth did the very same thing with Boaz. She freely gave herself to him, following the wise advice of her mother-in-law, Naomi. So for these reasons, I believe that the sexual act is the real moment when two people become married; at least according to my understanding of the Scriptures. Is it possible then that when Jesus told the Sadducees that they didn't understand the Power of God, that He was referring to God's ability to remove sexual desire? I honestly don't know, but it's been suggested by others that this may be what Jesus meant. But if that is true, then why did the Fallen Angels lust after human women? So in my mind, it is still an open question.

Now, if my understanding is correct, and the sexual act does in fact equate to marriage in God's sight, given the liberal attitude of sexual promiscuity that has become so prominent in our world today, just think of how many polygamists and adulterers there are. The wide availability of abortion and many forms of birth control certainly doesn't do anything to help alleviate this problem. As I candidly point out in the series "Abortion: The Slaughter of the Innocent", in my opinion, abortion and birth control are both evil, because they both promote and encourage this very same attitude of sexual promiscuity.

At any rate, that is my current understanding regarding the real moment when two people actually become married. It is when they become one in the flesh. As we saw earlier in this article, God didn't say "I now pronounce you man and wife"; but rather he said "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth". Everything else -- such as the paperwork -- is just a part of the legal formalities which society has come to expect of us. In fact, it may interest you to know that when it comes to marriage and divorce, it seems that the paperwork has been around for literally thousands of years. For example, you may recall this scene that is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark:

"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they

twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

Matthew 19:3-9, KJV

"And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."

Mark 10:2-12, KJV

In the previous verses, the Pharisees were referring to the following portion of the Mosaic Law which is found in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy:

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an

inheritance."

Deuteronomy 24:1-4, KJV

Sadly, as Jesus stated, divorce is not really a part of God's plan for humanity. It was only allowed under the Mosaic Law because of the hardness of the human heart. In other words, I believe that Jesus meant that God only allows divorce as a result of our own inability to love perfectly as we should. Equally tragic is the fact that in the years that followed, liberal-minded rabbis made it even easier for the Jews to obtain a divorce, even for the most vain of reasons. As the previous verses reveal, this was still in practice at the time of Christ. Today, of course, the situation concerning divorce has grown considerably worse. I am reminded of the following verse, spoken by Jesus, regarding the spiritual coldness which would overtake the world:

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

Matthew 24:12, KJV

While I was able to find Scriptural support for "paperwork" pertaining to divorce -- that is, the bill of divorcement -- as strange as it may seem, I was not able to find any verses which specifically mention any kind of document or physical contract -- referred to in Hebrew as "Kesubah" or "Ketubah" -- relating to the marriage ceremony itself. As we saw in part one, the Old Testament mainly discusses the "Mohar". That is to say, the dowry, or bride price. This is not to say that there aren't any verses which discuss a physical marriage contract. But in the time that I devoted to my Biblical research, I was not able to find any. On the other hand, I do find it interesting that the ancient Israelites had the custom of using a shoe, as we saw in the verses pertaining to both the Law of Redemption, as well as Boaz's marriage to Ruth.

As I noted at the beginning of this article, my purpose in writing this article was to answer my friend's question from a purely Biblical perspective. As you may recall, he asked me "How were marriage ceremonies carried out, according to God's Word?". The key phrase there is "according to God's Word". However, if you are interested in learning how the modern Jews perform wedding ceremonies, and in particular, Chassidic wedding ceremonies, you may wish to visit the following web pages:

<https://www.jewish-history.com/minhag.htm>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kesubah>

If you do choose to visit those pages, one thing which you will notice, particularly with the first link, is that there are no Biblical references whatsoever. The foundation for the information is purely Jewish tradition, and the writings of the Jewish rabbis; some of whom took great liberty in their personal interpretation of the Torah -- or Law of God -- as it is found in the Pentateuch. That is to say, in the first five books of the Bible. The second link does provide a few Scriptural references near the bottom of the page.

Addendum - March 3, 2010

Upon reading the previous article, the person to whom it was addressed wrote back to me with the following question:

----- Begin Quote -----

If male and female are married at the moment of intercourse, what then is fornication?

----- End Quote -----

As I explained to him via an email message, I believe that he slightly misunderstood what I am saying in the previous article. To say it another way, when a man and a woman who are committed to each other engage in sexual intercourse, that is the moment at which they truly become married;. That is, when they actually become one flesh.

Fornication is something entirely different. If we carefully study the way that the word "fornication" is used in the New Testament, we will determine that it actually has multiple meanings. Generally speaking, fornication refers to any form of sexual activity which occurs outside of an established male/female marriage relationship, which involves multiple sex partners. The word "fornication" is derived from the Greek word "porneia", and encompasses any form of illicit sexual intercourse. This includes adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, prostitution, etc. Again, in its simplified form, fornication is sexual intercourse with multiple sex partners. The following verses demonstrate these points:

"But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Matthew 5:32, KJV

The above verse clearly demonstrates that marital infidelity, or adultery, is a form of fornication. It involves sex with more than one partner. That is, with one's spouse, as well as with an outsider. Now consider the following verse:

"Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God."

John 8:41, KJV

Notice how the Jews responded to Jesus with the phrase "one Father". Why were they offended? Because the Lord told them that they had another father, other than God. You see, at first, those Jews did not really understand what Jesus was saying to them. They were quite boastful about the fact that they were the sons -- that is, the physical descendants -- of Abraham; but Jesus was implying that they had another father. In other words, in their minds, Jesus was implying that they had more than one father, and thus were the result of multiple sexual relationships. Thus, they took offense, and stated that they were not born of fornication, and had one father. The fact that they used the word "one" clarifies what they were thinking. Of course, Jesus was not referring to physical fornication whatsoever. He was referring to spiritual fornication, and made the fact quite plain to them when He blasted them in verse forty-four where He bluntly tells them that their father is the Devil:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

John 8:44, KJV

If we turn to the Apostle Paul's first Epistle to the church at Corinth, we discover another scriptural example which also demonstrates that Biblically-speaking, fornication refers to sexual relations with more than one partner. Consider this:

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the

Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife."

1 Corinthians 5:1, KJV

In the above verse, we again see that fornication refers to multiple sex partners. In this case, the Church at Corinth was experiencing a very serious problem where a father and a son were having sexual relations with the same woman. That is, with the wife/mother. The Apostle Paul took this problem so seriously that he told them the following:

"To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

1 Corinthians 5:5, KJV

This same idea of fornication referring to multiple sex partners is born out in the following verse as well, where the Apostle Paul states that to avoid fornication, we must have only one sex partner. That is, our husband or wife:

"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

1 Corinthians 7:2, KJV

The intention of Paul's words seems to be that when one is not dedicated to one husband or one wife, he or she tends to go from one sex partner to another, in pursuit of happiness, sexual fulfillment, and the perfect mate. There should be no doubt in any one's mind that this attitude is very prevalent in our modern day, and that the world is filled with fornicators.

We find another Biblical example which perfectly defines the meaning of fornication in the Mother of all Fornicators. That is, in Babylon the Great Whore, who is mentioned in the pages of the Book of Revelation. Spiritually-speaking, we are told that she has had multiple sex partners via the kings and the merchants of the Earth who weep at her destruction, as we see by the following set of verses:

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

Revelation 14:8, KJV

"With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with

the wine of her fornication . . . And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:"

Revelation 17:2, 4 KJV

"For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. . . And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,"

Revelation 18:3, 9, KJV

"For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand."

Revelation 19:2, KJV

So the previous verses and examples should give everyone a much clearer understanding of what the word "fornication" means, according to the Bible. It is important to remember that, as Christians, we should not always depend upon the modern definitions that are applied to words in order to understand the Bible. Sometimes we need to delve into the past, use Hebrew and Greek lexicons, and find the original meanings of words, in order to properly understand God's Word.

Having shared that piece of information with you, I will bring this article to a close. I trust that you have found it helpful and informative, and I pray that it has been an inspiration and a blessing in your life.

If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you would take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which contain topics that are related to this article, and which are likewise located on this very same Bill's Bible Basics website:

The Fruit of the Womb

"Adultery, Fornication, Marriage and Divorce" KJV Bible Verse List

Abortion: The Slaughter of the Innocent

Love, Mercy, Forgiveness and Chastisement

Women Shepherds and Pastors: A Biblical Perspective

Churchianity Or Christianity: Which Do You Practice?

Nephilim: The Giants of Genesis

The Gay and Lesbian Agenda: To the Point!

When Sin is No Longer a Sin!

Queen James Bible: Blasphemous Abomination Exposed!

"Homosexuality Lesbianism Bestiality Transvestitism" KJV Bible Verse List

The Overhauling of Straight America

The Gay Gene?

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