

## The Ancient Hebrew Wedding and the Return of Yeshua

The ancient Hebrew wedding is a custom that has been modified and changed many times during the last two thousand years. However, it is important as Talmidim of Yeshua to acknowledge what was the norm in the time when Yeshua was teaching here on earth.

The ancient Hebrew wedding had seven important steps that had to be fulfilled in sequence before the marriage could be considered complete. All seven steps are revealed in the words of Yeshua himself and are reinforced by the narrative from both the Tanakh (OT) and the letters in the Brit Hadashah (NT). The seven major steps are as follow:-

1. Selection and price of the bride
2. Betrothal and Ketubah
3. Bride consent and Mikvah
4. Departure of the Groom
5. Return of the Groom
6. Consumation of the marriage
7. The marriage banquet

### 1. Selection of the bride

Looking at the first step, we know from the words of Genesis 24:3-4, that Avraham sent his trusted servant to find a suitable wife for his son Yitzchak:-

*I want you to swear by YHVH, God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not choose a wife for my son from among the women of the Kena'ani, among whom I am living; <sup>4</sup> but that you will go to my homeland, to my kinsmen, to choose a wife for my son Yitz'chak."*

Once the father of the Groom had selected the bride, it was customary to pay the bride's father a ransom to release his daughter for the marriage. Because property inheritance was of paramount importance in the ancient world, it was more important for the father of the groom to choose his son's bride, rather than the son selecting a woman he loved. Love was an aspect of the marriage that came later. Often, as with Yitzchak, the bride and groom did not meet each other until after the contract between the father's was completed. That feature is reflected in 1 Peter 1:8, where we are told about our relationship with Yeshua:-

*Without having seen him, you love him. Without seeing him now, but trusting in him, you continue to be full of joy that is glorious beyond words.*

The bride price paid by the groom's father was to compensate for the material loss the bride's father would incur by her leaving his home. However, in the case of Yeshua a much higher price had to be paid, as we read in 1 Peter 18-19, where it says:- *You should be aware that the ransom paid to free you from the worthless way of life which your fathers passed on to you did not consist of anything perishable like silver or gold; <sup>19</sup> on the contrary, it was the costly bloody sacrificial death of the Messiah, as of a lamb without defect or spot.*

Then Sha'ul likens the bride price to the freeing of a slave when he says in 1 Corinthians 7:23 - *You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of other human beings.*

## **2. Betrothal and Ketubah**

Having purchased the bride, the groom's father then arranged for the betrothal, which was equivalent to the modern engagement. However, betrothal was much more than an engagement, it was the first real step of the marriage process. Once a couple were joined in betrothal, it was effectively a marriage, that is apart from the consummation which would follow later.

The betrothal was a legally binding step, which if broken by either party, would require a certificate of divorce. Hence, at the time of betrothal the father of the groom presented a Ketubah (Certificate of Marriage) to the father of the bride. The Ketubah consisted of a series of promises that the groom and his father were making to the bride and her father.

The Ketubah, given to the bride of Yeshua is the promise of the New Covenant, as spoken about by Jeremiah in 31:31-34, it has legally bound her to her groom through his fulfillment of that covenant, which we read last evening.

Completion of the Ketubah between Yeshua and his bride was stated by Yeshua himself during his last Seder, when he said in Luke 22:20:- *with the cup after the meal, saying, "This cup is the New Covenant, ratified by my blood, which is being poured out for you."*

Later that same day he ratified the New Covenant through his own bloody sacrificial death. So, the marriage contract was sealed between all whom YHVH, as the Father of Yeshua has deemed worthy to be part of his bride.

However, we much always remember that as the bride of Yeshua, either party can break the marriage contract at any stage. So, it is beholden upon all who have been called to ensure that the terms of the marriage are continually pursued, until either our death or the upward call. As Sha'ul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 9:25:- *Now every athlete in training submits himself to strict discipline, and he does it just to win a laurel wreath that will soon wither away. But we do it to win a crown that will last forever.*

### **3. Bride's Consent and Mikvah (Immersion)**

Although the father of the groom arranges the marriage, the bride has to also give her consent, which is borne out by what took place in Genesis 24:57-58, where Rivkah (Rebeca) was asked if she agreed to the marriage contract:- *They said, "We will call the girl and see what she says." They called Rivkah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" and she replied, "I will."*

YHVH never forces anyone to come into a marriage relationship with his Son, without their own personal consent. At his last Seder, Yeshua having sealed the New Covenant through the symbol of the bread and the wine, he then turned to the eleven and said, as recorded in Matthew 26:29:- *"I tell you, I will not drink this 'fruit of the vine' again until the day I drink new wine with you in my Father's Kingdom."*

Yeshua by saying those words, proved that his whole mission was centred round the customs of the Hebrew wedding. He was saying that he would depart for an unstated period, to prepare for their wedding, while his bride prepared herself, in his absence.

Having ratified the New Covenant, he continued sharing with the Talmidim for forty days following his resurrection. During that time he promised that he would fulfil yet another of the wedding customs. He promised that shortly after his departure he would send his bride a priceless gift, which today would be the engagement ring. However, what Yeshua was giving was something of far greater value, it was the Ruach HaKodesh (the Holy Spirit).

Just as his Father had given Isra'el two tablets of stone with the Ten Word inscribed, as their Ketubah for his marriage with Isra'el at Mt Horev, so also he gave them Ark of the Covenant, as the wedding gift as confirmation of their marriage with him.

So, by Yeshua giving his bride the Ruach HaKodesh, he also placed a part of himself in the midst of his bride and more importantly in their hearts. While Isra'el had a very close and tangible relationship with YHVH, it was never the less still external. But, we as Talmidim of Yeshua have a personal heart-centred relationship with our bridegroom, through the indwelling of the Ruach.

In response to the gift being given by Yeshua, each member of his initial bride, having earlier accepted their call from God the Father, followed the words of Kefa in Act 2:36 & 38-39.

*<sup>36</sup> Therefore, let the whole house of Isra'el know beyond doubt that God has made him both Lord and Messiah — this Yeshua, whom you executed on a stake!" ... <sup>38</sup> Kefa [then said], "Turn from sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh! <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away — as many as YHVH our God may call!"*

At that initial giving of the bridal gift (the Ruach) three thousand were added to the number of faithful who had been were called by YHVH. Each one was immersed and received the gift of the Ruach.

#### **4. Departure of the Groom**

The giving of the gift took place just ten days after Yeshua ascended to the right hand of his Father, where as we read in John 14:2-1-4:- *"Don't let yourselves be disturbed. Trust in God and trust in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many places to live. If there weren't, I would have told you; because I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> Since I am going and preparing a place for you, I will return to take you with me; so that where I am, you may be also. <sup>4</sup> Furthermore, you know where I'm going; and you know the way there."*

It is clear from these verses that Yeshua is currently fulfilling the obligations of the bridegroom. He has gone back to his father's house in accordance with the ancient custom. It is there that he is preparing a room as the bridal

chamber, where his marriage will be consummated. But, as Yeshua has many brides he said – *“In my Father’s house are many places to live.”*

So, rather than preparing just one room, Yeshua is preparing many places in his city, New Yerushalayim, which will be our home for eternity. But, it took time to prepare the bridal chamber, so the groom was often absent for over a year from the time of the betrothal until his return to receive his bride.

During the groom’s absence the bride also prepared herself. She has to be vigilant and watch constantly for the day when her groom would return. She remains in her father’s house gathering bridal wares, ready for the great day.

She was not allowed to have any other boyfriends or suitors in his absence, instead she had to remain holy (set-apart) while she awaited his return. This is what is spoken about in John 15:18-19 *“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, the world would have loved its own. But because you do not belong to the world — on the contrary, I have picked you out of the world — therefore the world hates you.*

However the world would often exert pressure upon the bride to take an active role in village life, with many saying, live it up while you can, because your groom will be a long time coming and maybe he will never return. These words are similar to those in 2 Peter 3:3-4 speak of when saying, of Yeshua:- *<sup>3</sup>First, understand this: during the Last Days, scoffers will come, following their own desires <sup>4</sup> and asking, “Where is this promised ‘coming’ of his? For our fathers have died, and everything goes on just as it has since the beginning of creation.”*

## **5. Return of the Groom**

But, the groom will return. On a day and at a time when he may be least expected, as Mark 13:32 says:- *However, when that day and hour will come, no one knows — not the angels in heaven, not the Son, just the Father. <sup>33</sup> Stay alert! Be on your guard! For you do not know when the time will come.*

The groom would not return until the bridal chamber is complete and ready. The father of the groom would inspect the completed work and pronounce the time when his son could go and fetch his bride. The same applies with Yeshua as he waits at the right hand of his father. He will only return when he is given approval by his Father. That is why, as we read last evening in

Matthew 25:13:- *So stay alert, because you know neither the day nor the hour.*

But, when the bridegroom arrived, he came with a fanfare of shofars and the support of his groomsmen. In the same way Yeshua will return with a blast of God's shofar and a whole host of angels with him and his presence will be announced as in Matthew 24:27, where we are told:- *For when the Son of Man does come, it will be like lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon.*

So, the bride had to be ready along with all her bridesmaids, so that they could all leave at a moments notice. The same with Yeshua as we read last evening in the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, there will be no time to go and make last minute preparations, because the groom will not be waiting around.

Just as it was with the servant of Avraham when he found Rivkah. After meeting with the family he expressed an urgent need to return to his master Avraham, with the bride for Yitzchak, as read in Genesis 24:53-56:- *Then the servant brought out silver and gold jewellery, together with clothing, and gave them to Rivkah. He also gave valuable gifts to her brother and mother. <sup>54</sup> He and his men then ate and drank and stayed the night. In the morning they got up; and he said, "Send me off to my master." <sup>55</sup> Her brother and mother said, "Let the girl stay with us a few days, at least ten. After that, she will go." <sup>56</sup> He answered them, "Don't delay me, since YHVH has made my trip successful, but let me go back to my master."*

In the same way, there will be no delays when Yeshua comes. He will not linger with the brides family, but rather he will make a hasty return to his father's house, with his bride.

Again we see the same urgency expressed in 1 Corinthians 15:52-53, where Sha'ul says:- *It will take but a moment, the blink of an eye, at the final shofar. For the shofar will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever, and we too will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this material which can decay must be clothed with imperishability, this which is mortal must be clothed with immortality.*

## 6. Consumation of the marriage

Having been legally married since the time of their betrothal the bride and groom had just one further step to complete the marriage. That is the consumation, which was similar to what we are told of Yitzchak and Rivkah in Gen 24:64-67:- *Rivkah too looked up; and when she saw Yitz'chak, she quickly dismounted the camel. <sup>65</sup> She said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" When the servant replied, "It's my master," she took her veil and covered herself. <sup>66</sup> The servant told Yitz'chak everything he had done. <sup>67</sup> Then Yitz'chak brought her into his mother Sarah's tent and took Rivkah, and she became his wife, and he loved her.*

In the same way God ordained marriage between Adam and Havah (Eve) when he said in Gen 2:23-24:- *The man-person said, "At last! This is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She is to be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." <sup>24</sup> This is why a man is to leave his father and mother and stick with his wife, and they are to be one flesh.*

We are also told in Isaiah 26:20:- *Come, my people, enter your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past.*

The wrath referred to in this verse appears to be the purging of the nations on earth which may take place over the period of Yom Kippur and Sukkot, while the marriage of Yeshua and his bride is being consummated in the New Yerushalayim.

## 7. The Marriage Banquet

No wedding is complete without a banquet. Following the consumation of the marriage in the ancient Hebrew wedding, the banquet lasted for seven days and all the people of the village and other important guests were invited. As it says in Revelation 19:9:- *The angel said to me, "Write: 'How blessed are those who have been invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb!'"*

Again in Matthew 22:1-10 we read about the guests who were invited to the wedding banquet, where it says:- *Yeshua again used parables in speaking to them: <sup>2</sup> "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son, <sup>3</sup> but when he sent his slaves to summon the invited guests to the wedding, they refused to come. <sup>4</sup> So he sent some more slaves,*

*instructing them to tell the guests, 'Look, I've prepared my banquet, I've slaughtered my bulls and my fattened cattle, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding!' <sup>5</sup> But they weren't interested and went off, one to his farm, another to his business; <sup>6</sup> and the rest grabbed his slaves, mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was furious and sent his soldiers, who killed those murderers and burned down their city.*

*<sup>8</sup> "Then he said to his slaves, 'Well, the wedding banquet is ready; but the ones who were invited didn't deserve it. <sup>9</sup> So go out to the street-corners and invite to the banquet as many as you find.' <sup>10</sup> The slaves went out into the streets, gathered all the people they could find, the bad along with the good; and the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

Here in lies a Scriptural paradox. Firstly, in this parable, Yeshua is referring to the call going out to the people of the Y'hudah, who found many reasons not to go to the banquet. So, the king (Yeshua's Father) became furious with his people and destroyed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple and scattered Y'hudah throughout the Roman diaspora. He then invited many diverse people from among the nations to be the guests.

So, if we consider the details of this parable a little more closely, we see that many of the invited guests are from outside of Isra'el. Therefore, we need to consider carefully, who the characters are that are being featured in the ancient Hebrew wedding, as it related to Yeshua?

Firstly, the Groom is Yeshua, and his Father is El Shaddai (God Almighty). Therefore, the bride's father must also be the father of Isra'el, because Yeshua's bride is taken at least in part from the midst of Isra'el, as we are told in Revelation 7:4 - *I heard how many were sealed — 144,000 from every tribe of the people of Isra'el.*

As, Isra'el is the wife of YHVH, then the bride is also taken from within the family of Isra'el, which reflects Genesis 24, where Rivkah as the bride for Yitzchak was also taken from the family of Avraham.

Then we see reference to Gentiles who have also been called in Revelation 7:9 - *After this, I looked; and there before me was a huge crowd, too large for anyone to count, from every nation, tribe, people and language. They*



*were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands;*

Then in Revelation 19:6-8 we are told:- *Then I heard what sounded like the roar of a huge crowd, like the sound of rushing waters, like loud peals of thunder, saying, "Halleluyah! YHVH, God of heaven's armies, has begun his reign! <sup>7</sup> "Let us rejoice and be glad! Let us give him the glory! For the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and his Bride has prepared herself <sup>8</sup> fine linen, bright and clean has been given her to wear."*

These are taken from among Isra'el and many nations, because they are the ones who have put their trust in Yeshua as the Messiah. Together they are worthy to be present of the wedding banquet. Are they the five wise bridesmaids (virgins), who's lamps are trimmed and full of oil? We, see from all this the whole Scriptural narrative about Yeshua, is centred around the Ancient Hebrew Wedding process.

In conclusion we finally see that to fully appreciate the significance of how the Hebrew wedding unfolds, it is necessary to consider many Scriptures from both the Tanakh and the B'rit Hadashah, because the drama is revealed in many different places between Genesis to Revelation. Why? Because Yeshua is not only the bridegroom, but also the Word of God; and as such was responsible for the giving of the whole scriptural narrative, firstly to Moshe, then to the Prophets, followed by the Emissaries and finally the Revelation to Yochanan, as the conclusion that ties all earlier Scriptures together and reveals the future purpose of those who have been called and who may finally be chosen to live with Yeshua forever.

## **Shabbat Shalom**

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