

Behold the BRIDEGROOM Comes!

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April 2011 TBC EXTRA www.thebereancall.org

Those Who live in the modern western world do not catch the full significance of **Jesus' promise** [in John 14:1-3 that He would go to His Father's house to prepare a place for them, and then come back and receive them to Himself]. This is due to the fact in His promise Jesus was drawing an analogy from Jewish marriage customs in biblical times.

By Jesus' time, it was usual for [a marriage] covenant to be established as result of the prospective bridegroom taking the initiative. [He] would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride. There he would negotiate with the father of the young woman to determine the price (mohar) that he must pay to purchase his bride. Once the bridegroom paid the purchase price, the marriage [and betrothal] covenant was thereby established, and the young man and woman were regarded to be husband and wife. From that moment on the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified, set apart exclusively for her bridegroom. As a symbol of the covenant relationship that had been established, the groom and bride would drink from a cup of wine over which a betrothal benediction had been pronounced.

[T]he groom would leave the home of the bride and return to his father's house. There he would remain separate from his bride for a period of twelve months. This period of separation afforded the bride time to gather her trousseau and to prepare for married life. The groom occupied himself with the preparation of living accommodations in his father's house to which he could bring his bride.

At the end of the period of separation, the groom would come to take his bride to live with him. The taking of the bride usually took place at night. The groom, best man, and other male escorts would leave the groom's father's house and conduct a torchlight procession to the home of the bride. Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the exact time of his coming. As a result, the groom's arrival would be preceded by a shout. This shout would forewarn the bride to be prepared for the coming of the groom.

Shortly after arrival [at the groom's father's house], the bride and groom would be escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber (huppah). Prior to entering the chamber, the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face. There in the privacy of [the bridal chamber, the bride and groom] would enter into physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted earlier.

After the marriage was consummated, the groom would announce the consummation to the other members of the wedding party waiting outside the chamber (John 3:29). Upon receiving this good news, the wedding guests would feast and make merry for the next seven days. During the seven days of the wedding festivities, which were sometimes called "seven days of the huppah," the bride remained hidden in the bridal chamber. At the conclusion of these seven days, the groom would bring his bride out of the bridal chamber, now with her veil removed, so that all could see who his bride was.

In the examination of the analogy [of Jesus' promise to His disciples], the first thing that should be noted is the fact that the Scriptures regard the **Church** to be the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-23). In addition, just as the Jewish bridegroom took the initiative in marriage by leaving his father's house and

traveling to the home of the prospective bride, so **Jesus** left His Father's house in heaven and traveled to earth, the home of His prospective Church, over 1,900 years ago.

In the same manner as the Jewish bridegroom came to the bride's home for the purpose of obtaining her through the establishment of a marriage covenant, so **Jesus** came to earth for the purpose of obtaining the Church through the establishment of a covenant. On the same night in which **Jesus** made His promise in John 14, He instituted communion. As he passed the cup of wine to His disciples, He said: "This cup is the new testament in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25). This was His way of saying that **He** would establish a new covenant through the shedding of His blood on the cross. Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom paying a price to purchase his bride, **Jesus** paid a price to purchase His bride, the Church. **The** price that He paid was His own life blood. It was because of this purchase price that Paul wrote the following to members of the **Church**: "know ye not that ... ye are not your own? For **ye** are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Analogous with the Jewish bride being declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for her groom once the marriage covenant was established, the **Church** has been declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Hebrews 10:10; 13:12). In the same manner as the Jewish groom came to take his bride to live with him at the end of the period of separation, so **Christ** will come to take His Church to live with Him at the end of His period of separation from the Church (John 14:3). **Analogous** with the Jewish bride not knowing the exact time of the groom's

coming for her, the **Church** does not know the exact time of Christ's coming for her. In the same way that the Jewish groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, so **Christ's** arrival to take the Church will be preceded by a shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Similar to the Jewish bride's return with the groom to his father's house after her departure from her home, the **Church** will return with Christ to His Father's house in heaven after she is snatched from the earth to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17; John 14:2-3).

Corresponding with the Jewish bride remaining hidden in the bridal chamber for a period of seven days after arrival at the groom's father's house, the **Church** will remain hidden for a period of seven [years] after arrival at Christ' Father's house in heaven. While the seven-year Tribulation Period is taking place on the earth, the **Church** will be in heaven totally hidden from the sight of those living on the earth. Just as the Jewish groom brought his bride out of the bridal chamber at the conclusion of the seven days with her veil removed, so that all could see who his bride was, so **Christ** will bring His Church out of heaven in His Second Coming at the conclusion of the seven-year Tribulation Period in full view of all who are alive, so that all can see who the true Church is (Colossians 3:4).

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