

Jewish Awareness Ministries  
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## Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Lesson 7

### *The Postponed Royal Jewish Wedding* Matthew 1:18-24

#### Oh, the Humanity

The royal lineage of Jesus was reviewed in lesson 6 (Matthew 1:1-7; Luke 3:23-38). In this study we'll look at the wedding that could've been, by looking into the wedding comments as found in the teachings of Jesus and known Jewish wedding customs. Joseph and Miriam had to forgo those festivities reserved only for chaste couples. No one could accept their professed purity much less the bizarre explanation of an immaculate conception. Without the angel's confirmation, even Joseph had feared the worst.

Since our purpose is to rediscover Jesus in the Jewish Gospels it is important to understand the Jewish family culture into which Jesus was born and spent 30 years of His life. He would be questioned by the Pharisees on marriage and divorce law. He would not only know the Law, as its author but would have the street credibility of experiential knowledge of the challenges of growing up for 30 years in a Jewish family. He began his ministry with a miracle at a wedding feast. Life in a Jewish community in a volatile region bordering longstanding Gentile enemies, not to mention being under the domination of Rome would connect His relevance in our witness to the Jews who would soon enter a 2000 year diaspora.

As Church-era Gentile believers we have a good grasp on the deity of Jesus but fail grasp the significance of understanding the humanity of Jesus in existential time and space. God in 3D Jewish humanity was the only means of displaying Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy for credibility among His own, fulfilling the indispensable blood atonement by His sinless body and the basis for universal faith and adoration among the Gentiles. Therefore, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are...*" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus' humanity says to Jews and Gentiles, "God gets us."

#### Jewish life in the Gentile region of the Galilee

"The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, *by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.*" Galilee had been prominently known as Gentile as Matthew correctly asserts (Matthew 4:15). The Old Testament names for the Sea of Galilee were "sea of Chinnereth" (yam-kinnereth: Numbers 34:11; Deuteronomy 3:17 Joshua 13:27; Joshua 19:35), and "sea of Chinneroth" (yam-kinereth: Joshua 12:3; compare 11:2; 1 Kings 15:20). There were many scattered Jewish settlements there. About 120 BC Aristobulus I invaded the country to protect the Jewish settlers who were in open conflict with their Gentile neighbors. He forcibly converted the population to Judaism and Jewish immigrants poured in from the south. Galilee was a frontier province bordering on Syria and much of the population remained Gentile, at least in spirit. Like most frontiersmen the Galilean Jews were a hardened people. Although Galilee became mostly Jewish by the time of Jesus, it was prone to disturbances. To the east of the Sea of Galilee were the provinces that were predominantly Syrian with a mixture of nomadic Arabs. We get a clue of the Gentile culture due to the demonic swine drowning incident - "the country of the Gergesenes" (Matthew 8: 28ff). "there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis." (Matthew 4:25; Mark 5:40; Mark 7:31) This area across the lake made western Galilee seem peaceful by comparison. It was to this region that God came as the Light of the world. "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matthew 4:16).

## Jewish Marriage Customs

- **Age** Marriages could happen after children reached puberty, 12- 13 for girls and 15 years for boys. Although it is stunning to our modern psyche to imagine baby Jesus in the arms of a 13 - 16 year old Miriam and Joseph age 15- 20, it would not have been out of the ordinary. It broadens our perspective to remember that their life span was mid to late fifties.

### There are three distinct parts to the ancient Jewish wedding:

- **Shiddukhin** (mutual commitment)
- **Erusin** (engagement)
- **Nissuin** (marriage)

1. **Shiddukhin** refers to the preliminary arrangements prior to the legal betrothal. They both signed a *Ketubah* (marriage contract).

### 2. **Erusin: The Betrothal**

“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good *thing*, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). The father of the groom often selected a bride (*kallah*) for his son, as did Abraham for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:1-4). Of course, the consent of the bride-to-be is an important consideration. Rebecca (*Rivkah*), for example, was asked if she agreed to go back with Abraham’s servant to marry Abraham’s son, Isaac. She went willingly (Genesis 24:57–59). The betrothal preceded marriage by a year. Haggling over the amount of the dowry between the fathers was first order. Then “there was the signing of the *tehnoyim*/ conditions stipulating and outlining various obligations, duties, and responsibilities, including a penalty or fee to be paid should the engagement be broken. To annul this contract, the couple would need a religious divorce (*get*), which could only be initiated by the husband.

Matthew 1:18,19 “When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.”

Joseph pondered putting Miriam away privately as He was too just to make her the target of public humiliation or worse. Joseph followed the precedent of his ancestor Boaz who gave Ruth a covering. So Joseph gave Miriam the covering of his name. Such was God’s amazing pattern of grace as is highlighted in some of the holy couple’s ancestry by the inclusion of the names of Rahab, Tamar, Bath Sheba and Ruth in Matthew’s genealogy. Boaz in particular as the kinsmen redeemer of Ruth was a type of Jesus. “It is likely that the marriage of Ruth and Boaz was not technically a Levirate marriage as outlined in Deuteronomy 25. In a Levirate marriage, a brother was commanded to marry the widow; Boaz was a cousin, not a brother.”<sup>i</sup> There was an unnamed kinsmen, “now it is true that I *am thy* near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.” Ruth 3:12 Remember how the Saducees used this law and a parable to test Jesus. Matthew 22:28

Deuteronomy 25:5,6 “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.”

The seemingly overstatement of grace toward these women who were otherwise unacceptable in Jewish culture fashioned the textual setting into which God placed his precious jewel of the expectant virgin Miriam. Later in history there was the tradition of the breaking of a plate for good luck and the holding of both ends of a white handkerchief by the bride and groom referred to as the *kahbahlas kinyan* meaning “receiving the acquisition.”<sup>ii</sup>

On the eve of the wedding the bridegroom and his friends went to the bride’s home to collect her. Jesus used this custom

as an analogy of His leaving and returning to take His disciples to His Father's house where He would prepare a place for them. (John 14:1-6) When Jesus was asked why His disciples did not follow the custom of fasting, He alluded to the customs of the friends of the bride-groom.

“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?” (Matthew 9:14,15)

The Shabbot before the wedding the groom receives an *Aufruf* in the Synagogue, being called by the Cantor up to the Bema to read from the Torah. The groom is showered by small bundles of nuts, raisins and candies which are distributed afterward to the children. He reads and recites *baruchas*/blessings.

A procession was formed with dancing and singing songs to her praise as the veiled bride was carried to the groom's home under an elaborately adorned canopy or Hupa accompanied by her brides maids. Jesus used this analogy in the parable of the 10 virgins to state; “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom...And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.” Matthew 25:1,6

Jesus also used an analogy of a royal wedding feast that Israel had failed to respond to. Matthew 22:1-13

Matthew 22:3-14 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. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen.”

**3. Nissuin: The Marriage** Nissuin from the Hebrew Naso, which means to lift up. (as in lifting her veil) - to avoid a repeat of Genesis 29:25.

The evening was spent in celebration and feasting upon arrival. A special room in the grooms house was prepared for the bride and her bridesmaids to spend the night. The next day the feasting and dancing with games continued. Jesus' first miracle at the Cana wedding would have likely been within their extended family circle. (John 2:1-11) When you consider that she got to experience none of this, Mary's attention to make sure their wedding lacked nothing, is very insightful. Was she possibly overcompensating for the celebration she was never able to have, due to her virgin birth. She knew her socially rejected heaven-sent son could bless this wedding giving Him value. His first response was not assuring. She backed off and told the servants He was in charge. Certainly, Jesus saw right through to the heart of His dear mother who

because of Him never had a wedding celebration. Jesus only did that which the Father told Him and He said He did everything the Father said, but He did resolve the issue that His mother brought to His attention. Though the Heavenly Father knows the end from the beginning, it is astounding how that He allows human involvement and dynamic of love, and faith to initiate His timing to bring about a blessing. How often do we have not because we ask not.

As the preparations were made for a great evening feast to follow the vows... “Traditionally, in preparation for the betrothal ceremony, the bride (**kallah**) and groom (**chatan**) are separately immersed in water in a ritual called the **mikvah**, which is symbolic of spiritual cleansing.”

An interesting comparison is seen in the Persian custom of pre-marriage cleansing in the account of Esther.

Esther 2:12,13 "Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, *to wit*, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with *other* things for the purifying of the women;) Then thus came *every* maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house."

The Apostle Paul and John reminds believers in Jesus that we are His bride.

2 Corinthians 11:2 "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may **present you as a chaste virgin** to Christ."

Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for **the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready**. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

When all was prepared the bride was decked in white and bejeweled. It was not uncommon for the silver coins of her dowry to be worn in an head band securing her veil. Jesus may have been referring to this bridal treasure.

Luke 15:8,9. "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*? And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." He used this as one of three examples to state that lost people really matter to God.

The bride sat in a seat of honor under the canopy attended by her bridesmaids. The bride groom joined her side amidst great rejoicing. Seeds were thrown at their feet. Sometimes a pomegranate was crushed, and a bottle of scent broken.<sup>iii</sup> The couple stands under a canopy held by four groomsmen with a Rabbi presiding. The bride circles the groom from 3 up to as many as 7 times depending on the sect of Judaism. Seven because the phrase, "and when a man takes a wife" is found seven times in the Hebrew scriptures. Three times because in the book of Hosea the phrase "I betroth you" is used 3 times. On a humorous note: Maybe 7 times around the groom symbolized 7 times around Jericho to conquer it. "Immediately following the reading of the *ketubah* [the marriage contract], the second part of the ceremony begins. This ceremony involves the recitation of seven blessings and hence is commonly referred to as the *Sheva Berakhot*. During the recitation of these blessings, as was the case in the first ceremony, the rabbi holds a cup of wine aloft. And once again, upon completion of the blessings, groom and bride drink from the cup. Some rabbis also elect to offer the *Berkhot Kohanim* "Priestly Blessing" (Numbers 6:24-26).<sup>iv</sup>

Modern "Jewish wedding bands are often inscribed with Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li "I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine" (Song of Solomon 6:3). The words of this verse are also considered an acrostic called the "Elul,"<sup>v</sup> Concluding the ceremony (since Medieval times) and kicking off the celebration is the stomping of a glass followed by raucous chants of Mazel Tov! Modern interpretations of the breaking of the glass are used to commemorate the destruction of the Temple. During the merriment following the feasting, the couple exit. After their union the groom and his unveiled bride would rejoin the celebrations which continued for a week. The first year of marriage was so important that there was a Mosaic exemption from military service.

"what man *is there* that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her." Deuteronomy 20:7

By Jesus' day a husband could divorce his wife for any reason of uncleanness. The Jewish betrothal was as binding as a

marriage vow only breakable by a writ of divorce – known as a *get* (Deuteronomy 22:13-30; 24:1-4). An unfaithful bride to be or wife could be stoned according to the Law of Moses.

No sooner was their new nest readied for the arrival of her infant Messiah, than Mary and Joseph hastily packed for what they thought would be a two-week roundtrip to pay Caesar's tax in Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem<sup>vi</sup> (Luke 2:1-5).

Luke 2:7 "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

### **Jewish Home life**

Fathers were the absolute heads. Families were larger and multi-generational. At age 30 Jesus preached in the synagogue of Nazareth and His home-townsmen asked "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" Matthew 13:54-56

Jesus grew up in a family of 4 half-brothers and at least 2 sisters, possibly more. Since there is no mention of Joseph being present at Jesus' first synagogue sermon and Jesus' first miracle it is assumed that he had already passed. If so, Jesus would have been the key breadwinner for the family of 8+ after Joseph's death until He began His ministry. Where did He find enough work if Nazareth had an estimated population of 500? Jesus and the half-brothers would have worked with Joseph as they came of age. Rome's Administrative City of Sepphoris/Tzipori was in walking distance just north of Nazareth. The city became one of the five synods of Roman influence in the Near East. Sephora would have been a major source of employment for many in that area especially for construction craftsmen. Joseph was *teknion* crafter by hand of stone, wood, etc....

### **Redeeming the Firstborn**

*Pidyon Ha-Ben* in Hebrew is a ceremony done on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of life. Five shekels of silver to be paid to the Temple. Today it is given to the Rabbi, then returned to the father which he gives to charity.

"the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem." Exodus 13:12-15 "That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, **all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.** And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What *is* this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem" (Numbers 18:15).

Luke 2:24 indicates the sacrifice. "And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." **Miriam and Joseph could not afford a lamb to present the Lamb of God!** "And if she **be not able to bring a lamb**, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean." Leviticus 12:8

**Laws of circumcision** The *bris milah* or covenant of circumcision enters the individual into the divine covenant between God and Israel. It always takes place on the 8<sup>th</sup> day (Genesis 17:11-13; Leviticus 12). The son is given His Hebrew name at the *bris*. Luke 2:21 "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

### **Laws of purification after birth** Leviticus 12:1-5

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled. But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days."

Mary and Joseph came to the Temple on the 41<sup>st</sup> day, 33rd day after Jesus' circumcision (Luke 2:22-24). "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

### **Jewish weddings in Jerusalem are a prophetic sign of Messiah's return**

Jeremiah 33:10,11 "Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say *shall be* desolate without man and without beast, *even* in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride."

### **The Wedding Feast of the Marriage of the Lamb of God is to be anticipated to all who by faith are in the Bride of Christ.**

Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

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<sup>i</sup> Ruth and Boaz: The Story of the Kinsman-Redeemer – Israel My Glory

<sup>ii</sup> The Book of Jewish Customs, Harvey Lutskey, Jason Aronson Inc., New Jersey, London, 1986, P 53

<sup>iii</sup> Living In The Time Of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter Conoly, Steimatzky Ltd., Tel Aviv, Israel 1983, P. 55

<sup>iv</sup> Nissuin: The Second of the Two Ceremonies | My Jewish Learning

<sup>v</sup> Ancient Jewish Wedding Customs and Yeshua's Second Coming | Messianic Bible

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/classics/andrews-the-life-of-our-lord-upon-the-earth/part-i/the-taxing-of-augustus.html>