

## Pt 7: The Rapture of the Bride (part 2)

### The Hebrew Wedding and the Rapture

As I pointed out in my last message ('The Rapture of the Bride pt 1'), there appears to be significant misunderstanding concerning the nature and purpose of the Lord's *'parousia'* ('coming' / 'presence') for his people. I believe this failure to distinguish between the 'rapture' of believers and the actual 'second coming' itself, has been brought about by a relative unfamiliarity in recent times with Old Testament teaching in regards to the Old and New Covenants.

As I hope to show in this message, the truth of the 'rapture' of the Church is quite inseparable from the marriage of the 'Bride' and the 'Bridegroom', as it takes place under the terms of the New Covenant. We'll only grasp the real significance of the 'rapture' when we understand how it parallels the penultimate stage of an actual wedding ("nissu'in") in ancient Hebrew culture. As some-one has said: 'He who denies the 'rapture' of believers is some-one not sufficiently acquainted with the ancient Hebrew marriage ritual.'

So let's begin:

As we know, the relationship between Christ and the Church is right now the relationship between the spiritual 'bridegroom'-to-be and his prospective 'bride'. As Paul describes it in [Ephesians 5:31-32](#),

“...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery---but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

Accordingly, the apostle expresses the purpose of his life and ministry in the following terms:

"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." (2 Corinthians 11:2)

The wedding itself takes place when we reach the Father's house in Heaven. There we'll be married to the Lord and there we'll enjoy a wedding supper (reception).

**Revelation 19:7-9** "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. [8] Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) [9] Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"

We can't describe every detail of the ancient Hebrew marriage process itself but we'll pick out a few salient points and parallel them to our developing relationship with Christ. This will enable us to understand the true nature of the 'rapture'.

### **Shiddukhin (mutual commitment)**

The ancient Hebrew marriage process was actually divided in two parts: *betrothal* ('*Shiddukhin*') and the wedding itself ('*Nissu'in*'). These two events were separated by an interval of (usually) twelve months.

*'Shiddukhin'* involved a promise to wed: a commitment to the contemplated marriage. It refers to the first step in the marriage process leading up to, and including, the legal betrothal. This betrothal process was considered to be of the utmost importance: a betrothed couple were considered married even though not enjoying the actual benefits of marriage.

Here's how 'Shiddukhin' began:

### The father chose the bride for his son:

It was common in ancient Israel for the father to select a bride for his son - in fact the match was often arranged by the respective fathers ([Genesis 24:3-4](#); [24:51](#)). According to some Jewish rabbis, this first step in 'Shiddukhin' is seen in [Genesis 15](#), where Abraham, the father of the bride (Israel) negotiated the terms of the proposed marriage with the prospective groom (Yahweh).

This was customary in Israel in Old Testament times; a suitable marriage would, in a typical case, be arranged between the families of the prospective couple. In fact, romantic love was often considered secondary and something which would develop over time. We come across the first record of such an arrangement in [Genesis](#) when Abraham sends a messenger (probably Eliezer of Damascus) to procure a bride for Isaac, his son ([Genesis 24.3](#)).

In other instances, a young man might spot what he perceived to be a beautiful young woman and he would either ask his father's permission to take her as his bride (as Samson did with Delilah [[Judges 14:1](#)]) or ask his father to procure the girl on his behalf - as in the case of

Shechem and Dinah ([Genesis 34:4](#)). In all cases, the parents would play an active part in arranging the union on behalf of the young couple.

### Our Father chose us

This begins the parallel between the Hebrew marriage ceremony and Christ's relationship with the Church. We were chosen by our Heavenly Father as a bride for Christ, the Son; therefore our 'Shiddukin' began in eternity and everything has proceeded from that point.

We read about this 'moment' in [Ephesians 1:4-5](#),

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will---" (see also [1 Peter 2:2](#))

### The next step

The groom, together with his father, would then visit the home of the prospective bride. The picture here is a beautiful one: Christ came down from heaven to earth ([Philippians 2](#)) - from his home to that of the bride - in order to make arrangements for our betrothal to him. This union could, of course, only be made possible by the paying of the bride-price (as we'll see shortly).

Once the father and son had arrived, they would knock on the bride's door and seek admittance. This is reflected in the words of Jesus:

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in....." ([Revelation 3:20](#). See also [John 1:12](#))

The next step was then up to the bride. If she refused to open the door, the betrothal process would be over! But if she opened her door, the father and son would come in to begin negotiations for the marriage.

This is a crucial point: although the bride may have been chosen and the marriage arranged, she still had to give her consent: the groom couldn't force himself upon her!

We can see this in the example of Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah was chosen by the messenger who was acting on behalf of the father (Abraham) but her consent was nevertheless essential:

**Genesis 24:57-58** "Then they said, "Let's call the young woman and ask her about it." [58] So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said" (see also **Genesis 24:39, 43-46**).

**We too have free will to accept or reject Christ.**

Similarly, Jesus does not force himself on the sinner. Free will is taught everywhere in the Scriptures (**John 1:-12, 3:16**) but though he knocks on the heart's door and (through the Holy Spirit) requests admittance, sadly the majority of human beings have refused to open up to him (**John 1:11; 5:40**).

Once the father and son were admitted to the bride's home, the "Shiddukhin" could then continue. The son would sip from a cup of wine and then pass it to the bride. If she also sipped from the cup, this signified that she had

accepted him (it was regarded as effectively being their first kiss). So it says in the [Song of Songs 1:2](#),

**"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth---for your love is more delightful than wine."**

This first cup was of utmost significance. It signified that the prospective bride and groom were willing to set themselves apart and remain faithful and pure for each other; i.e. 'sanctified'. (This sharing of the communion cup would later be publicly formalised under the 'chuppah' - as we'll see shortly).

The couple's participation in the same cup was also emblematic of the fact that they would be joining their two families together - 'one blood', if you will. How perfect a picture of the believer and his Lord. By virtue of his shed blood shed for us, we are made one with him! Joined with the Saviour in his death ([Romans 6:3](#); [Galatians 2:20](#)) buried with him ([Romans 6:4](#)) and soon to rise again in the likeness of his resurrection ([Romans 6:5](#)), we will enjoy, in him, every privilege of full sonship in the family of God for all eternity! ([Galatians 4:4-5](#)). What amazing love and grace!!

Now the door having been opened and the cup shared, the two families then sat down to a communal meal over which the parties thrashed out the terms and conditions of the proposed marriage.

This is reflected in the full text of [Revelation 3:20](#)  
**"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."**

Once the terms of the marriage had been agreed upon, both parties celebrated by sharing a second cup of wine. The participation in this cup by the spiritual 'Bride' (the Church) and her prospective groom (Christ) is seen in the "Last Supper" - the Passover meal shared by our Lord and his disciples (who were to be the foundational members of the 'Bride'; ([Matthew 16:18](#); [Ephesians 2:20-22](#))).

"Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. [28] This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." ([Matthew 26:27-28](#))

The results of the negotiations were then enshrined in a written contract, known as a 'Ketubah'.

### **The Ketubah ('marriage contract')**

The 'Ketubah' has, from earliest times up to the present day, been regarded as a necessary part of any Jewish marriage. It is an entirely one-sided document, created solely to protect the interests of the bride. It set out precisely the groom's obligations and the nature of the provisions he would make for his bride both before and after the wedding. As such, it remained essentially the property of the bride, and so important was it, that a Jewish woman who didn't possess a 'ketubah' was regarded as little more than a concubine. Once written ('ketubah' means 'written') and signed by two witnesses, this marriage document was considered to be legally binding from the onset.

This 'ketubah' was unilateral in that the bride was under no similar obligation to contribute anything material for the support of the marriage. She had only to agree to the

terms of the 'ketubah'. to thereafter remain pure and faithful to her intended before and after the wedding, to prepare herself for married life and to learn to be a good wife and mother ([Proverbs 31:10-28](#)).

### We also have a Ketubah

We too, as the prospective 'bride', have received our spiritual 'ketubah' under the terms of the New Covenant. It was foreshadowed by the prophet Jeremiah and its wording, unlike that of the Old Covenant ([Exodus 19, 24](#)), contains no conditions to be met by the bride (see [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)). A fuller explanation of this can be found in an earlier message in this series: '*Reconciliation: the New Covenant*'. The details of our 'ketubah' are enshrined in what we know as the 'New Testament'.

Like the Jewish bride of old, we too contribute nothing towards our Salvation except to receive Christ as our Saviour and gratefully accept everything he has freely and graciously provided for us:

[John 1:12](#) "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God---"

[Ephesians 2:8-9](#) "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith---and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--- [9] not by works, so that no one can boast."

The stipulations imposed on the Jewish bridegroom by the 'ketubah' are very similar to those found in Jewish marriage contracts today. And as such, they form a fascinating parallel to those found in the marriage contract that binds our heavenly bridegroom to his bride-to-be, the Church. Our spiritual 'ketubah' was signed

with the blood of Christ ([Matthew 26:28](#); [Hebrews 12:24](#)) and witnessed by the whole of the Godhead ([1 John 1:7](#); [2 Corinthians 13:1](#)). It's presented to us as the Scriptures - the Word of God - penned by human beings but effectively written by the Spirit of God ([2 Peter 1:21](#); [2 Timothy 3:16](#)).

There are three stipulations in the Jewish 'ketubah' that are particularly relevant to us as the 'bride-to-be':

(I) The amount of the dowry or 'bride-price' to be paid by the groom to the bride's father (known as 'mohar') was stipulated in the contract. The 'mohar' was usually reserved as a kind of insurance, claimable by the bride in case of divorce, desertion or death).

(ii) Provisions for the support and comfort of the bride, including:

- (a) food
- (b) clothing
- (c) oil (conjugal love)

(These three things were actually imposed on the groom by the Torah (as set out in [Exodus 21:10](#))).

(iii) The provision of a home in which the married couple would dwell

How blessed this is! We find that Christ himself, our heavenly bridegroom, has already fulfilled the first condition, is currently fulfilling the second and will soon (we believe) have fulfilled the third!

Let's look at these in turn:

### **A. Mohar - the bride-price**

We first come across the concept of 'mohar' in the story of Prince Shechem and Dinah, Jacob's daughter. Shechem had violated Dinah but seemed to genuinely love her and wished to marry her. And so he says to Jacob and his sons:

**"Make the price for the bride ("*mohar*") and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife."** (Genesis 34:12 )

It's important here to realize that the payment of a 'mohair' (bride-price) was not a transaction that meant the girl was being 'purchased' like a slave. It was, in fact, helping to ensure her welfare, because, although paid to the father, it was usually put aside on the bride's behalf - thereby acting as a kind of 'insurance policy' should it ever be needed. In fact, it actually appears that the original purpose of the 'mohar' was to compensate the father of the bride for losing some-one who was a valuable member of his house-hold. For that reason, the amount of the 'mohar' was often calculated as the wages for one year of a servant girl who would be needed to replace the bride.

What is very important for our discussion is that the payment of the 'mohar' changed the status of the bride: it set her free from her father's house and enabled the bridegroom to ultimately take her away as his own! (Genesis 24:53, 29:20,27).

The most striking example of this aspect of the '*mohar*' is seen in the case of Israel (the earthly bride) and Yahweh, her husband-to-be. They were already betrothed (Genesis 15) but Israel could not be delivered from her father's

house (Egypt) until the bride-price had been paid. In this case, in type, it was the blood of the Passover Lamb ([Exodus 12](#)). Once redeemed from Egypt, Israel was then shortly thereafter joined to her husband in marriage at Mount Sinai (see first message in this series: '*A marriage made in Heaven*').

And this is a type of what has happened with us, the spiritual 'bride'. The "mohar" was paid for us by the sacrifice of *our* Passover lamb on the cross. As Paul says in [1 Corinthians 5:7](#)

".....Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

The bride-price has been paid and the currency used by the groom was his own blood!

[1 Peter 1:18-19](#) "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed .....19] but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

So as with the Hebrew bride of old, we too have been delivered from the bondage of sin which tied us to the world and the 'god' of this world ([1 John 5:19](#)). With our status similarly changed ([Ephesians 2:2-6](#)) we are now released to be joined with our Lord in heavenly marriage. In fact, the very word 'redeem' ('*exagorázō*') means: 'to buy up for oneself'; 'recover from the power of another by the payment of a price'. ([1 Corinthians 6:20](#))

## **B. Food, clothing and oil**

The groom's responsibility, stipulated in the 'ketubah', was to provide his beloved with 'food', 'clothing' and

'marital love'. This is also seen in the provisions Christ has made for *his* 'bride':

**a. Food:**

- (i) he is the bread of life ([John 6:22-59](#))
- (ii) he feeds us with his Word ([Hebrews 5:14](#); [1 Peter 2:2](#))
- (iii) he is the water of life ([John 7:37](#))
- (iv) he nourishes and cares for the Church as a man does with his own body - and should do for his own wife ([Ephesians 5:28-29](#))

And even on a physical, natural plane, his continuing provision for us is assured:

[Matthew 6:31-33](#) "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. [33] But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

**b. Clothing:**

Our Lord has clothed us in garments of salvation ([Isaiah 61:10](#); [Luke 15:22](#)) and he himself provides our practical and eternal sanctification ([Romans 13:14](#))

**c. Oil (Marital love)**

Christ loves the Church as a husband loves his wife ([Ephesians 5:25](#)).

**C. A marriage home**

Last, but certainly not least, the groom was bound by the 'ketubah' to provide a home for his bride after the wedding. As a general rule, the rooms would be made by

creating an extension on the family home. This, Christ also promised to do for us. He said to his troubled disciples:

**John 14:2-3** "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

(This returning for his bride is what we refer as the 'rapture'. A little later we'll explain just why we do so).

The participation in the 'kiddushin' cup ('cup of sanctification') by the now-betrothed couple and the writing up of the 'ketubah' was followed by a public betrothal under the 'chuppah' (a marriage canopy or tent). But firstly, in preparation for this ceremony, the couple would be separately immersed in a bridal bath known as a 'mikveh'.

### **The Mikveh (Ritual immersion)**

This ritual bath was symbolic of spiritual cleansing. Immersion in the water symbolised the couple's vow of purity and separation ('kiddushin') for each other. One rule of the 'mikveh' was that the bride had to be totally submerged in running or 'living' water: no part of her body was to be untouched. She would bend towards the stream with mouth, eyes and even fingers and toes open. By doing so, she signified that she would remain every inch pure and devoted to her beloved. Following the 'mikveh', her attendants would then anoint her with fragrant oil.

Our heavenly Bridegroom (Jesus) was immersed in the running waters of 'mikveh' at the very beginning of his public ministry when he was baptised by John in the

Jordan river ([Matthew 3:13-17](#)). And as the bride, we also have our ritual immersion in baptism at the very beginning of our betrothal to the Lord. ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#)). In this way, each of us (bride and bridegroom) have publicly indicated that we are now 'sanctified' ('set apart') for each other ([Ephesians 5:26-27](#); [I Corinthians 6:11](#)).

(We must, of course, remember that water baptism is the public declaration of the spiritual baptism that occurred when we first accepted Christ and were baptised into his death ([Romans 6:3](#); [Ephesians 4:5](#)).

This ritual baptism (or bridal bath) gives us three important truths about baptism in the church today:

1. It is only undertaken by one who is already saved (i.e. 'betrothed' to Christ)
2. It involves full immersion in the water
3. It is an act of 'sanctification'

Kenneth Wuest, the great Greek scholar of 'Back to the Bible' fame, described the meaning of baptism in this way:

**“Human life cannot breathe under water. Going under water symbolises fact that we have entered a new environment that forever separates us from our previous, natural existence.”**

Baptism declares that we are "dead to the world" - so to speak. Paul describes this relationship in the following terms:

**[Galatians 6:14](#) "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."**

And so, to indicate our death in the death of Christ and our consequent spiritual separation from the world, we

undergo water baptism - which is a picture of us being buried with Christ in a place that is dead to this world. In effect we, as the bride, are each individually (and publicly) declaring: "I have broken all connections with my former surroundings. I am separated from this world (under the 'waters of death'). This world has no appeal for me: it's dead to me - and I to it ([Romans 6:6-8](#)). I'm now waiting for my beloved to come and get me - and I intend to live my life accordingly:

So the spiritual bride and groom have been sanctified for each other. Christ referred to this in his high-priestly prayer:

[John 17:19](#) "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

And look at the context of our Lord's statement. It's all about us being kept from contamination from this world - much as a bride-to-be would be expected to keep herself pure while she remained in her father's house, awaiting the arrival of her beloved:

[John 17:15-19](#) My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. [16] They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. [17] Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. [18] As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. [19] For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

When Christ rose from the dead, he no longer belonged in any sense to this world: he was preparing to go home. After his resurrection, he said to Mary Magdalene:

"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father (i.e. to prepare a dwelling place). Go instead to my

brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father (the 'families' were now united'), to my God and your God.' ” (John 20:17)

Similarly - in baptism - we enter the water - signifying our death in the death of Christ (Romans 6:3). Having been crucified with Christ, we are living a new life which is dead to sin (Romans 6:2,4). And when you think about it, isn't death the ultimate sanctification? A dead body cannot respond to its surroundings: the separation is complete (James 2:26).

As Christ said John 17:14 “..they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”

### Public Betrothal (under the Chuppah)

The betrothed couple then proceeded to the 'chuppah' (a marriage canopy) erected for the purpose). This 'chuppah' itself was symbolic of the new household they intended to establish together. At this point the 'ketubah' would customarily be read out aloud and the couple would publicly announce their intention to enter the betrothal period together (much like the wedding 'banns' today).

At some stage in these proceedings:

- (i) the groom would make a gift to the bride of something valuable - such as a ring or an amount of money
- (ii) the 'ketubah' would be signed by two witnesses
- (iii) the couple's covenant vows would be sealed and celebrated by their final sharing in a cup of wine over which a blessing would be pronounced

(As all ancient covenants were customarily signed and sealed with blood, it would appear that this sharing in a cup of wine reflected this practice).

And interestingly, the groom would often vow not to drink wine again until he joined his bride in the wedding feast.

As we described earlier, Christ shared in this 'kiddushin' cup with his disciples on what was effectively the eve of his departure and he also vowed that he wouldn't drink wine again until he joined his bride at the end of the impending separation:

**Matthew 26:29** “I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

Notice that the Lord refers here to his ‘Father’s kingdom’. It would seem that he is referring to the time when he takes the 'bride' back to the father's house, as he promised in **John 14:2-4**.

This giving of items of value would also seem to be reflected in Scripture. After his resurrection, it says this of the Lord in **Ephesians 4:8**, that:

“When he ascended on high .....he gave gifts to his people.”

These gifts include the gift of grace (**Ephesians 2:8**), eternal life (**Romans 6:23**) and so on. However there is one gift Christ gave that is particularly significant in the context of the Hebrew wedding ritual - but more of that in a moment.

So important was the 'shiddukihn' ('betrothal') and the 'kiddushin' ('sanctification') that although they would be living apart without a physical relationship for at least twelve months, the betrothed couple were now regarded as effectively married. So much so that any infidelity

would be regarded as adultery and any breaking of the union would require a religious divorce (a 'get').

Joseph and Mary are often cited as examples of this. During their 'erusin', Mary had fallen pregnant. Believing her to have been unfaithful, Joseph, her 'husband' had decided to 'divorce' Mary before they had even got to the stage of living together as man and wife;

**Matthew 1:19-20** “Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. [20] But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

We too, as the betrothed of Christ, are similarly sanctified for him and are effectively married in the purposes of God. If we compromise ourselves with the world around us - if we are drawn to things other than our beloved - then we are committing spiritual 'adultery' in the absence of our coming groom.

**James 4:4** “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?”

But how comforting the 'flip-side' of this relationship proves to be for us. It shows how actually impossible it is for us to 'lose our salvation'. This is because even though the wedding itself lies in the future, we (the 'bride') are "legally" (in the eyes of God), already 'married' to our Lord Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 5:31-32**). Therefore It would take a divorce to separate us. and that can *never* happen! In

ancient times, only the man could initiate a divorce proceeding and that is something our heavenly groom-to-be has promised he will *never* do! ([Hebrews 3:5](#)).

### The Erusin

Following the public ceremony under the 'chuppah', the couple then separated. The groom would return to his father's house to prepare the dwelling place for them both while the bride remained in her father's house to prepare her wedding garments - as well as learn how to be a good wife and mother.

This period of separation (usually about twelve months) was known as the 'erusin' ('betrothal'). It did not mean 'engagement' as we understand it today but there are obvious similarities. At the end of 'erusin', the groom would return and gather up his waiting bride for the wedding itself ('nissu'in').

Perhaps one of the last things the bridegroom would do before he left the bride, would be to reassure her that he would be coming back for her. There can be no lovelier example of this than found in what were essentially Christ's parting words to his anxious disciples:

[John 14:2-3](#) "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

### The Mattan

Now before he left, the departing groom would give his prospective bride a costly gift known as a 'mattan'. We

come across the first reference to this once again in the story of Shechem and Dinah. Remember what Shechem said to Jacob and his sons?

**Genesis 34:12** "Make the price for the bride and the gift ('mattan') I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife."

First and foremost, the 'mattan' was a mark of ownership - a declaration by the groom that the bride now belonged to him alone (much as an engagement ring does today). Remember that in Hebrew thought and rabbinical law, the couple were effectively 'married' from the day of betrothal. So much so that unfaithfulness during the engagement period was regarded as tantamount to 'adultery'.

The 'mattan' also served another important purpose. It was given by the groom to the bride to remind her that she was always in his thoughts, that he loved her and that one day he would come back to claim her as his own.

This what the Holy Spirit does! He's here to remind us of Christ's words (**John 16:14**) to reassure us of our heavenly destiny (**1 Corinthians 2:7,10**) and to prepare the 'Bride' in every possible respect to be ready to meet her heavenly 'Bridegroom' (see message: 'The Spirit and the Bride'.) It was, in effect, a deposit on the marriage by which the groom 'sealed' the bride for himself!

And what is the costly gift given to us by our now-absent Bridegroom? No less than the Holy Spirit Himself who is actually referred to in Scripture as a 'gift', sent by the Father and 'given' to us at the Son's request (**Acts 2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17**).

In this respect, the costly 'gift' of the Holy Spirit serves the same function as an engagement ring (which is usually much more expensive than the wedding ring itself). A very significant verse in [Ephesians chapter one](#) seems to bear a direct relationship to this:

[Ephesians 1:13-14](#) (KJV) "...in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise (14) which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession"

The Holy Spirit who has 'sealed us' (a mark of ownership) is described as the 'earnest' ('pledge'/'deposit') of our inheritance. And here's the interesting thing! The word 'earnest' is the Greek word 'àrrabōn' which is used in modern Greek to mean 'an engagement ring'.

In the same sense, too, the Holy Spirit serves as a kind of 'first-fruits', giving us, the awaiting Bride, a 'fore-taste' or 'glimpse' of the glory that awaits us when we join our heavenly groom ([Romans 8:23](#)). This is what Eliezer, Abraham's messenger, did for Rebekah when persuading her to return with him to join with Isaac ([Genesis 24:35-36](#)).

Soon after groom left - the bride would throw a party and receive gifts, one of which would be a veil. It was important for her to wear this veil in public as a sign to other men that she was now betrothed and therefore unavailable to any other man.

The well-known passage in Corinthians may well be a reference to this practice:

[1 Corinthians 11:6,10](#) " For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a

**disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.....[10] It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels."**

**(The world may not understand the significance of our spiritual marriage to Christ, but the angelic world certainly does!).**

**At the very least, and irrespective of how we view head-coverings today, we may safely assume that in the early church the veil (i) served as a reminder that the woman was set aside for her man and (ii) symbolised the fact that the 'bride' (the church) was sanctified for her 'husband' (Christ) whilst we are in this 'erusin', awaiting his return.**

**Meanwhile, as we have seen, the groom was at home building the extension on the father's house for their future home together. And interestingly, the Rabbis used to stipulate that this new dwelling must be better than her previous house. Surely a reflection of the fact that our future hone (heaven) will be far superior to our present dwelling here on earth.**

**Not only was the groom preparing the new home for them both, but he would also be storing up enough resources and saving enough money for them both. This is because the groom was forbidden by Jewish law to work for one full year after the wedding.**

**So, the Bible talks repeatedly of the treasures that await us in heaven:**

**Philippians 4:19** “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

This concept of a year's rest from any form of labour by the groom, is quite significant. As we shall see shortly, it has a direct bearing on our understanding of the timing of the 'rapture'.

And here's an interesting point: the son couldn't go and pick up his bride until the father had decided that the extension was complete and satisfactory. In addition, only the father could determine just when enough money had been saved to see them both through that first year of rest (reflected in the modern 'honeymoon' of today).

So (at least while our Lord was on earth as the prospective groom), Christ had apparently (and voluntarily) excluded from his consciousness any knowledge of just when he would be returning for his bride:

**Matthew 24:36** “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Admittedly the context of this verse shows that it can't be a direct reference to the 'rapture' (which was first revealed to Paul (**1 Corinthians 15:51**)). However, as the Lord's coming for his bride takes place around seven years before his coming back to the earth, I believe that this lack of knowledge on his part could reasonably be extended to the timing of the 'rapture'. But whether it is still the case with our Lord in glory today, or whether it applied only to his time on earth, we cannot say.

So although the bride knew to expect her groom after about a year, she too didn't know exactly when he would return. For that reason, she had to keep her oil lamp

ready at all times - because traditionally the groom would come for her at night-time. In fact both the bride and bridesmaids would usually have enough oil in lamps to keep them alight for at least two weeks at a time. The parable of the ten virgins in [Matthew 25:1-13](#) would seem to be a reference to this.

We too are urged to keep watching and waiting:

[1 Thessalonians 5:4](#) “But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.”

In fact, as the day drew near for the groom’s return, it was customary for him to let news of his soon-arrival to slip out to members of the bride’s family. This was so that they would have time to prepare themselves for the wedding. The wedding garments would need to be finalised, the bride would need to have her bags packed, ready to go and she would have to ensure that a lamp was burning in her window.

As the groom approached, her friends would then lead her out to a ceremonial bridal bath. Following this ‘mikveh’, her attendants would anoint her with fragrant oil. She would then go out to meet the groom wearing white garments interwoven with threads of gold and scents of myrrh, frankincense and acacia.

[\[Rev 3:12\]](#) “Look, I am coming soon! counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

So Christ has ‘let the word slip’:

**Revelation 22:12** “Look, I am coming soon!”

We, too must have our lamps trimmed and ready, regularly undergoing the ‘mikveh’ of the Word of God as he approaches.

**Ephesians 5:25-26** “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [26] to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word”(see also **John 17:17**).

At midnight, on the day designated by the father, the groom would gather together his groomsmen, who were relatives of his, chosen well in advance and all of them, virgins! An echo of this is possibly found in Revelation where we read this of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel:

**Revelation 14:4-5** "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes."

The wedding party would then make its way to the home of the bride. As they wound their way through the streets, people along the way take up the cry of ‘The bridegroom is coming’. When they neared the bride’s house, the groomsman himself would announce the approach of the wedding party with a shout of: ‘Behold, the bridegroom comes’, and the remaining groomsmen would then join in by blowing shofars (trumpets of ram’s horn).

Upon Hearing the approach of the groom, the bridesmaids would then go out to meet him and their lamps would show the way to the bride. This moment is described in Matthew’s gospel:

**“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.” (Matthew 25:6-7).**

But we need to keep in mind that the groom would not enter the bride’s family home: this would be considered to be invasive! Instead, with bags packed and ready, she would she would go out to meet him. She would then be placed on a chair, lifted up above everyone’s head and paraded around like a queen.

In the case of Christ and the church, I believe our ‘erusin’ is now almost at a end. In the words of **Romans 13:11-12:**

**“...The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. [12] The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”**

And when the ‘day’ at last arrives, events will again follow closely those of the ancient Hebrew wedding ritual.

They are described in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

**“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”**

As in the Hebrew wedding, one of Christ’s attendants (the archangel) will announce his arrival and the shofar will sound! But just as the groom would not enter the home of the bride (see **Genesis 24:6**) so Christ will not come down

to the earth itself; The call and the sound of the trumpet were the expectant bride's cue to leave her house and meet her beloved outside and so we, the bride, will leave our 'father's house' ([John 8:44](#); [1 John 5:19](#)) and go out and meet our Lord 'in the air'.

**“And so we will be with the Lord forever.”**

And that's the point of the 'rapture'. It's not the 'second coming' as such (that's when Christ returns in glory to the earth ([Zechariah 14:4-5](#); [Thessalonians 1:7-10](#))); it's the time when the bridegroom picks up his bride and takes her away for the wedding ceremony! In fact, the word 'rapture' itself was coined in light of the description in [1 Thessalonians 4](#) that **“.we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..”**

The verb **'caught up'** is a translation of the Greek word *'harpazein'* which means 'to seize', 'snatch', 'carry off'. The word 'rape' use to mean exactly that (it didn't have almost exclusively sexual connotations as it does today). Hence 'rapture' meant a 'carrying off' or a 'carrying' away (e.g. 'raptures of delight'). There seems to be an echo of this in modern times with the bridegroom carrying the bride across the threshold.

The wedding day itself (nissu'in) was a joyous occasion (simcha - [Jeremiah 23:10-11](#)). The groomsmen would again set up the 'chuppah' and again the couple would say a blessing over the cup of wine, This ceremony finalized the promises and vows that they had made together during 'Shiddukhin'.

The invited guests then celebrated while the bridal party escorted the betrothed couple to a private room (either a purpose-built 'chuppah' or a bridal chamber) and they would wait outside until the marriage was consummated (In fact, even a couple being left alone in a room was regarded as tantamount to consummation in some cases).

Ordinarily, once evidence of the union had been produced, the groomsman would announce the happy news to the expectant guests. I imagine that this would be very like today - a couple being introduced to the congregation with the words: 'Ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to present to you: Mr and Mrs ...'

Doesn't this give such a special meaning to the words of our Lord in [Matthew 10:32](#)?

**“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.”**

The pinnacle of this joyful celebration was the marriage supper which, unlike a reception today, usually consisted of seven full days of food, music, dance and celebration -

From the believer's perspective, this is quite instructive in terms of the prophetic time-line. Our wedding supper is described in [Revelation 19:7-9](#) and is followed in [Revelation 20](#) by the account of Christ returning to the earth as King - bringing his saints with him. And when does he return? At the climax of the seven-year period of tribulation on the earth (i.e. at the battle of Armageddon ([Zechariah 14:2-9](#))). Surely it's not then unreasonable to assume that the seven days of the ancient Hebrew marriage supper is a reflection of the seven years of our marriage supper in heaven. A marriage supper that takes place *before* Christ returns to this earth!

After the festivities the husband was free to bring his bride to their new home to live together as husband and wife in the full covenant of marriage.

One further thought that appears to support the time-line we've been considering throughout these last two messages:

The newly-married groom was forbidden by Jewish law to perform any kind of work for a minimum of one year after the wedding. Although an ancient Hebrew male was obliged to fight in the Israeli army, it was with this one exception: for the twelve months following his marriage he was exempt from military duties (in fact forbidden to do any work)!

How suggestive this is! Similarly, Christ does not return to the earth to fight against the nations at the same time (or immediately after) he joins with his Bride in marriage. [Revelation chapter 19](#) clearly indicates that firstly there is the marriage itself, followed by a seven-year reception in heaven (the duration of the tribulation period on earth) and only after this period of time does he come forth to battle the nations on the earth.

So one day Christ *will* return to this earth as the King and we rightly sing: 'The King is coming'. But when we finish that chorus with the words: 'praise God he's coming for me', we've perhaps failed to understand the implications of the Hebrew wedding ceremony. He comes for us as a Bridegroom (the 'rapture') and after Daniel's prophesied

period of seven years tribulation, he returns (with us) to this earth as a King (the 'second coming').

Given all of this, what manner of lives should we be living ([Ephesians 4:1](#))?

The Jewish bride would spend that period of 'erusin' thinking only of her returning beloved. And that is what the Scripture exhorts us to do:

[Colossians 3:1](#) "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

And while she waited for her beloved - she would keep herself pure for him. The joyful expectation of his soon-return would encourage her and give her the motivation to keep herself exclusively for him!

[Titus 2:11-13](#) "It (the grace of God) teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope---the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

And in the meantime, the loving bride would pore over every scrap of correspondence she would receive from her lover! Every reminder of him would be precious!

We too have our beloved's love letters! They are what we know as the New Testament 'epistles' (letters) and he is their embodiment (the 'Living Word').

Meanwhile, in this period of sanctification, may we keep ourselves pure and set apart for him. May we watch and wait eagerly for our coming bridegroom. He has given himself for us, as Paul said in [Ephesians 5:26-27](#) "to

make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, [27] and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

We're going home soon; we don't belong here; our citizenship is in heaven ([Philippians 3:20](#)). The Bible doesn't say he 'will come': it says 'he is coming'. He's on his way! Let's be ready when the wedding party arrives!

[Revelation 22:17](#) “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”

[Revelation 22:20-21](#)

“He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

Jewish Wedding bands are often inscribed with ‘Ano L'Dodi V'Dodi Li’ (*I am my beloved's And my beloved is mine*)

‘Oh I am my beloved's  
And my beloved is mine;  
He takes a poor lost sinner  
Into his house of wine;  
I stand upon his merit,  
I know no other stand;  
Not e'en where glory dwelleth  
In Emmanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garments  
But her dear bridegroom's face;

I will not gaze at glory  
But on the King of grace.  
Not at the crown he giveth  
But on his nail-piercèd hands;  
The Lamb is all the glory  
In Emmanuel's land.

**God bless!**