

## Traditional Jewish Marriage Customs and God's Love for His Children

Traditional Jewish wedding customs depict well the Biblical story of God's love for humanity. Consider below customs practiced to this day by some orthodox Jews. Each bullet is followed by passages showing how the Scriptures mirror these marriage customs:



Betrothal ceremony under a *huppah* canopy (a prayer shawl) that recalls God's cloud covering over Mt. Sinai when He made His Covenant with Israel—likened by rabbis to a marriage covenant.

- **The Bride Is Chosen by the Groom's Father or the Father's Representative**

Abraham sent his servant to choose a bride for his son, Isaac. *Gen. 24:1-4*. God followed a similar pattern with us.

God chose us in Christ Jesus **"before the foundation of the world."**  
*Eph. 1:4*

**"I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness."** *Hosea 2:19-20*

Paul—God's representative—said: **"I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."** *2 Cor. 11:2-3*

- **Payment of the Bridal Price** – The groom's family paid a high price for a worthy bride, signifying the groom's ability to support the bride, thereby releasing her from her parents' household. The gifts ultimately returned to the bride, confirming until then her new identity as wife-to-be of her husband-to-be until the marriage was consummated at the end of the betrothal period.

Jesus likewise paid a steep price for us: **"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."** *1 Cor 6:19-20*. It cost Him everything He had as a man to provide us with a new identity and the riches of eternal life to all who accept Him.

- **Ritual Purification** – Prior to signing the marriage contract, the bride and groom may each undergo separate ritual purification baths—*mikvah*, in Hebrew—a forerunner of Christian *baptism*. This signifies their departure from their past identities and commitment to their new joint identity as husband and wife.

**"You were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."** *1 Cor. 6:11*

**"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** *Gal 2:20*

- **Public Betrothal Under a Huppah** – (See photo, top of page.) The *huppah*, (meaning "canopy" or "covering"), signifies the home the groom will provide for his bride, as well as God's covering over the marriage. God's blessing adheres to those who obey the terms of the marriage covenant and remain under His covering. Jews understand the Torah as a marriage covenant agreement rather than simply as rules to be obeyed. This passage is referred to by rabbis as the "Betrothal":

**"Tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."** *Ex 19:3-6*

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**The Ketubah, Marriage Contract** - The marriage contract spells out in clear written terms what is expected of the bride and groom in the marriage. The signing must be witnessed publicly because all of Israel witnessed God's "marriage covenant" at Sinai. In this way the couple acknowledges that their decision to marry is rational and reflects something greater than themselves, not simply a romantic act of personal love. The contract is considered so serious it requires an act of divorce to abrogate, yet the marriage will not be consummated for at least one more year!

**Hebrews 12:4 calls Jesus the "Mediator of the New Covenant", which Jeremiah describes this way:** "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, *though I was a husband to them*, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. *Jer 31:31-33*



Examples of modern Jewish marriage contracts

- **The Bridal Gift** – This gift serves as a pledge promising the groom will return after one year or more for his bride. In like manner, Jesus pledged the gift of the Holy Spirit to His followers before He departed.

**"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. *John 14:15-18***

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

- **Separation for One Year or More** – The groom returns to His Father's House for at least a year to prepare a place for His bride, typically new rooms added to his father's house. The bride spends this time preparing herself and her bridal garments, often of embroidered fine line. The groom returns only when his father says, a time no one else knows, not even the groom!

**"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." *John 14:1-5***

**"His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. *Revelations 19:7-8***

- **Wedding Feast & Consummation** – When the groom returns for his bride, a great wedding banquet is held, as long as seven days, with lots of wine, singing and dancing. To this day, guests may appear off the street and are often welcomed to wedding festivities, recalling the hospitality for which Abraham and Sarah were known by tradition. Again, this social aspect of the wedding acknowledges that marriage between a man and a woman is part of something bigger than themselves related to the greater purposes God has established for the institution of marriage.

**"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." *Matt. 24:36, 42***