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The Jewish Wedding Customs

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.... 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. ..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.

Once the contract was drawn up, 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*. Once she had agreed to be married, there was



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nothing the wife could do to stop the process, the decision was with the husband.

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. 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. 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 from her father. 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. The groom would carry the bride back to the new chamber he had built.... 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. 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.