



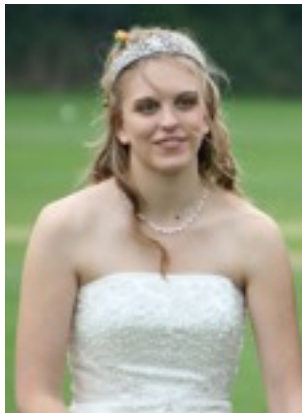


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What's all this about Brides?

About half of the people reading this never expected to be a Bride. It's not something that blokes consider! But then, the ladies amongst us don't expect to be called a Son of God either.

But the Bible is clear, all Christians are *sons* of God, (*Galatians 3:26¹*) and all Christians are also *the* Bride of Christ (see *Ephesians 5:22-33²*). Sons are the ones who, in Bible days, inherited from their father. Daughters married into a new family, and as the bride became endowed with an inheritance from the new family. We learn that God has *adopted us* as sons into His family, so we are therefore inheritors with Christ of all that He has. But, and this is what this weekend is about, we are also together the One that Christ gave Himself for.... and is destined to marry.... and the Bride of Christ will be endowed with the riches of Heaven.

We inherit both ways! The more you understand what God has intended for His people, the more amazed you become at the size of this thing called grace... for God is poised to lavish so much upon us. As we discover more about the inheritance we have, the more you will see the richness of God's call upon our lives. This weekend, and this accompanying booklet, are only looking at the *Bride* and ignoring our *sonship*. But a few thoughts on that before we begin...

Something on Sons..

Romans 8:14 tells us that those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. And, although the NIV uses the word "children", Young's Literal translation of John 1:12 tells us that *as many as did receive him to them he gave authority to become sons of God -- to those believing in his name*. We do not have time here for a full study on sonship, it would take another weekend. But you might like to think about what it means when you get home. The Bible has many stories of the privileges of sons, and these therefore apply to us in our relationship to God the Father. Jesus is the *firstborn*, but we share with Him in the inheritance. Here are just a few themes:

Sons were blessed by their fathers. See for instance Genesis 49. What blessings has God the Father spoken over us as His children?

All that the father had was shared amongst the sons. See Exodus 32:13. The passing on of property was considered so vital that God gave them a list of who it went to if there were no sons (See *Numbers 27: 1 - 11*). It was not allowed to pass out of the family (*Numbers 36:7*). There are over 200 verses relating to inheritance in the Bible, it is an

¹ You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus

² Don't get hung up about the "wives serving husbands" bit. Read it and reflect on what it says about our relationship with Christ.



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important topic because it teaches us so much about what God has for us.

Our inheritance as Christians is nothing short of God's Kingdom itself...shared with Jesus! See *Matthew 25:34*. Other verses to look at include *Ephesians 1:14-18*, *Colossians 1:12*, *Colossians 3:24*, *Hebrews 9:15* and *1 Peter 1:4*. To find more go to www.biblegateway.com and type inheritance into the search box.

The Jewish Wedding Customs

We are now going to look at the Jewish wedding customs of Jesus's day, and after that see what they (and the Feasts as well) teach us about the Plan of God for our salvation and eternal lives. On the next page is a chart detailing the stages of marriage, and following that we will go through them and see how God relates them to us.

The first thing you might notice, looking at the stages of the marriage, is that there is a gap, or wait, in the middle. However, unlike in a modern western relationship, the couple are considered to be more than just engaged. They are married, but not yet together.



Below, we will look in more detail at each of these stages, and as we do we begin to consider what the relationship between Jesus and the Church.

Betrothal

If you have ever seen *Fiddler on the Roof* you will remember the song "Matchmaker, matchmaker make me a match". Some Jewish communities still have professional matchmakers who go out to look for a partner for a family's son or daughter.

In Genesis, Abraham sent his servant back to the land of his birth to find a wife for his son Isaac (*you can read this story in Genesis 24*). Isaac did not have anything to do with it. It did not always happen this way (Jacob, for

instance, chose Rachel for himself a few chapters later.... but her father made him take her sister too!).

Many Bible scholars see Genesis 24 as a prophetic pointer to God the Father sending the Holy Spirit to find a Bride for His Son Jesus.



The Betrothal

- 1/ Dad's Choice
- 2/ Bride Accepts
- 3/ Groom/his father pays a price
- 4/ Contract Drawn up
- 5/ Ritual washing/ wine seals the covenant. They are now *betrothed*.
- 6/ Groom leaves, promising to return

The Wait

- 7/ Groom at his father's house, preparing a bridal chamber
- 8/ Bride waits at her father's house

The Marriage

- 9/ Groom's father decides when the chamber is good enough and then sends the groom to get his bride
- 10/ Groom leads procession of his friends to bride's house to 'steal his bride from her father'
- 11/ Bride and Groom enter the chamber he has prepared and hide away together for 7 days, Marriage is consummated (and best man has to confirm this to family and friends outside). Guests celebrate outside for the 7 days.
- 12/ Bride and Groom revealed together and married life starts publicly

When a potential bride was found, the two fathers would agree a contract. This would normally involve the groom's father making a payment to the bride's father. Often this



occurred whilst the future groom and bride were children, and was a way of guaranteeing that the family

continued to look after the

girl and protect her from other men. In Genesis 24 the task is delegated by Abraham to his servant, who has the silver and gold ready to give Laban when the agreement is reached.

However, a most important fact to point out is that the final say of 'yes' or 'no' rested with the woman. It was not allowed to use force to make her accept. If she said "no" then of course she forfeited and of the benefits that the marriage might have brought (riches, gifts, etc) but if she said "yes" then the full marriage process would begin.

A *ketubah* or marriage contract would be drawn up. These days it includes commitments by both bride and groom but originally it only spelt out the commitments of the groom. This was because the bride had already said "yes" and in so doing was giving her word of honour that she would be a faithful wife. Without the contract, they were not allowed to live together (and if they ever lost it they had to make a new one). If the woman was *not* a virgin the groom's father had to agree to waive his son's right to marry a virgin, or the the marriage could not continue.



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Once the contract was drawn up, and both sides were happy with it, the bride and groom were separately given a ritual immersion as a symbol of spiritual cleansing and then there would be a public ceremony to express their betrothal. (This is called *eyrusin* which means betrothal but also sometimes *Kiddushin* which means sanctification). They would exchange gifts and conclude the ceremony by sharing a cup of wine to seal their vows.

After the ceremony, the Eyrusin period began. They were to live as betrothed man and wife for at least a year. During this period they were considered to be married but *not allowed to live together*. Only death, or the groom's decision to apply for a divorce because he had learnt his wife was not a virgin (for instance) could break the relationship. This is why Joseph was struggling with what to do about Mary when he discovered her to be pregnant. She was betrothed to him, they had not yet been together.

Once she had agreed to be married, there was nothing the wife could do to stop the process, the decision was with the husband. (*Of course, she could decide to become unfaithful and thereby goad him into a divorce...but it was still his decision not hers. The prophet Hosea had an unfaithful wife but God told him to take her back...not to divorce her... to show how great God's love is for His people*).

At the end of the ceremony, the Groom would announce to his bride that he was going back to his father's house to prepare a place for her. He did not know when he would return, only his father would know that.

The Eyrusin Waiting Period

The Bride and Groom had different responsibilities during this time. For the bride, it was a time of preparation of herself to become the best possible wife she could be. She needed to learn home-making skills and also to demonstrate her worthiness. The period lasted at least a year to prove she was not already pregnant before the betrothal. The period might last much longer, because it was not uncommon for the betrothal to take place whilst the bride (or both) were still children. So the bride is set apart for her husband at this time.

Meanwhile, the groom is back at his father's house and is building a bridal chamber. He had to make it as good as he could, because the honour of his father's name depended on it. If anyone (especially the bride's father) said it was not good enough then that would be a disgraceful thing. So the groom could not tell when it would be finished, as only his father would give the final approval. It could take the whole year or longer before the father would say it was built well enough, and decorated well enough, to bring the bride home. Whilst others might look at it and suspect it was nearing completion, they could not know the day - or the hour - that the father would announce it was. The eyrusin period of waiting would only end, then, when the Groom's Father was satisfied that all was complete.

The Marriage Feast

The day finally comes when the Father says "Go". The groom then gathers his friends and makes a procession to the bride's family home to, literally, snatch her away



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from her father. The Jews love adding fun to all their ceremonies, and it is often arranged that this procession will take place in the middle of the night. If the bride's father sees them coming he will turn his face so that he doesn't notice. However, at whatever time of day or night... the groom expects to find his bride ready. Therefore, she has had to be ready throughout the *eyrusin* period. She has no excuse, because he might come at any moment just like a thief in the night. And it could be midday as well!

When the procession arrives at the bride's house, the groom will call out for her and blow the *shofar* ram's horn. The bride would be with her bridesmaids who would be there with her as the time for him to come drew close. (Remember, all could see the state of the chamber being built by the groom, so they knew when the time for completion was nearing).

The groom would carry the bride back to the new chamber he had built...it was very bad form if he made her walk any of the way. They were followed by the group that had gone with the groom to the Bride's house, together with her family, bridesmaids and friends.

The groom takes his bride into the bridal chamber. They go in and remain together alone there for seven days. Meanwhile, everyone else celebrates with an elaborate feast that the groom and his father have laid on for them. However, this does not begin until the Best Man has made an announcement. Our custom of carrying the bride over the threshold of the door is a poor substitute in comparison. Though there is an annual "wife carrying" race in Dorking each year.

When the bride and groom enter their chamber, the Best Man waits just outside. His job is to make sure that the marriage has been consummated and that the bride was definitely a virgin. So the couple come together, and the Groom shows the Best Man the bedclothes to confirm that the bride was a virgin. Once he announces to the wedding party

that the marriage has been consummated and all is well the party begins.

After seven days alone together, the married couple come out to the guests and begin their public married life together.





Spiritual Application of all of this

The Betrothal

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- 12/ Bride and Groom revealed together and married life starts publicly

Salvation

- 1/ God chooses us
- 2/ We accept
- 3/ Jesus paid the price for us
- 4/ New Covenant of grace
- 5/ Baptism and Communion
- 6/ Jesus ascended and promised to return

Christian Life

- 7/ Jesus has gone to "prepare a place for us"
- 8/ We should be preparing ourselves for Him, and ready for His return

Eternal Future

- 9/ God will say when Jesus is to return
- 10/ Jesus returns for His church and takes her to be with Him
- 11/ The "marriage feast of the Lamb" takes place in heaven
- 12/ Christ and the Church return to earth and reign together

Verses relating to all of this will be given on the following pages.

By now you will probably have begun to see the significance of all of this to the Christian Gospel. Jesus is the Groom, and the Church (all Christians) is the Bride. (*Note, it is together that we are the Bride, not individually*). Let's look again firstly at the marriage



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programme, and see the application to the Gospel next to it. The table on the previous page gives you the headlines, we will look in detail at it below.

God chooses us

Another name for the *Church* or the *Bride of Christ* is the *Elect*. It means the Chosen Ones. God's choice for us was made before the foundation of the world, to be set apart and special for His Son Jesus³. We were chosen by God and given to His Son. Jesus said "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24). There are several verses that relate to this theme in scripture.⁴

Since God chose us, people debate whether that means we have free will or not, but as we shall see as we read on, the answer is we definitely do!

We accept

Just as the Jewish maiden had complete right to accept or reject the proposal from the marriage arranger, so do we. If you read the story of Rebekah in Genesis 24 you will see that her father deferred the decision of marriage to her. That is always the case.

The choice was between the following two options:

Saying Yes

Receiving the full riches bestowed by the Groom

Leaving behind the old way of life

Enjoying full advantage of life with the Groom as part of his father's family

Saying No

Forfeiting any riches offered

Staying in the old way of life

No advantages from the potential groom at all

When God calls us to become united with Christ, the choice is the same for us. We can choose to reject Him, and that means we cannot expect any of the benefits of being a Christian. Or we can choose to accept. The *implication* of accepting is that we are leaving behind our old way of life entirely. Rebekah made a decision to go to Isaac and within a few days left her father's house and ***never saw him again***. The call to follow Jesus implies the same level of giving up our old life and following Him to a completely new place.

The *benefits* of doing this are that all the riches of the Kingdom of the Father are now ours as well. Immediately!



³ See Ephesians 1:4

⁴ Examples include Ephesians 1:11 and 1 Peter 2:9



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Jesus paid the price

Whilst it might be free for the Bride, she gets the riches, it is not free for the Groom. He has to pay a Bride Price. The price paid for a bride was a high price. The *Mishnah* (the code/guide book of Jewish regulations) suggested 100 shekels, which was equivalent to the price of having three slaves for life and then some. In some cases it would be work or service instead of money that was given.⁵ The more that was paid, the more the bride was clearly valued. Jesus said that *greater love has no-one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends (John 15:3)* and so He paid the ultimate Bride Price... the greatest love that could be shown, He gave His life for His Bride....for us.

New Covenant/contract

The acceptance by the bride's father and family of the offered price would form part of a contract that would be drawn up. This contract would be made up of promises made by the Groom. Jesus has made many promises to His Bride. "*I will never leave you or forsake you*"⁶ being one of them. This promise to never reject us He repeats in several places.⁷ Jesus did not just make the customary few promises, the Gospels are packed with promises Jesus made to us. These are the promises of the Groom to the Bride, and as we accept Him and come into His family they *all* apply to us immediately.

The sacraments of baptism and communion

Why did Jesus get baptised? John asked Him that very question. If baptism was a sign of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (as John was preaching) then there was clearly no need for Jesus to do it. But baptism (or ritual cleansing) was also in common use as a ceremony performed by *both* the Bride *and* the Groom at this stage of the marriage process. They were both washed as a sign of spiritual cleansing. This was called the *Mikvah*.

So Jesus was baptised because He was preparing, with His Bride, for their marriage. We are baptised for the same reason. In Acts, the believers in Ephesus are asked by Paul "*what baptism did you receive?*". They replied that they had received "*John's baptism*" (signifying repentance) and were then offered the Baptism of Jesus, which caused them to be filled with the Holy Spirit.⁸ In other words, they were now receiving the *Mikvah baptism* into the marriage contract with the Groom Jesus. Up to that point they had not entered into a relationship with Him, only decided to be 'religious people doing no wrong'. It is vital we come to that relationship ourselves if we are to be included in the Bride of Christ.

⁵ For instance, Jacob agreeing to work for 7 years for Rachel in Genesis 29, or David killing 100 Philistines for King Saul's daughter.

⁶ Hebrews 13:5

⁷ See, for instance John 6:37 and, of course, John 3:16-18

⁸ See Acts 19



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The giving to us of the Holy Spirit is the *signet ring* of the ceremony. Just as a wedding ring is the sign of a completed marriage today, so the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit are the sign that we are married to Christ.

The final part of the ceremony was the drinking together of wine. It sealed the contract. The Bride moved from being under the authority of her father (in our case, the world and its ways) and began immediately to be under the authority of her husband (in our case Jesus).

We have Communion and we drink it to remind ourselves that we are now under His authority...which is why we are told not to drink of it lightly. If we publicly declare ourselves to be under the authority of Jesus and yet live lives that deny that authority, we truly are drinking *judgement on ourselves*.⁹

The Betrothal is complete. The man and woman are now considered to be married. Jesus and the Church are the same, set apart for each other, but as yet not living together.

Jesus' ascension

Jesus the Groom tells us that He is to return to His Father's house and He is going to prepare a room for us.¹⁰ When all is complete, He will return but He cannot say when, as only His Father knows that.¹¹ And so He ascended, leaving the Bridal Party looking on (*Acts chapter 1*) and they are told that He will return in the same way as He left....as the Groom, as part of the marriage ceremonial traditions.

What Jesus is doing now...

He is with His Father. He is part of the Father's household. More than just a 'part' of course! He is now the central focus of everything in that house, just as the young groom would be in a Jewish father's household of the time.

You can imagine the young groom working away at the room he is preparing and the family saying "So, what is she like, this bride of yours?" and the groom just gushing with stories of his love for her. If anyone dared to say something bad about her he would defend her honour and speak up for her.

Jesus is doing just that for us!¹² Jesus is excited about us, working to prepare a place for us and *interceding* for us which means, essentially, that He is defending our honour when the accuser (Satan) starts telling about our failings.

⁹ See 1 Corinthians 11: 23-32

¹⁰ John 14: 1-6

¹¹ Matthew 24: 36-41

¹² Romans 8:34



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What we should be doing now...

Just as Jesus is preparing a place for us, we should be preparing ourselves for that place. We are already married to Him. We are as man and wife.¹³ Our preparation consists of keeping ourselves pure for Him (worshipping no other God, having no idols, etc¹⁴).

We need to be remaining alert because we do not know when He will come back for us.¹⁵ And even if we are ringing Him up to talk to Him (*ok, praying*), He can't tell us because *He doesn't know Himself. only the Father knows*. And so we must keep ourselves prepared.

Whilst the parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish maidens (bridesmaids)¹⁶ isn't talking directly about the bride the message is clear. They know the time for the groom to return is close, they know it is likely to be at night (for that was the custom), but they just aren't ready and they miss out.

All of this means we should be spending time intimately with Jesus regularly. Remember, during the eyrusin period the Bride and Groom are married but just not living together. Our times of intimacy should be the most important, most unmissable, things we do.

It also means we should be clearly reserved for Him... we have left our Father and Mother and become joined to Him. Read Genesis 24 again. Rebekah had not seen Isaac (we have not seen Jesus). She was impressed by the price he was prepared to pay for her (are we impressed by what Jesus paid for us?). She made a very quick decision, within a few days she decided to leave her old way of life and start on a long journey towards her new husband. She said goodbye to her father and mother and *everything* she knew **forever**. Our lives should reflect that determination and separation from the *old* way of life for intimacy with Jesus.

God tells Jesus to return

Up to now everything has happened. We are in the eyrusin period (provided we have accepted the proposal, if we have not then *none of this* applies to us).

13 Remember again that it is together, as the Church (Body of Christ) that we are the Bride. This is not something to get awkward about if you are a fella reading this at the moment.

14 Exodus 20. We do not see the Ten Commandments as rules to be religiously obeyed, but as the things we do out of love for our Groom to prepare ourselves for the day we shall begin to live with Him.

15 Mark 13:33

16 All 3 parables in Matthew 25 are about the need to be ready for the Groom's return



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We can see that the Groom has nearly completed the Room he is preparing for us, and His return is imminent.¹⁷ We should be expectantly ready, with everything in order. When the groom found the bride he expected her to be washed and clean, in her best clothes (albeit probably night clothes) and ready. There was no time for her to say goodbye or just to go and get something she wanted to take with her. And since she didn't know exactly when he was coming she had to live like that **all the time**.

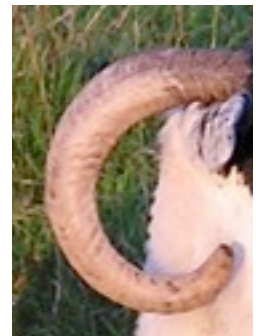
The same for us.

The Rapture

It's worth looking at 1 Thessalonians 4:15 - 18 in detail:

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Sudden, noisy, and cataclysmic. The father says "GO". The groom and his friends march to the bride's house, shouting and blowing trumpets. The groom blows the *Shofar* or *ram's horn* and goes into the bride's house to snatch her away. That is what is going to happen, and all those who are part of the Bride of Christ will be involved. Those who have fallen asleep will be taken first, and those still alive will then be 'taken up' too. There will be trumpet blasts and loud shouts heard on earth from heaven on that day. We do not know the day or hour, but we must be ready!



This event captures imagination like no other. There are many books about it, dramatic films and stories. In most cases the imagination runs amok and extra details get added, or it gets interpreted in the light of today's news. In many cases the books concentrate on those who get left behind, the people who aren't part of the Bride. But they are not the ones the real story is about, and so the fiction runs off following imaginations of men who are trying to fill in blanks.

The *real story* is what happens now to the Bride and to the Groom. For that is our future, if we have accepted the offer from the Groom in the first place.

¹⁷ For any one person, the room is prepared within their lifetime, and the end of that life marks the falling asleep. Remember, it is whilst the bride was asleep that the groom would normally return for her. THE Bible makes clear that those members of the Church who have fallen asleep (died) before Jesus returns will be the *first* ones to be snatched up by Him. There will come a day when this will happen and those alive at the time will be then caught up too. See 1 Thessalonians 4: 15 -18



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The Marriage Feast of the Lamb

Some modern fiction tells us that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had children by her.¹⁸ But Jesus is not unfaithful! He is betrothed to the Church. And the final events of that marriage will now take place. He has taken His bride back to the Father's House.

In the Jewish wedding the Bride and Groom were separated from everyone else and alone together for 7 days, whilst the Marriage Feast for family and friends went on without them. The Bible tells us of a great party in heaven: *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (Revelation 19:7)*. What happens in the bridal chamber for that week was secret, between the two of them (once the Best Man had given witness to the consummation and Bride's virginity!). The wedding feast in Cana that Jesus attended and where he turned water into wine would have been what was happening outside of the bridal chamber.

How long will this go on for? Is it a literal 7 days or might it be 7 years as many people suggest? Again, there is a lot of speculation and all of that is about what is happening on earth meanwhile. The *real* story is what is happening in the bridal chamber ... and of that we have no clues! The length of time is not the important thing either.

Reigning together

Once the wedding is over, Bride and Groom live together. His property is her property. She brings nothing to the marriage other than herself and her devotion. All that He has he now share with her.

We can give nothing to Jesus other than our devotion, but everything He has He shares with us and by this stage that means that we will rule with Him on earth. The Bible speaks of this lasting for a thousand years initially, and then a new heaven and a new earth being created where we will rule with Jesus for eternity.

That is the future for the Bride of Christ!

The Feasts of the Messiah

It is worth just a few thoughts on the Feasts that God gave Israel in the book of Leviticus, because these feasts follow a similar pattern to the wedding plans of the Hebrews and become a second prophetic statement of God's plan of salvation. The Bible teaches that two witnesses seal a matter... God has spoken of His eternal plan in the Jewish wedding ceremony and also in the annual pattern of feasts, fasts and holidays. Whilst this is a bit

¹⁸ One simple verse that proves this could not have been the case is John 20:16. Mary sees Jesus, whom she thought was dead. Her first word to Him was "RABBONI!" or "TEACHER!". If they had been married, I somehow imagine she might have said something else "DARLING!" or whatever. But she used the word that expressed her *most intimate* relationship with Him.... Teacher.



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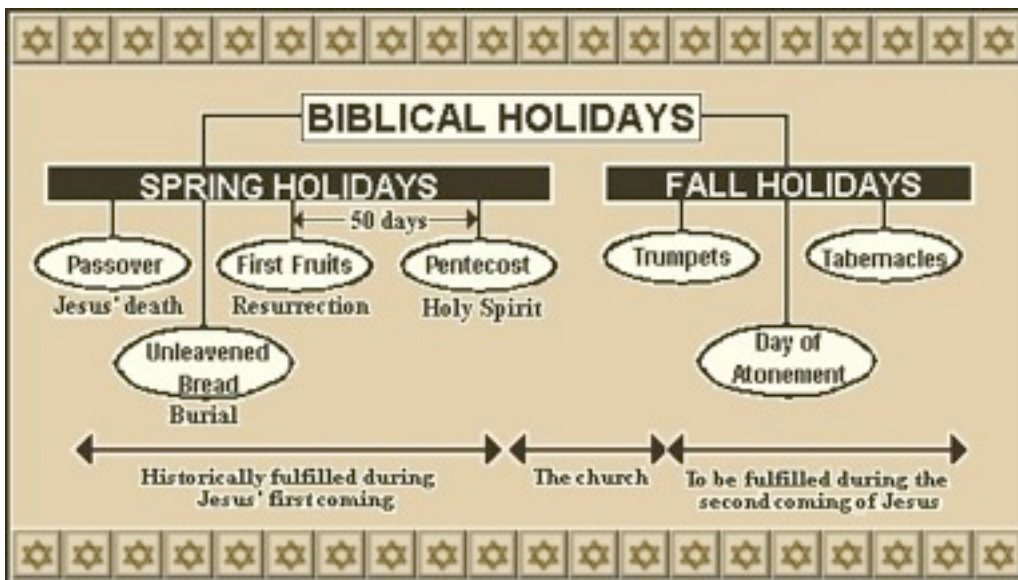


more complicated than the wedding plans, if you can stick with it for a few more pages there may be more to learn!

God's plan for His creation was first revealed to the Hebrew people, a tribe who descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. God revealed to them, especially through Moses and the other prophets, His plan of salvation. But it was a *mystery* in that its revelation was veiled. Only with the coming of Jesus did He make everything clear.

That doesn't mean there is nothing to learn from the Old Testament, or indeed the customs of the Israel nation.¹⁹ Infact, as we look at both from the viewpoint of the New

Chart from waitingforjesus.com



Testament we begin to see that God's plan for salvation is written in both in amazing ways. One of these is the pattern of *feasts* God gave His people whilst they were in the desert.

Feasts both to remember what He *had done* for them but also to point to the Messiah and what

He *would do* for them.

You might find that some of this is a bit difficult, in which case you can ignore it and move on to the chapter on the Jewish weddings which starts on page 8.

The feasts fall in two different groups, one set in the spring and the other in the autumn.²⁰

The Spring feasts have a direct correlation to the Life and Work of Jesus, as we shall see below. However, the Autumn Feasts do not. They do, however, point to what he will

¹⁹ The word Jew refers only to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the 'southern Kingdom' who remained loyal to the sons of David when the other 10 tribes rebelled. Those 10 tribes were eventually captured and scattered, whilst the southern tribes were later taken into exile in Babylon. They returned to the land of Israel in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, but the other tribes did not and are often referred to as the lost tribes of Israel. In Jesus' day, it was Judah - the Jews - who inhabited the Promised Land. Today's Israelis can trace their line back to Judah, the other 10 tribes are still lost. (Though doubtless God knows who they are!)

²⁰ There are other feasts, instituted since the Exodus, such as Purim (which celebrates the deliverance recorded in the Book of Esther). But it is the feasts God gave them in the desert which we are interested in here.



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accomplish at the Second Coming. A brief outline of the feasts, and what they teach us about God's Plan for Salvation, follows. In Leviticus 23:2 we read *'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies'* but a

more literal translation of "sacred assemblies" gives us a different view to that of 1200 people sitting on a hard floor in a cramped sports hall... the Hebrew word *miqra* can also mean a *rehearsal*. As we shall see, these feasts point to things God had planned to bring about later.

The Spring Feasts²¹

Passover. The remembrance of the escape from Egypt, when the blood of a slaughtered lamb was painted over the doorposts of the Israelite houses. That night, the angel of death visited every home in Egypt and killed the firstborn son. However, when he came to a house with blood on the doorpost he passed over and did not visit that house.

Also celebrated in Israel as the beginning of the harvest. (the Barley harvest)

Jesus was crucified at Passover, His blood being applied to the lives of believers so that by His death we might live.

Unleavened Bread This begins at Passover and lasts for a week. It is a holiday... sometimes "Passover" and "Unleavened Bread" are used interchangeably. Before Passover all leaven is removed from homes (yeast, etc). It is all taken outside the house and destroyed, so that nothing that would decay was left in the house. This was a process of sanctification.

Jesus was taken 'outside the city' and buried. He did not see decay however.

First Fruits. As the Harvest was gathered, the first things brought in (and these would be the best) were brought to the priest as an offering (see *Leviticus 23:10-14*). This was the time of the wheat harvest. A sheaf of wheat was waved by the priest (and a sheaf often represented a person, as it did in Joseph's dreams of Genesis 37).

First Fruits represents Resurrection... Paul wrote *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:20)*

Finally, Pentecost. (also known in Judaism as the Festival of Weeks or Shavu'ot) This comes 50 days after First Fruits (or, more correctly, 7 sabbaths and then a day, see *Leviticus 23: 15-21*). In the Old Testament, the Commandments were given 50 days after the crossing of the Red Sea, and in the New the Holy Spirit is given at Pentecost, 50 days after the Resurrection. For the Jews, Pentecost celebrates the giving of the Torah on Sinai.

The following quote is from www.jewfaq.org: *We count each of the days from the second day of Passover to the day before Shavu'ot, 49 days or 7 full weeks, hence the name of the festival. The counting reminds us of the important connection between Passover and Shavu'ot: Passover freed us physically from bondage, but the giving of the Torah on Shavu'ot*

²¹ Wikipedia is as good as anything on these, but also look at bibleprohecy.org/feasts1.htm



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redeemed us spiritually from our bondage to idolatry and immorality. Romans 8 tells us that what the law was powerless to do... God did by sending His own Son... that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us... who live... according to the Spirit. (from verses 3 and 4). The Law was written on stone at Sinai, and is commemorated in Shavu'ot, the Law was written on our hearts by the Spirit at Pentecost.

Pentecost is seen as the final part of the feast season that began with Passover, and completed the Passover period. We can see clearly how the Passover to Pentecost feasts *rehearsed* all that Jesus would accomplish on the Cross and by sending His Spirit to us.

As we shall see later, the Spring feasts also have a relationship to the Jewish wedding customs, and relate to the way Christ sees the Church as His Bride. The Spring feasts are also about the *priestly* role of the messiah, whilst the Autumn feasts speak more of His *kingly* role.

The Autumn Feasts

There is now a gap between the feasts, whereas the first set of feasts given by God were related back to the Passover ("count so many days and then..." etc), the Autumn feasts are given a separate date, between September and October to use our months. These are the most important holidays and feasts of the Jewish year. *Don't forget, this is not an RE lesson. We are not trying to learn how to be a good Jew but to see how God prepared the way for Jesus and us, His people, by causing the people of Israel to rehearse it year after year as a sign for the world of what God is doing.*

The Feast of Trumpets, today also known as Rosh Hashanah or Jewish New Year, starts the season. You can see this in Leviticus 23 from verse 24. It is a forty day period, and includes some of the most important days in the Jewish calendar. It starts on the first day of the month of Tishrei with trumpet blasts. Since Jewish months are related to the moon directly²² it does not always start on the same day of September. Rosh Hashanah is also called the *Unknown Day* as 'no man knows the day or hour at which it begins'. It begins when 2 witnesses testify to having seen the new moon, and that might be on one of two days (it sometimes cannot be seen on the first day it is expected, as it is low in the sky). So though they knew when to expect it, they did not know the day or hour it would appear. The population are alerted to the arrival of Rosh Hashanah once the moon has been sighted by a blast of the *Shofar* (Ram's Horn).

This links in very closely to the wedding ceremonies... the *Shofar* is blown as the groom approaches the bride's house as we have seen. And this also happens on the *Unknown Day*, some scholars speculate that the return of Christ the Groom for His Bride will thus happen on the unknown day of Rosh Hashanah in a year yet to come.

The blowing of the *Shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is know to the Jews as the *Last Trump* (or *trumpet*). The *First Trump* of the year is blown at Pentecost (*Exodus 19:19*) and is blown

²² which, of course, is why we call them months in the first place!



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to declare that God has betrothed Himself to His people, Israel. The *Great Trump* occurs in the next feast, Yom Kippur.

Ten days later comes the Day of Atonement, or *Yom Kippur*. This was a most holy day, a special Sabbath (even if it was not the 7th day of the week) and a day of fasting. On this day atonement was made for the people's sins (see *Leviticus 16*). Between Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Atonement are the ten high holy days of the year. These are the *days of repentance* and preparation at the start of the year. Often these days are called the *Days of Awe*. The belief is that God has books He writes our names in, and what will happen to us. God writes in these books on Rosh Hashanah, but depending on a person's penitent heart during the Days of Awe, God might alter what He has written. When Yom Kippur comes, however, the books are sealed for the year...and your fate during that year is now based on what God has written for you.

This was the only day of the year when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with the goat's blood as a sin offering. As he sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat, the sin of all the people was atoned for.

There are many references to these themes in Ephesians, for instance "*being sealed unto the day of redemption*" in 4:30 refers to the sealing of the books determining our fate.

So, Yom Kippur comes and the books are sealed. It is a day of fasting and many Jews wear white to symbolise sins being made white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). God is reconciled with His people, and they with God. Sin, which is forgiven at Passover, is now removed completely from the picture. The books have been wiped clean (if the people have repented).

Five days later comes the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the most joyful occasions in the Jewish calendar. The days of awe and repentance are over, the books have been sealed. This feast reminds the Jews of the wilderness journey, and they will spend much of the week camped out in tents (tabernacles). You can read about it in *Leviticus 23:33-44*.

This feast is the "season of joy". Your sins are forgiven, and all is at peace. The symbolism is of a temporary dwelling place, looking forward to the Promised Land and permanent home with God. It is the final harvest of the year (the fruit harvest) and is sometimes therefore called the *Feast of Ingathering*... bringing in the harvest. It prophetically represents God bringing His harvest home to heaven finally.

This has been a very brief sketch of the Jewish feasts, and we will see later why we needed to understand something about them. If you want to know more you can look at <http://bibleprophecy.org/feasts1.htm> (it goes up to feasts8.htm), from where the following quote comes:

God designed the agricultural and weather seasons in Israel to parallel the life of every believer in Christ who seeks to love Him and serve Him with all his heart. With this in mind, let us examine how this is true.



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Every time a person receives the Lord Jesus as his own Saviour, he spiritually experiences Passover. He is to flee Egypt, the world's evil system and ways, trust in the Lord, the Lamb of God, and allow Christ to be the doorpost of his heart. As believers, we are then to seek to live holy lives before God and experience Unleavened Bread. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, we are to consider our former ways dead to us and experience the newness of life in the Lord. Once we do this, we can be immersed (baptised) in the Holy Spirit and have the power of God (the anointing) in our lives. Spiritually, we have experienced the spring harvest of Israel in our lives....

At that time, God will begin to take us on a spiritual journey through the wilderness of life. Spiritually, we will begin to experience the dry summer season of Israel. Many things in our lives will not go the way we expect them to or how we trust God for them to go. In the process of experiencing life's bitter disappointments and struggles, if we keep our eyes upon God, He will take us from Passover to Pentecost. There He will reveal His ways and his Word, the Bible, in a deeper and more progressive way. ...

It is when we spiritually experience the autumn festivals -- especially the Feast of Tabernacles, and enter into our spiritual promised land that God will anoint our lives for Him in an awesome way, as we live and serve Him, and we will then experience the greatest joy in our entire lives. Joy unspeakable! But we will experience not only joy, but also dancing, praise, victory, peace, and the power of God in our lives. Spiritually, we will be experiencing the fall harvest of Israel. The rain in the bible speaks of two things: the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and an in-depth understanding of Jesus and his Word, the Bible, in our lives. Both the anointing of the Holy Spirit and great knowledge of spiritual truths will be present in our lives in order that we may accomplish the purpose God has for every one of our lives. Therefore, we have the anointing of God upon our lives so we may help to do our part to build up the Body of Christ to full maturity and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth until we come to that day when we will rule and reign with the Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords on earth during the Messianic age, the Millennium, and for all eternity.

---Study taken from "The Seven Festivals Of The Messiah" by Eddie Chumney

Many books have been written about all of this, and I have only given you the briefest summary. If you choose to follow it up on the internet please remember that many people who write on this subject are doing so to try to prove their position on theological arguments such as whether Christ comes for His Bride before or after the Anti-Christ appears, whether the anti-Christ is a person or a philosophy, whether we live now in the Millennium reign or not. It can all get very confusing so don't get too bogged down in what you find! The final answer to exactly the details of what will happen will only become clear as it does.

In the Wedding Ceremony and the Feasts God has made a promise that it *will* happen and that it will be glorious for His people. That is the message to remember!



Summary Mnemonic

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Intimate
Declares
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www.tfg.org.uk/joiniTFG

Instead of sending emails, members will be contacted based on which *iTFG* groups they sign up to.

the main features of this weekend will be available online on the TFG website eventually. Meanwhile, you can listen to our range of previous weekend talks and other meetings on www.tfg.org.uk. The *latest* Thursday evening talk is always available on the main page of *iTFG*, and you can hear our podcasts also on the iTunes Music Store (search for Twyford Fellowship for weekly talks, or TFG for weekends).

Weekly Programme

Lunchtimes at 1:35pm:

Mondays (Worship) and Fridays (Guest Speaker) all years

Wednesdays for Year 10s, Thursdays for years 11 -13

Thursday evenings at 8pm for years 10-13 and ex-students

Thursday Communion at 8am for all years.



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