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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



MAPPING THE END TIMES IN LIGHT OF ANCIENT JEWISH WEDDING CUSTOMS

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK

We all grew up hearing those wonderful tales about a prince who found his true love and swept her off her feet. In the 1950s, an enterprising businessman in Southern California famously turned that genre into a multimillion-dollar industry! His name, of course, was Walt Disney.

However, the greatest love story of all isn't about Cinderella, Snow White, or Sleeping Beauty. It's one that's found in the Bible, where the true Church is known as a "bride" who will someday be married to her Messiah and live happily ever after.¹

Why do the NT writers rely so heavily on this analogy between the Church and a Jewish bride? It must be intentional because the analogy is consistent not only in the Gospels, but also in the Pauline writings, as well as in the Book of Revelation.

Could the reason be that ancient Jewish wedding customs provide a template, of sorts, that can help us understand the timing and sequence of prophetic events leading up to (and following) the coming of the Messiah?



The Parable of the Ten Virgins (section)
Phoebe Traquair

The parallels are so striking, it's difficult to imagine that they are the result of mere happenstance. In fact, Yeshua (Jesus) himself drew on the wedding/Second Coming analogy in His own teaching ministry. In His Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), for instance, the Son of Man (Yeshua) is clearly the "bridegroom" whose return at midnight took five of the bridesmaids by surprise (v. 10). The Lord was using an ancient Jewish wedding as a template to teach us about prophecy!

In modern Judaism, some of the older wedding-related events have been truncated and abridged to accommodate modern (i.e., abbreviated) attention spans and budgets. Family celebrations (like weddings), that once spanned days, weeks, or even a year or more, are now condensed into just a few hours. However, when we take a careful look at the ancient antecedents, and separate the blended elements, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place with remarkable clarity.

I. THE PRICE (MOHAR)

To begin with, it was customary in ancient times for the father to choose his son's bride. If the young woman was agreeable, a marriage payment (Heb., *mohar*; a sort of dowry) was made by the bridegroom to either the bride or her father. There's a beautiful example of how this worked in Genesis 24, where we read about Abraham sending his servant Eliezer to get a bride for his son Isaac. The prophetic parallels seem self-evident. Abraham represents God the Father; Isaac is Messiah Yeshua; Eliezer is the Holy Spirit; and Rebekah (the bride) is the Church (or, the Messianic Community).

The Holy Spirit, then, is God's "Eliezer." According to John 16, He is the matchmaker who brings us to faith in Yeshua:

- He convicts us of our sinfulness (vv. 8-9).
- He reveals the Messiah's perfect righteousness (v. 10).
- He warns us of coming judgment if we don't respond to His invitation (v. 11).
- He shows us the way to salvation through Yeshua alone (v. 13; cp. 14:6).

OT (Genesis 24)	NT Marriage of the Lamb
Abraham	God the Father
Isaac	God the Son
Eliezer	God the Holy Spirit
Rebekah	The Messianic Community (Church)

God the Father has arranged (through His sovereignty and foreknowledge in the ageless past) for His Son (Yeshua the Messiah) to have a Bride (the Church):

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of [Messiah],

And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through [Yeshua the Messiah];

To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

According to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in [Messiah Yeshua] our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

Abraham (through Eliezer) paid Rebekah a *mohar* consisting of expensive gold jewelry (Gen. 24:22, 47). However, Yeshua paid for His Bride with His own life's blood: *Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of [Messiah], as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19).*

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II. THE MARRIAGE COVENANT (KETUBBAH)

When the price was paid, the next step was to sign a formal contract (*ketubbah*). The most important term of the contract was the agreed-upon price (see Point I above). It was the basis upon which both parties entered into the arrangement.



A *ketubah* (Jewish wedding contract) from Livorno, Italy, dated 23 July 1698. Public domain; courtesy of Sotheby's.

Israel's original contract was the one God made with her at Sinai (Ex. 19-24). It involved the shedding of sacrificial blood that foreshadowed the *mohar* Messiah would pay later for the purchase of His Bride. However, Israel broke that covenant (Jer. 31:32), and God divorced her for unfaithfulness (Jer. 3:8). The divorce is not permanent, though. God still loves Israel. He and His People Israel will someday be reunited under the terms of a New (and better) Covenant (31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-12). In the meantime, non-Jewish believers share in the benefits and blessings of that New Covenant by virtue of their Abraham-like faith (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-9), even though the covenant itself continues to be primarily between God and a united Israel.²

Some people are troubled by the fact that Israel in the OT was the “wife” of Jehovah (i.e., before their “divorce”; Hosea 1:2; 2:2), and in the NT the Church is the Messiah’s “Bride” (2 Cor. 11:2-4; Eph. 5:22-33). So, when Israel comes to faith at the end of the age, and she’s restored as God’s “wife” (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 16:60-63), will that make God a bigamist Who has two wives (i.e., Israel and the Church)? Of course not. Regrettably, this is what happens when

analogies are pressed too far: they can become confusing. Both Israel and the Church (with some overlap between the two) will enjoy an intimate relationship with the God of the Universe based on the Redemption accomplished by the Messiah on Calvary. It’s a divine bond that transcends human laws or limitations and cannot be confined within the boundaries of a simple wedding analogy. Can God have two “wives”? Of course He can, since it’s not a literal marriage between two human beings. It’s not a zero-sum game (meaning the relationship God has with one entity doesn’t take away from His relationship with the other). In fact, the two relationships complement and rely on one another. Israel and the Church will concurrently dip into the same, inexhaustible well of God’s amazing grace.³



Messianic believers call the Christian New Testament “the New Covenant” (Heb., *Berit HaChadashah*) because it embodies the working details of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 (cp. Heb. 8:1-13). When Paul mentioned “the Torah of Messiah” (חמשיה תורת; Gal. 6:2), many of us believe He was referring to *Berit HaChadashah*, or the New Covenant/New Testament.

Jewish couples today still use marriage contracts (sometimes called *ketubot*), whether traditional or non-traditional; but they’re typically not as detailed as ancient covenants were.

III. THE KIDDUSH CUP (KOS L'KIDDUSH)

It was customary in ancient Israel for the bride and groom to share a cup of wine. When the bride drank from the offered cup, it signified her acceptance of the proposal. The bride and groom were then considered betrothed.

Today, in Ashkenazi circles, the *mesader kiddushin* (i.e., the officiating rabbi) takes a cup of wine and says a blessing (“*Borei pri hagefen*”) over it. Then he says the *berchot erusin* (the “betrothal blessing”; see Point IV below) and gives the cup to the couple so they can each take a sip.

The traditional Passover Seder uses cups of wine—four of them, in fact—to commemorate what God did for Israel when He led them out of Egypt in ancient times.⁴ But, when Yeshua celebrated that last Seder with His disciples, He may have had more than just the exodus from Egypt in mind. What the Lord said over the third cup that night sounds like it could be the heavenly Groom talking to the Bride about her purchase-price (*mohar*): “*For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But 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*” (Matt. 26:28-29).



Kiddush Cup from 1925
Jewish Museum of London

IV. THE BETROTHAL (ERUSIN or KIDDUSHIN)

Following the cup, and the recitation of the betrothal blessing, the groom would slip the ring onto his bride’s finger and say, “Behold, by this ring you are consecrated to me as my wife according to the laws of Moses and Israel.”⁵

The Talmud is replete with recorded disputes and discussions about betrothal procedures and about which blessing went where during the betrothal ceremony; however, it probably happened in much the same way as it’s done today.

While there is ambiguity about some of the ancient details, there’s no uncertainty about the fact that the Apostle Paul considered the Messianic Community (i.e., the Church) to be currently in betrothal mode: *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to [Messiah]* (2 Cor. 11:2). We have been in that mode for the past 2,000 years.

V. THE DEPARTURE (YETSIAH)

There is no departure, per se, in modern Jewish weddings. The *erusin* (betrothal) and *nisu’in* (marriage) take place today, in succession, as part of the same ceremony. The only break between them is for the reading of the marriage covenant. The groom doesn’t leave and come back later. However, this was not the ancient custom. Originally, the groom would let the bride stay with her parents for a year or more after the betrothal. Later, he would return to retrieve her and the marriage ceremony (*nisu’in*) would take place in a tent or room he had prepared for her.⁶



Ascension
John Singleton Copley

Not long before His Crucifixion, Yeshua forewarned His disciples about His approaching death and ultimate departure from this world. Peter, the impetuous and impulsive disciple, wanted to go with Him, so he asked, “Lord, where are You going?” (John 13:36a). The Lord knew where Peter was headed with this line of questioning, so He replied, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward” (v. 36b).⁷ Later in the conversation, He reassured all of them with these words: “*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*” (John 14:2).

Not long after His Resurrection, Yeshua departed this world just as He had said He would: *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight* (Acts 1:9).

Kiddushin is the portion of the Gemara (in the Talmud) that deals with weddings.

VI. THE RETURN/PROCESSIONAL (TAHALUCHAH)

In modern ceremonies, the bride and groom are escorted to the *chuppah*—usually by the couple’s parents (and sometimes grandparents, too).

The escorts hold candles as they lead the couple to the *chuppah*. This tradition may be traceable back to the ancient practice of the wedding party making its way from the bride’s house to the groom’s house under cover of night. In the NT, for instance, the Lord relates a story where members of a wedding party are holding lamps in their late-night processional (Matt. 25:1-8).



Chuppah
Jeanette Kuvin Oren

Interestingly, the bride today is escorted to the *chuppah* where she meets the groom. That is, *she comes to Him*. In fact, this remains the practice in many cultures today: the groom waits at the front of the room as the bride is escorted down the aisle to meet him. When the Jewish bride arrives, she circles the groom in a counterclockwise direction either three times or seven times, depending on the particular community’s custom.⁸

In ancient times, the bride might suspect the approximate time of her groom’s return (because it was typically a year or so after his departure), but she didn’t know the exact time; hence, the admonition that she and her bridesmaids should remain ready at all times. Finally, the groom would come and snatch her away under cover of night from her family’s house (at the end of the betrothal period) and the festive, joyful processional then made its way to the groom’s house with their lamps flickering in the darkness and illuminating the way.

This is a lovely picture of the coming Rapture event: Yeshua leaves Heaven (the New Jerusalem) and descends into earth’s atmosphere, where He stops and waits for us to come up and join Him.⁹ Like the bride in a ceremony, *we come to Him*.

This will fulfill an important promise that Yeshua made to His disciples. He assured them (and all of us) that someday He will return for His Bride: “*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*” (John 14:3). He descends toward the earth, stops, and then “receives” us as we rise to meet Him. Then He whisks us back to the New Jerusalem for the wedding festivities. We are with Him from that point on in the narrative.

When the Rapture takes place, we will rise to meet the Lord “in the air”—that is, somewhere in the realm of the earth’s atmosphere. That much-anticipated rendezvous may happen at an altitude of several thousand feet or several thousand miles. The Bible doesn’t provide us with those details.

NASA Earth Observatory



This is when the Apostle Peter, bless his heart, will finally follow Yeshua like he wanted to in the first place (John 13:36-37):

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first [including Peter, along with other believers who’ve gone to Heaven during the past 2,000 years]. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

A GLOSSARY OF JEWISH

There's a certain amount of diversity in customs and practices between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish communities, and among Haredi, Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative groups, but they all still have much in common. A number of the modern practices listed below have obvious antecedents in ancient Jewish wedding customs. This list is alphabetical, not chronological.

- *Aufruf*
In the Ashkenazi tradition, Yiddish for “calling up.” The prospective groom is called up (the term in Hebrew is *aliyah*) to the synagogue platform (*bimah*) to recite a traditional *berakhah* (“blessing”) over the Torah, and when he’s finished, he’s showered with candy as he comes back down.
- *Baruch haBa*
Literally, “blessed is he who comes.” In some Orthodox communities, like Chabad, this is a song the cantor sings when the bride takes her place at her husband’s side at the conclusion of the ceremony. Yeshua said this is what Israel will exclaim when He returns someday (Matt. 23:39).
- *Bedeken*
On the wedding day, prior to the ceremony, the groom ceremoniously covers the bride’s face with a veil.
- *Berchot Erusin*
The “betrothal blessing” that follows the cup of wine.¹
- *Betrothal*
See *kiddushin* and *erusin* below.
- *Chuppah*
The wedding canopy under which the ceremony takes place. Typically, its appearance is reminiscent of a sukkah; that is, it’s a cloth or sheet (or sometimes a prayer shawl) stretched out overhead and supported by four poles. When the bride and groom stand beneath it, the *chuppah* symbolizes the home they will be building together. Some of the older *Diaspora* communities (like the Yemenites) don’t use a *chuppah*.²
- *Erusin*
Betrothal (also known as *kiddushin*; see below).
- *Ketubbah*
Lit., “writing.” This is the written marriage contract that’s read between the *kiddushin* and *nisu’in*. The original purpose of the contract was to protect the rights of the woman in the event of a separation or divorce (Heb., *get*). Not the same as the *tenaim* (see below).
- *Kiddushin*
Betrothal (also known as *erusin*; see above). Roughly analogous to engagement in non-Jewish communities, but much more formal and legally binding. In ancient times, when there was an interval of a year or more between *kiddushin* and *nisu’in*, a betrothal could only be broken by divorce. It’s not an issue these days because there’s no longer an interval between betrothal and marriage. Both are incorporated into the same ceremony.

WEDDING TERMS

- *Mikveh*
Before the marriage ceremony, the bride undergoes a ceremonial immersion in a ritual pool of water. It signifies the spiritual “cleansing of the bride” (*taharat haKallah*) and her consecration to her groom.
- *Nisu'in*
This is the marriage ceremony under the *chuppah* with a rabbi officiating and invited family and attendants serving as witnesses.³ It typically begins with the rabbi's remarks, continues with the reciting of seven blessings (see *Sheva Brachot* below), and concludes with the groom shattering a glass in commemoration of the Temple's destruction in AD 70.
- *Shabbat Kallah*
Lit., “bride's Sabbath.” This is the practice in Ashkenazi communities of the bride's family and friends gathering to celebrate with her on the Sabbath preceding the wedding. It's similar to a bridal shower in modern non-Jewish communities.
- *Sheva Brachot*
The “seven blessings” (see *nisu'in* above) are recited again after dinner on the night of the wedding. In some communities, the custom is to recite these blessings for seven successive nights at congratulatory dinners with family and friends.
- *Tenaim*
A document of commitment that's signed by both families at the engagement party, followed by the symbolic shattering of a dish. This document typically spells out details like the wedding date, amount of dowry (if any), and other practical aspects of the wedding (like who pays for what). Not the same as the *ketubbah* (see above).
- *Wedding Feast*
A celebratory meal afterward for the bride and groom, their families, their attendants, and other invited guests. In ancient times, many more people were invited to the feast than were invited to the wedding. The wedding was a small and intimate affair for the families and select guests while the wedding feast was open to virtually the entire local community (e.g., Luke 14).⁴
- *Yichud*
The “seclusion room” where the bride and groom are taken to be alone following the marriage ceremony (see *nisu'in* above), prior to the wedding feast.

¹ The blessing over the wine says, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, Master of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us regarding forbidden unions, and Who forbade betrothed women to us, and permitted to us those married to us by *chuppah* and *kiddushin*. Praised are You, Lord, Who sanctifies His people Israel with *chuppah* and *kiddushin*.” The blessing makes more sense—especially where it says a betrothed woman is “forbidden” to the man until they are married—when we realize that in biblical times, the betrothal and marriage took place a year or so apart and the couple didn't cohabit in the meantime.

² Historians say the *chuppah* as we know it today originated during medieval times in European Jewish enclaves.

³ Jewish law requires the presence of at least two witnesses for the marriage ceremony.

⁴ According to some authorities, the ancient wedding feast was a seven-day celebration following the *nisu'in* (see “Under the Wedding Canopy” by Avi Lazerson at jewishmag.com).

VII. THE CLEANSING OF THE BRIDE (TAHARAT haKALLAH)

The *Mikveh* is a ritual immersion required for conversion to Judaism, for marriage, or for the observance of *hilchot niddah* (i.e., laws of menstrual purity). It signifies spiritual cleansing, consecration, and the individual's identification with the community. It is believed to be the Jewish antecedent for the later Messianic (Jewish-Christian) practice of believer's immersion (baptism).

Prophetically, the cleansing of the Bride takes place once we're in the New Jerusalem (i.e., Heaven) with our Bridegroom, Yeshua, while the events of the Tribulation are unfolding down on the earth. This cleansing is known as the *Bema* Judgment or the Judgment Seat of Messiah (Rom. 14:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8). It's only for believers and has to do with *rewards* rather than salvation.¹⁰

Paul tells us that the purpose of this judgment will be to determine the enduring quality of our works in this life. Did we have the right priorities? The right motives? Did we obey His leading? Living our lives in line with eternal priorities, for the right reasons, is like "gold, silver, and costly stones" while temporal, worldly priorities leave us with only "wood, hay, and straw" that will burn up. When the totality of our lives passes through the "fire" of God's judgment, we are rewarded on the basis of what survives the fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15). This is Yeshua's way of cleansing the Bride and preparing her for eternity with Him. At the end of the process, we are clothed in white robes signifying the imputation of God's righteousness to us because of our faith in His Son, *haAdon Yeshua* (the Lord Jesus).

This judgment shows us that believers aren't perfect—at least, not yet. In fact, Paul says that some believers will be barely saved—that is, saved by the skin of their teeth

(v. 15).¹¹ With respect to rewards, these folks will "suffer loss"—but they will still go to Heaven. They may have been doing many of the right things, but for the wrong reasons! However, others who have labored in quiet, selfless obscurity in this world will be wealthy (i.e., entrusted with resources), powerful, prominent, and influential in the future Kingdom.¹²

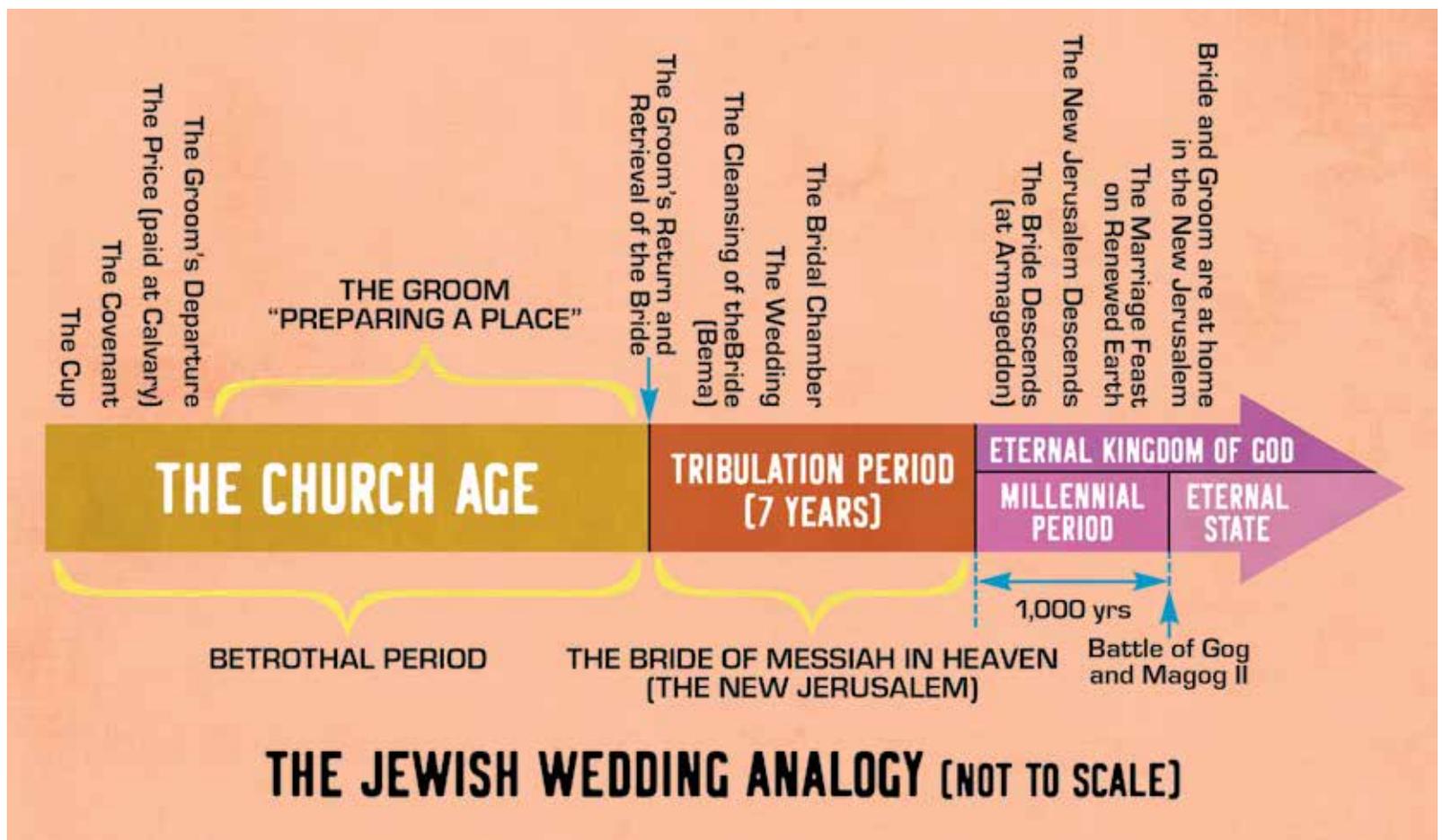
VIII. THE WEDDING (NISU'IN)

We've already seen that today, both betrothal (*erusin*; see Point IV above) and the actual marriage (*nisu'in*) take place in succession under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) during the same ceremony.¹³ There is no year-long interlude between them, like there was in biblical times.

The *nisu'in* portion of the ceremony includes the recitation of the *sheva berakhot*, the seven marriage blessings. At the close of the ceremony, the groom (or sometimes the bride and groom together) shatters a glass in memory of the Temple's destruction. Then the bride and groom are led by their attendants from the *chuppah* in a recessional.

Again, things were done differently in biblical times. There was a long interval (up to a year or more) between the two parts of the ceremony (i.e., between the betrothal and the actual marriage). During that intervening period, the groom busied himself with the task of preparing a dwelling for his bride. Typically, that dwelling was added on to his father's house or tent.

In our analogy, the great wedding ceremony will take place in Heaven while the seven-year Tribulation is happening down here on earth. This heavenly *nisu'in* will be only for the Messianic Community (the true Church)—the saints of the past 2,000 years, both Jewish and Gentile. Old Testament saints and Tribulation martyrs won't be resurrected until the end of the Tribulation (see Point X below).



IX. THE BRIDAL CHAMBER (YICHUD)¹⁴

We have already seen that in ancient times, marriages were arranged by families; and, the betrothed couple sometimes didn't see or talk to each other until their wedding day (e.g., Gen. 24:65). Even today, in Orthodox Jewish communities, it is frowned upon for a man and woman to be alone together before they are married. So, in modern ceremonies, the bride and groom are escorted after the *nisu'in* to a private room (known as the "*yichud* [seclusion] room") where they are together, alone, for the first time. Once the door is shut and secured by their attendants, the couple exchanges gifts and enjoys a private, intimate time together with no distractions.

In a similar way, we have been betrothed to Yeshua, whom we love even though we haven't seen Him yet with our physical eyes. The NT says, "[Yeshua the Messiah], whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:7-8).

Someday, when we're in Heaven, we will commune with Him face to face: *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known* (1 Cor. 13:12). Yeshua told His disciples, "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). Haven't you ever wondered what those things will be? What does He want to share with us? Whatever those things are, the first-century disciples evidently weren't yet equipped to process the information. But, someday we'll be ready to hear and learn. I can't wait for those "Emmaus Road" strolls with the Lord where we'll just walk and talk to our heart's content. I have many questions for Him!

So, just to recap, while we're with the Lord in Heaven during that seven-year period, there will be (1) the Bema Judgment for believers, (2) the Marriage of the Lamb, and (3) a time of intimacy and solitude for Yeshua and His Bride (that's us!).

At the conclusion of the Tribulation, we will leave the New Jerusalem to return to earth with the Lord and end the great Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-16).¹⁵ The New Jerusalem will descend behind us and settle on a newly-formed plateau in the Middle East (21:1-2; 22:1-5).

X. THE MARRIAGE FEAST (CHATUNNAH)

In the aftermath of the Tribulation, Old Testament saints and Tribulation martyrs will be resurrected.¹⁶ Many of us agree with Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a respected Messianic commentator, that at the beginning of the coming Millennium, the recently-resurrected Old Testament and Tribulation saints will be the "friends of the bridegroom" (John 3:29) who are invited as guests to the wedding feast.¹⁷

So, it will be party time! And, if you've ever been to a Jewish wedding, especially among the Hassidim, you can testify that they know how to party! This marriage feast will be a cosmic celebration on a scale never before witnessed in the history of the world. Yeshua will be with His Bride at long last!¹⁸

The Marriage Feast: is it Really a Party?

What is a "party," anyway? It's a celebration. We celebrate birthdays, graduations—and, yes, marriages, too. All indications are that the Marriage Feast at the beginning of the Millennium will be the greatest and most elaborate celebration of all time: *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready"* (Rev. 19:6-7).

Even today, banquets following traditional Jewish weddings (especially in Israel) are elaborate and joyous. There's lots of food, drink, gaiety, toasts, dancing, and music. In many cases, literally hundreds of friends and family members are in attendance. Some of these celebrations can cost up into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on what the families can afford. But, how much more splendid and festive will the eschatological Marriage Feast of the Lamb be?

Augustine of Hippo, who confessed that he had pursued a wild and loose lifestyle as a young man, evidently understood that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb was going to be a prolonged party during the Millennium. In fact, his later switch from Premillennialism to Amillennialism may have been prompted by his aversion to the excesses of the premillennial Donatists, whom he vigorously opposed. They were doctrinally orthodox; but they were also notorious party-lovers who borrowed popular customs from the Romans and consumed what Augustine considered excessive amounts of food and drink at their feasts (see *City of God*, 20.7). Maybe that's why Augustine came to associate the Millennium with supposedly carnal indulgences rather than with spiritual devotion. However, he was wrong. Partying and devotion aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, as we see in the Book of Revelation.

The devil would love to convince the world that it's more fun to follow him—and that Yeshua-believers are sad, pathetic creatures who take themselves too seriously and are incapable of cracking a smile or telling a joke. If you're a believer, however, be forewarned: someday, you'll participate in the greatest party in the history of the world. It's your destiny!

THE CHURCH AS MESSIAH'S

In ancient Israel, marriages were arranged affairs in which the father chose his son's bride.¹ Once the selection was made, the father paid the price (Heb., *mohar*, or dowry) for the bride to her father or to the bride herself.

The Price

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:20). The price paid was the sacrificial blood of Messiah Yeshua (Eph. 5:25-27).²

When the *mohar* changed hands, the arrangement was formalized with a written contract (*ketubbah*).

The Covenant

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Heb. 8:10; Jer. 31:33).³

The bride and groom would drink from a cup of wine,⁴ signifying that the contract and the bride-price had been accepted.

The Cup

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But 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" (Matt. 26:27-29).

At this point, the couple was considered betrothed (*erusin* or *kiddushin*) and the agreement was legally binding on both parties.⁵ However, they didn't live together yet as husband and wife.

The Betrothal

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to [Messiah] (2 Cor. 11:2).

The groom would leave his bride with her family and return home, where he would begin building an extension onto his father's house to accommodate his new family.⁶ It is still common in native Mideastern cultures for several generations of a family to live together in this way.

The Departure

"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" (John 14:2).

A year or so later, with his father's approval, the groom would return for his bride and take her to his newly-prepared apartment at the father's house. His bride and her bridesmaids might have a notion about the approximate time of the groom's return, but not the precise date or hour—hence, the warning shout and sound of the shofar so they would know that the groom was approaching.⁷

The Return/ Processional⁸

"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" (John 14:3).

"And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'" (Matt. 25:6; cp. 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36).

In modern Judaism, the bride typically undergoes a ceremonial immersion in a pool of water (*mikveh*) prior to the wedding. It signifies spiritual cleansing, purity, and her consecration to the groom. In ancient times, however, the cleansing would have taken place sometime during the interval between the *erusin* and the *nisu'in*.

The Cleansing of the Bride

The cleansing of the bride corresponds to the Judgment Seat of Messiah (or, Bema), which is for believers and has to do with consecration/rewards, not justification/salvation (2 Cor. 5:10). This takes place in Heaven while the earth below is engulfed in the cataclysmic judgments of the Tribulation.

BRIDE

In the Ashkenazi tradition, the *chuppah* is the traditional canopy under which the wedding ceremony (*nisu'in*) takes place. The word *nisu'in* means “elevation” in Hebrew.

The Wedding

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and 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 (Rev. 19:7-8).

Even today, in some Orthodox communities, the bride and groom retire to a *yichud* (“seclusion”) room following the wedding ceremony. It is supposed to be the first time the bride and groom have been alone together. This is a sweet time of intimacy, without distractions, when they concentrate only on each other and begin their journey toward a deeper and more meaningful relationship as husband and wife.

The Bridal Chamber

This phase of the Jewish wedding also takes place during the seven years when we’re in Heaven (during the Tribulation). The Lord wants us to be with Him—so, that’s where we’ll be. He wants to commune with us, much like He spent time with Adam and Eve during those reflective evenings in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8-9). Yeshua said, “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3b).

Once they’re married, the couple enjoys a long and joyous celebration with their invited guests. It includes lots of food, drink, live music, dancing, and intermittent toasts and testimonials by the guests. In some communities, the festivities can continue for up to a week.

The Marriage Feast

The marriage feast marks the beginning of the Messiah’s Millennial Kingdom. *Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God”* (Rev. 19:7-9).

Even today, newspaper wedding announcements often include the full name of the bride and groom, as well as their parents, and conclude with something like this: “The couple is at home at 123 Clover Lane in Allendale.” In ancient times, once the ceremonies had concluded, and all the gaiety and festivities were over, the new bride and groom were happily at home in the father’s house.

The New Home

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). The New Jerusalem is the Bride’s eternal home. The Holy City is currently situated somewhere in the heavenlies but will descend to earth at the beginning of Messiah Yeshua’s earthly reign.

¹ Genesis 24 shows us how this process played out in real life when Abraham sent his servant in search of a wife for his son Isaac.

² Other passages refer to the blood of Messiah as a “ransom,” which is a slightly different allusion and means the Lord died in our place (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6). So, in the Jewish wedding scenario, the Messiah paid His own *mohar* with His life’s blood.

³ The New Covenant (*Brit HaChadashah*) is primarily between Israel and God (Jer. 31:31-33). However, non-Jewish believers in Yeshua, by virtue of their Abraham-like faith, also participate in the covenant’s blessings and are “grafted in” to the Olive Tree of Abrahamic faith (Rom. 11:17-24).

⁴ The Cup of Redemption (during the traditional Passover Seder) represented the price paid to secure the blessings of the New Covenant—namely, the shed blood of Yeshua the Messiah. Likewise, the marriage cup can be seen as pointing to the groom redeeming His bride with a price (*mohar*).

⁵ Joseph and Mary had already been betrothed when Yeshua was conceived in Mary’s womb by the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38). This was considered scandalous because during the betrothal period, the bride and groom weren’t supposed to engage in sexual relations (John 8:41). The Judean religious leaders accused the Lord of being illegitimate because He was conceived during the betrothal period (John 8:41). The Talmud deals with Jewish betrothal issues in great detail in tractate Kiddushin in the Gemara. A *get* (divorce) was required to break a betrothal.

⁶ “Until late in the Middle Ages, marriage consisted of two ceremonies [i.e., *kiddushin* and *nisu'in*] that were marked by celebrations at two separate times, with an interval

between” (“Ancient Jewish Marriage” by Hayyim Schauss, accessed on the My Jewish Learning website at myjewishlearning.com).

⁷ Some people see a contradiction between the idea of a noisy wedding processional and that of a secret, “thief-in-the-night” return of the bridegroom. However, in a predominantly rural, agrarian society like ancient Israel, where houses weren’t packed closely together like they are in modern cities and towns, a noisy, late-night return (when most people were tucked snugly in their beds) would most likely only be noticed by those who were watching for it. (To that point, a screaming FedEx Boeing 747 flies at low altitude over our house on approach to San Antonio International Airport several times a week at around 4:30 AM, but we only notice it if we’re already awake at that time!) If you think like a first-century Israelite, it’s not difficult to imagine the neighbors waking up the next morning (after a wedding processional had passed by) without a clue that anything unusual had happened during the night.

⁸ In modern Judaism, there’s no time-lapse between the *kiddushin* and *nisu'in*. Both are done, one after the other, under the *chuppah* during a Jewish wedding. However, it hasn’t always been this way: “In ancient times, the two stages of marriage were done on separate occasions, often separated by a full year which the groom would devote to Torah study. Both the *kiddushin* and the *nisu'in* were accompanied by celebratory feasts. By the twelfth century this practice had ended, and it became customary to do both *kiddushin* and *nisu'in*, successively, beneath the *chuppah*. One of the reasons given for this change of custom is the poverty which prevailed in the Jewish communities. People simply couldn’t afford the expense of the two celebrations” (“Kiddushin—Betrothal” by Naftali Silberberg, accessed at chabad.org). Also, see endnote #6 above.

XI. THE NEW HOME (*BAYIT CHADASH*)

In this ancient Jewish wedding scenario, the bride and groom are joined and confirmed as husband and wife, in the presence of witnesses. They come together with their family and invited guests in a resounding celebration of their loving union. Then, they take up residence in their own, personal area of the father's house—a place prepared by the groom for his bride during the betrothal period.

Likewise, Yeshua and His Bride, the Church (or, Messianic Community), will be at home in the New Jerusalem down here on earth. The celebratory marriage feast (see Point X above) marks the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. We (that is, believers from the church age) will have already taken up residence (while the Tribulation is happening down on earth) in the New Jerusalem before it descends out of the heavenlies and touches down in a geographically transformed Middle East. It will be our “forever home.”

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to

me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2, 9-10).

Only one question remains, dear reader—will you be there? The invitation has been extended, so if you're not already a believer, it's up to you to respond:

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).



*Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.*

¹ John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:9.

² “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” (Jer. 31:31). The parties to the New Covenant, then, are God and the two (now united) houses of Israel (i.e., Ephraim and Judah). Non-Jews come into the Covenant when they're “grafted in” by faith (Rom. 11:17-24). Jewish believers are not spiritually superior to Gentile believers, but as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), they are uniquely positioned as a bridge, of sorts, between the two communities (i.e., Israel and the Church) due to their dual status as part of *Am Yisrael* (“the People of Israel”) and also the Messianic Community (or the “Church,” NT believers in Yeshua). Jewish people who come to faith in Yeshua, of course, are still Jewish.

³ See “The Wife of Jehovah and the Bride of Messiah” by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum on the Bible Prophecy Blog (bibleprophecyblog.com). Ironically, there are people on both sides of this issue who don't like what we're saying here. Traditional rabbis reject Jewish Yeshua followers because they supposedly worship an illegitimate claimant to the Messianic throne; and Christian replacement theologians reject the legitimacy of traditional Judaism because they say “the Jews” forfeited their position as God's Chosen People when they snubbed Yeshua as the Messiah.

⁴ The Passover cups reflect four things God said He would do for Israel in Ex. 6:6-7: (1) “I will bring you out,” (2) “I will rescue you,” (3) “I will redeem you,” and (4) “I will take you as My own people.”

⁵ The Talmud confirms that there was originally an interlude between the betrothal (*erusin*) and the wedding (*nisu'in*). It points out that in ancient times the betrothal blessing was recited at the groom's house and the wedding blessing was employed later at wherever the *nisu'in* was conducted (*Ketubot* 7b).

⁶ *Made in Heaven: A Jewish Wedding Guide* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (Jerusalem: Monaim Publishers, 1983), Chapter 18.

⁷ The text doesn't say it in so many words, but Peter may well have been thinking, “Well, the Master told us to follow Him; so, if He's leaving, I'm going with Him!” Note the Lord's response. He told Peter he couldn't follow Him “now,” but he would follow Him “afterward.” Some of us see a potential reference to the Rapture here. The Lord was about to be caught up to Heaven in a Rapture-like event (Acts 1:9); but, the believing community would be left behind for now to do God's work in this world. They (we) will follow later (“afterward”), in a similar event in which they (we), too, will be translated from earth to Heaven (1 Cor. 15:50-57; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

⁸ This is only in Ashkenazi communities. Sephardic brides do not circle their grooms.

⁹ The exosphere is the upper region of earth's atmosphere. It extends from an altitude of 310 or so miles above sea level up to the most rarified atmosphere at about 6,000 miles. If the “clouds” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 are to be understood as literal clouds of water vapor, that would place an upper limit for our Rapture rendezvous of some eight miles (or 40,000 feet). However, there are other kinds of clouds in the Bible—like the “clouds of Heaven,” which may be more accurately understood as the Shekinah Presence of God (Dan. 7:13). There was also a “pillar of cloud” (also God's Shekinah Presence) that led Israel through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21-22), as well as another “cloud” of God's presence that hovered over the Tabernacle (Ex. 34:5; 40:34-38), not to mention clouds in various eschatological theophanies (e.g., Isa. 4:5; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 2:2). So, it's by no means a foregone conclusion that the “clouds” in passages like Daniel 7:13, Matthew 24:30, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 are simple, meteorological clouds of water vapor. Our rendezvous with the Lord may very well take place in outer space, thousands of miles from the earth.

¹⁰ The Great White Throne Judgment (GWTJ) takes place at the close of the Millennium. Unlike the Judgment Seat of Messiah, which determines rewards for

believers, the GWTJ is for unbelievers and has to do with their just punishment (Rev. 20:11). It's entirely possible that there are degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire just like there are degrees of rewards in Heaven (cf. Matt. 11:23-24; Luke 12:42-48; also, see endnote 13 below).

¹¹ The Greek phrase here means, literally, “to narrowly or barely escape” with your life. The mental image could be that of someone running out of a burning building as it collapses right behind him.

¹² Most of what Yeshua taught about stewardship and rewards for believers in the Millennial Kingdom is found in the Gospel of Matthew—5:11-12; 6:1-6, 20; 16:27; 25:14-30. Paul concurred in passages like 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. Our rewards may take many forms, some of them intangible, like higher positions of responsibility in the Millennial Kingdom, for instance (“you have been faithful over a few things, [so] I will make you ruler over many things” [Matt. 25:23b]). God's new world order will require “rulers”—mayors, administrators, and governors. Scientific research will advance like never before. Agriculture will expand exponentially, with hunger and famine disappearing virtually overnight. The construction of amazing edifices all over the globe will require engineers, architects, and contractors. There's a whole universe out there to study and explore! In every field of human endeavor, we'll witness the recovery of the amazing potential that Adam and Eve forfeited when they fell into sin at the dawn of human history.

¹³ A notable exception to the *chuppah* tradition is the Yemenite community. Their brides and grooms stand in a special, decorated room in the family home rather than under a *chuppah*.

¹⁴ Some of our information about Jewish wedding customs and their ancient background was derived from an informative series of articles (“Guide to a Jewish Wedding”) at the Chabad website at chabad.org.

¹⁵ The Rapture and the coming in glory are the two phases of the Second Coming. The Rapture is when the Lord returns for His saints (1 Thess. 4:15-17) and the coming in glory is when He returns with His saints (3:13; Rev. 19:14).

¹⁶ There are two resurrections: the first resurrection (for believers) and a second resurrection (for unbelievers) after the 1,000-year Messianic Age (Millennium). The first resurrection is a multifaceted event that takes place in several stages over a period of 2,000 years. It includes a resurrection (at the end of the Tribulation) of the Old Testament saints (e.g., Noah, Moses, David, Elijah, and all the others; Dan. 12:1-2; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:13-14) and a contemporaneous resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs (Rev. 20:4-6). The second resurrection is a singular event at the close of the Millennium when the bodies of the unbelieving dead of all time are raised (and reunited with their spirits) to face the Great White Throne judgment and be confirmed as permanent residents of the Lake of Fire (20:11-15). Just like there are degrees of rewards in Heaven (see Endnote 14 above), there may also be degrees of punishment in Hell. In any case, no one will be able to claim they didn't have their day in court. *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God* (Rom. 3:19).

¹⁷ *The Footsteps of the Messiah* by Arnold Fruchtenbaum (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 268-270.

¹⁸ Events in this concluding section of Revelation aren't necessarily in chronological order. John skips around, dealing with these final events in more of a topical-priority order to make them easier to understand. The “marriage supper [feast] of the Lamb” begins the Millennium (Rev. 19:9); and it's preceded by another supper, “the supper of the great God,” at the end of the Tribulation (vv. 17-18). Those who are invited to the millennial supper are “blessed” (v. 9) while those who find themselves overtaken by the earlier “supper of the great God” have come under divine judgment.

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



Happy New Year, dear readers, and welcome to the first issue of *Messianic Perspectives* in 2019! It is a privilege to share with you how God is using CJFM's representatives in the United States and in foreign countries to reach both Jew and Gentile alike with the Gospel message (Romans 1:16).

Only A Phone Call Away

Diann Parkas, CJFM representative (New Jersey), was contacted by CJFM headquarters stating that a woman who is a Jewish believer had called in requesting for someone to share Yeshua (Jesus) with a family member, and asked Diann (also a Jewish believer) to call the woman. When Diann called the woman, she was told that the person was her husband, who is of Arabic descent. Due to a recent, sudden health challenge, he was open and willing to speak with Diann. It was apparent that he was eager to know the Lord. Diann shared the basics of the Gospel message and answered his questions. At the end of their conversation, he told Diann that he was ready to commit his life to Jesus. He then prayed the sinner's prayer with Diann. Following up with another phone call, he said that he was praying daily and reading the Bible and that they are both eager to understand the Messianic Jewish context of the Bible. He and his wife agreed to participate in a discipleship Bible study with Diann, focusing on the major covenants of the Bible—over the phone! Diann asks, "Please pray for both of them, for growth in their faith and also for the overcoming of health challenges and strength."

Diann also teaches another Bible study series over the phone with a group of women. She recently found out that a newer attendee had not yet entered into a personal relationship with Yeshua. One night after the study, Diann called her and explained the way to salvation. The woman responded by saying, "OK, I'm getting on my knees, please pray with me!" Diann writes: "God had already been working in her heart, preparing her for that moment. I praise God for the privilege of being a spiritual midwife, praying with her as she entered into the new birth!"

The Remnant

Michael Campo, CJFM Midwest director (Chicago), wishes to encourage churches and individuals who have, through the years, prayed, financially supported, and believed in the biblical mandate to go to the Jew first (Romans 1:16). Recently, while attending the congregation of a Jewish pastor friend of his, he witnessed firsthand the great things God is doing with His remnant. Of the 200 people who attended the service, 180 were Jewish believers. Looking around, it blessed Michael how God had used him to lead a few of those 180 to the Lord. He writes: "I don't believe I can put into words just how filled with joy I was observing these 180 Jewish believers worship the Lord. This is a rare sight, usually it is the other way around—180 Gentiles worshipping alongside 20 Jewish believers. This is a humbling reminder of what God is doing among the remnant when we stand together."

A Special Anniversary

Yosef Ovadia, CJFM representative and pastor of Kehilat Haderech Messianic Congregation (Israel), will be celebrating the 30th birthday of his congregation this year. At Passover, thirty years ago, a small group of people led by Pastor Yossi took the Lord's Supper as a congregation. *Kehilat Haderech* has grown into a blessed community center that is home to a large, diverse and unified family. The young adults group continues to grow and develop, with biweekly meetings in their new center, "The Well." A few weeks ago, the young adults formed a special connection with a group of believing young adults from the Arab villages around Nazareth and Kfar Cana. Pastor Yossi comments, "What a blessing!" He asks that we please pray for the next joint meeting which is already being planned. The congregation is also preparing to host a large community event in their cultural center, with guest speaker, Joel Rosenberg, author of *The Ezekiel Option*, among other books. Joel will give a geopolitical lecture on the covenant that is forming between Russia, Syria and Iran, and will give a biblical perspective based on Ezekiel's prophecies about Gog and Magog. Please pray "that many non-believers will attend and see that God's Word is alive, relevant, and important even today."

"No Problem"

CJFM director of missions, Rob Styler (Phoenix), recently spent a few hours helping his friend, Robert Spector, who is with the Jewish ministry, Rock of Israel, during his outreach at the Arizona State Fair. One of the workers, Doug, explained to Rob one of the things they do at the Fair. A book of Messianic prophecies could be given free to a Jewish person who visited the booth once they had a conversation. Then Doug went to lunch. A few minutes later, Rob had a conversation with "M," a Jewish man living in Phoenix. Rob writes, "During our conversation, I mentioned the book and told him he could have it free of charge. His response was, 'I'm an atheist,' to which I responded, 'You're in luck! I just happen to have the atheist version right here!' M laughed but decided to take the book. As he was leaving he asked, 'Would you mind if I gave this to my sister after I read it? She lives in Tucson.' I told him, 'No problem!' With that settled, M turned and walked away." Pray that God settles the rest of Rob's story. "With God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

A Squeeze of the Hand

Richard Hill, CJFM representative (Las Vegas) and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation, received a call asking Rich if he would visit "Gary," who was in the hospital due to a debilitating disease and was not saved. The family could not bear the thought that Gary was dying and would spend eternity in hell. When Rich visited Gary, he found that Gary could not speak. Rich explained the yes/no method and squeezing of the hand as a way to communicate. Once Rich had shared the Gospel, Gary seemed eager to receive the Lord, and squeezed Rich's hand in acknowledgment. Rich then led Gary through the sinner's prayer. And now Gary is going through rehab, PTL! Please pray for Gary's new spiritual life and physical healing.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *I was interested in what you said on the radio about “creation with appearance of age” in Genesis 1. But, if it’s true that God tampered with time-scales and such to make the earth look like it’s 4.5 billion years old, when in reality it’s only a few thousand years old, wouldn’t He be guilty of deception? And if so, isn’t that a problem?*

ANSWER: You’re asking a great question here. Back in the old days, Charles Halff (the founder of our ministry) and I had many thought-provoking conversations about the age of the earth. He was a classic “old earth creationist” (OEC) and I had always been a “young earth creationist” (YEC). So, as you might imagine, we had some interesting (and spirited) discussions about this topic. I was surprised when he told me that many of the old-time, Christian leaders in the late 19th and early 20th centuries took an OEC position. He was the first person to point out to me that even some of the early church fathers didn’t believe the world was created only a few thousand years ago in six literal days. That was an eye-opener to me!

Many years ago, after Charles died, I heard a speaker from Answers in Genesis say something that made a lot of sense to me. He said, “Our belief in a ‘direct’ creative act of God in Genesis doesn’t mean He didn’t employ processes.” He went on to explain that God is a God of processes. Sometimes He does things instantly; and other times, He does things gradually. Even today, we can see processes in everyday occurrences like the gradual development of a baby, over nine months, from conception to its birth. We see many processes like this in nature. I thought that made a lot of sense! God is orderly and methodical in how He does things.

So, God may have started, in the very beginning, before anything else existed, by establishing the laws of chemistry and physics to govern how the universe would function. Then, working in tandem with those laws, He formed the first atoms and molecules (like hydrogen and carbon, which even today appear to function as the basic building blocks of life). From there, God continued the process by creating more complex molecules, followed by suns, planets, and simple forms of animal and plant life—and on and on it continued until He created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Naturalists and secularists have hijacked God’s creative process and called it “evolution,” when in reality it’s creation by the Word of God! God created everything by His Word (in effect, speaking it into existence). John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word”—and the ancient concept of *Logos* (Heb., *Dabar*) carries with it the idea of logical progression and *action with purpose*.¹ So as He spoke the universe into existence, the LORD God used processes.

The fly in the ointment here, however, is all of those millions and billions of years the naturalists and secularists say were required for the world to “evolve.” So, what about those vast periods of time? Do they contradict the Bible? Do they somehow argue *for* Darwin and *against* Genesis 1 and 2? No, as far as I’m concerned, they don’t—not in the slightest bit. I frankly don’t see why there’s so much hullabaloo about the supposed millions or billions of years. Remember that we have no idea what time was doing during those first three days of the Creation Week. Even Einstein figured out that time is not a constant.

(He said time slows down as it approaches the speed of light.) Time, in fact, was part and parcel of Creation itself—it didn’t exist before God spoke it (along with everything else) into existence! When God created the universe, He created time, too. He himself is eternal. He exists *outside* of time. He is sovereign *over* time. He *made* time.

We, on the other hand, are finite. We are creatures of time. My life (and yours) consists of a sequence of days, months, and years. We measure the passage of time by the cycles of the sun and moon. However, the sun and moon don’t come into play in Genesis until the fourth day of the Creation week (Gen. 1:14-19). So, as far as we know, the “atomic clock” (or “quantum clock”; i.e., the passage of time on the atomic level) may have been thousands of times faster during the first three days of creation than it is now.² Were those first three days literal days? Yes, of course they were. They weren’t allegorical. Each day (with the exception of the seventh day, the Sabbath) had a beginning (“evening”) and a terminus (“morning”). But, were they 24-hour periods exactly like the days we experience today? Not necessarily. The so-called geological ages may have been sped up exponentially and thereby compressed into a matter of a few minutes or hours, rather than millions of years, during those first three days. Does this constitute a “false history”? No, it’s just a much faster history!

Virtually everyone acknowledges that the Hebrew word for “day” doesn’t always mean a conventional 24-hour day. In Genesis 2:4, for instance, *yom* (“day”) is used for the entire panorama of Creation (בְּיוֹם עָשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם, “the day [*yom*] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens”), so that certainly doesn’t sound like your run-of-the-mill 24-hour day. (And, the argument that *yom* plus a numeral [“one,” “two,” etc.] in Scripture always means a standard 24-hour day isn’t all that convincing.)

I say all of that to say this. After all these years, I don’t see any reason to change my view that the world was created in the equivalent of what we would call six standard earth-days, with the appearance of millions of years of development time-compressed into the first three days—and it all happened less than 10,000 years ago. So yes, certainly, the world was created with an appearance of age. Adam and Eve, for example, were adults—not newborns. The trees in the garden were fully grown—and fruit was hanging from them. The animals that Adam named were mature. The moon probably already had a thin layer of lunar dust on it. And yes, if Adam had mined the earth, he might have found diamonds and deposits of oil, even though naturalists would say those things take millions of years to form. There may have been majestic waterfalls gushing through rock formations that looked like the product of thousands of years of erosion. And yes, Adam and Eve looked up into the night sky and saw thousands of fiery points of light emanating from far-flung stars and constellations—light that some people would say should have taken millions or billions of years to reach the earth. So, what’s the alternative? Adam and Eve gazed into the heavenlies and saw nothing (apart from the moon and a few scattered planets) but empty blackness? Seriously?³

Now we come to your question. Was it deceptive of God to accelerate the formative cosmic and geological processes on

those first three days? No, I don't think so. Are you suggesting that God was somehow obliged to slow everything down to current, slow-motion (relatively speaking) time standards just to accommodate skeptics who would later claim He wasn't the Creator? I don't understand that reasoning. How could it be considered deceptive, especially since the LORD told us (in the Book of Genesis and in some detail) how He did it? It only *appears* deceptive or misleading to someone who doesn't accept the Genesis account. It's only a problem for someone who insists on imposing the principle of uniformitarianism (i.e., "the present is the key to the past") on God's work during the Creation Week (that is, they assume that time passed at the same rate during each of the six days of Creation as it does today).

No, God is not a deceiver—although He does conceal things sometimes (and even then, He says anyone who seeks in sincerity will find what they're looking for; Deut. 29:29; Prov. 25:2; Matt. 7:6-8). In any case, He expects us to believe what He tells us in His Word. If we don't, we're deceiving ourselves!

Charles Halff used to tell us that 95 percent of our theological difficulties are the result of our making God too small or too confined. We have our own preconceived ideas about what He would or would not do. This is a hurdle we all need to get over, especially when we're thinking about the Creation. Our Creator is *El Gibbor*, the Mighty God (Isa. 9:6), and He doesn't ask anyone's permission before He acts!

I'm not a scientist; however, from my humble, layman's perspective, here's a short list of how I believe we should be thinking about Genesis 1:

1. The Bible isn't a science textbook, and was never meant to be. Instead, it's mostly a narrative—the story of who we are, how we got here, and where we're headed. Still, the fact remains that we believe it's true and reliable. So it's a problem—a big problem—if the Bible says something that can be shown to be wrong or unscientific. For instance, if it said, "The earth rests on the back of a giant tortoise that's swimming in a cosmic sea," then based on the observations of modern science, we would have to conclude that the Bible isn't entirely true after all.
2. God's Creation was *ex nihilo* (lit., "from nothing"). Our space-time universe did not exist before the LORD God created it. However, Genesis 1:1 may not have been an absolute beginning.⁴
3. Creation was a direct act of God. That is, He didn't just establish laws and processes and leave them to operate *laissez-faire* without His direction. Apart from His creative action, in fact, random natural processes cannot sufficiently account for the Creation. In fact, many scientists say that a godless Creation is a scientific and statistical impossibility. But, the fact that Creation was a direct act of God doesn't mean it wasn't gradual (within the parameters of those six days in Genesis 1) and involve processes.

4. Creation was the work of the LORD God, another title for Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah (Col. 1:16-18). He is the Creator. God the Father created "all things" through the agency of His Son, the eternal Logos (John 1:1-3).
5. Adam and Eve were two literal people who fell into sin and from whom the human race is descended. What a geneticist might label a "single pair bottleneck" in the genome might actually be traceable back to Adam and Eve (see Gen. 5:1; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Tim. 2:13).⁵ Some people make a big deal about human DNA being 98 percent the same as a chimp's. But, human DNA is 35 percent identical to that of a daffodil—so does that mean flowers are somewhere in our ancestry? DNA is the blueprint for all life on earth, so similarities shouldn't be any surprise.
6. God invented science—and, He didn't create anything that was bad. Adam and Eve were the first scientists. There is no contradiction between the Bible and science, when both are properly understood. Believers have nothing to fear from real, unbiased, fact-based science. Education and training are good things. One Puritan preacher famously remarked, "If God does not need our wisdom, He surely does not need our ignorance" (see 1 Cor. 1:20).
7. If we say anyone who disagrees with us on the day-age controversy is a heretic, we are departing from the historic position of the Church. We know it was an issue as far back as the early church fathers (with some, but not all of them embracing a young earth approach to Creation); nonetheless, the controversy never made its way into the ancient creeds because (evidently) no one saw it as essential to the Faith.⁶ We should exercise caution and discernment in these matters, however, because views like theistic evolution can undermine biblical authority and even the nature of sin and the atonement.⁷
8. Let's stop scurrying for cover, like startled cockroaches, every time a scientific journal or tabloid publishes a new "discovery" that purports to discredit or disprove Genesis 1 and 2. God's Word has weathered countless such attacks over thousands of years and it's still as rock-solid as it ever was. Remember that many of the greatest scientists in history have been men and women of faith!⁸ Also, we should refrain from being so reactionary and insecure about how we view Genesis 1 and 2. The truth is that the vast majority of legitimate, fair-minded scientists these days are more interested in just doing their work than they are in grinding an axe with the Bible.

If you'd like to learn more about the ongoing conversation among evangelicals about evolution and the age of the earth, I recommend *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*.⁹ It's part of Zondervan's "Counterpoints" series, which lays out opposing viewpoints side-by-side so we can compare them and draw our own conclusions. Contributors to this volume are Ken Ham, Hugh Ross, Deborah Haarsma, and Stephen Meyer.

¹ See "Law and Order" by Skip Moen on the *Hebrew Word Study* website (June 10, 2010) skipmoen.com.

² In a quantum clock (which utilizes cesium atoms that pass through radio waves), the atoms vibrate at a frequency of 9,192,631,770 cycles per second, which makes for very precise timekeeping!

³ In the 1980s, Calvin College physics professor Howard Van Till came down hard against "creation with appearance of age" in his book *The Fourth Day: What the Bible and the Heavens Are Telling Us about the Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986): "If the cosmos is only a few thousand years old, and if the light we are now receiving was created en route to appear as if it were coming from a distant source, then most of the visible universe is reduced from reality to illusion . . . If the apparent-age hypothesis were true, then that magnificent, orderly, coherent history of which we spoke earlier would necessarily be reduced to a divinely-perpetuated hoax" (238-39).

⁴ For Allen Ross' explanation of why it's reasonable not to see Genesis 1:1 as the absolute beginning of our space-time universe, see his comments on Genesis 1:1-2 in *The*

Bible Knowledge Commentary, edited by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 28.

⁵ For more information, see *Adam and the Genome* by Dennis Venema and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017).

⁶ "Interpreting Genesis 1 with the Fathers of the Church" on the Catholic site *Thomistic Evolution* (thomisticrevolution.org) summarizes patristic views on Genesis 1. For a more evangelical approach, see "The Early Church on Creation" by James R. Mook (Oct. 18, 2007) on the *Answers in Genesis* website at answersingenesis.org.

⁷ Check out Wayne Grudem's insightful critique of theistic evolution cited in "Theistic evolution critiqued by evangelical scholars" on the *Baptist Press* website (bpnews.net, Nov. 29, 2017).

⁸ See "List of Christians in science and technology" on Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org).

⁹ *Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*, J.B. Stump, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

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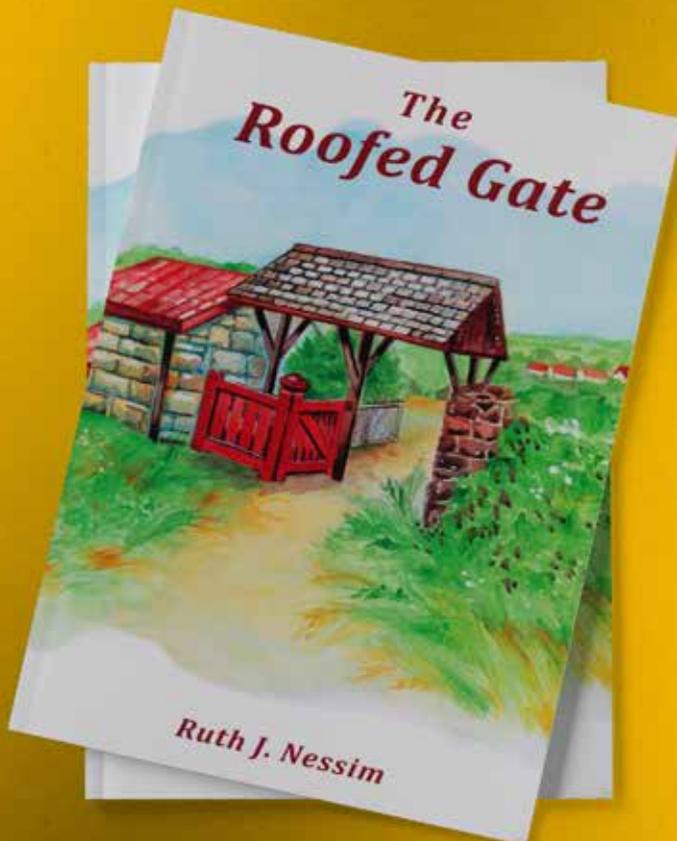
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