

Betroth

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As Christ's betrothed bride are you prepared for your marriage?

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Jewish marriage traditions during biblical times, particularly around the period of Jesus' birth, had several unique aspects, including the concept of betrothal or engagement.

The term "engagement" in the context of the New Testament narrative describing Mary and Joseph's relationship can be a bit misleading if interpreted through the lens of modern Western customs. The original Greek term used in the New Testament is "μνηστευθεῖσα" (mnēsteutheisa), translated as promised - GW; betrothed - CSB, ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV, YLT; pledged - NIV. Betrothed is more accurate in reflecting the cultural seriousness of betrothal and conveys the legal implications of their commitment.

Betrothal, Not Engagement

Unlike modern engagements, in the Jewish culture of that period, betrothal (*Kiddushin*) was a formal and legally binding contract between a man and a woman and was considered the first stage of marriage. Betrothal was much more binding than modern engagements typically lasting about a year. Once betrothed, the couple was legally regarded as husband and wife, even though the marriage had not yet been consummated and the betrothal period.

Marriage Contract (*Ketubah*)

This was a legal document outlining the husband's responsibilities to his wife, including providing for her needs and the conditions of inheritance. The *ketubah* also included provisions for the wife's security in the event of divorce or the husband's death.

Bride Price (*Mohar*)

This was a financial arrangement where the groom or his family would pay a sum to the bride or her family. This practice was not necessarily a transactional purchase of the bride but rather a form of dowry and a demonstration of the groom's ability to provide for a wife.

The young bride covered her face with a veil as a symbol that she had entered a betrothal covenant and was now unavailable to any other.

Between Betrothal and Wedding

"She (the Bride) would light an oil filled lamp which she kept burning in a strategic place, perhaps a window, so the bridegroom could see she was mindful of their covenant. The bridegroom would then return to his father's home for a period of around one year to prepare for the arrival of his bride. This time-period was never less than nine months in order to test the sexual faithfulness of the bride, and to give her sufficient time to make herself ready for the second stage of the marriage. During this time he would be erecting a 'chadar' or bridal chamber. This would be overseen by his father and if he (the Groom) were asked how long before his wedding he would traditionally reply that only his father knew the day and hour. "

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Wedding Ceremony

The actual wedding involved bringing the bride to the groom's home, followed by a feast and celebrations. This ceremony formalized the marriage and marked the end of the betrothal period.

Cultural and Historical Accuracy

Using "betrothed" helps modern readers understand that Mary and Joseph's relationship was under the binding Jewish customs of betrothal, which had significant legal and social consequences. It highlights the gravity of Mary's virgin pregnancy during this period, as well as Joseph's initial dilemma and his subsequent decision to stay with Mary, which was significant given the societal and legal context. The story of Mary and Joseph, within this framework, underscores the fulfillment of prophecy and the divine nature of Jesus' birth in Christian belief. The reference to "the virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Isaiah 7:14) is a fulfillment of a prophecy, emphasizing the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth as a pivotal event in Christian theology. The name "Immanuel" symbolizes the belief in Jesus as God incarnate, a central tenet in Christian faith.

Implications

It is no doubt that the Jews clearly understood the meaning of betrothal. Consider the following statements in light of the Jews understanding of betrothal of Christ's Church to Him.

- "I (John the Baptist) am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:28-30)
- Jesus left His home, Heaven, came to Earth to pay the price (crucifixion) required for His Bride. This price also cleanses His Bride - His Church - of all imperfections.
- Jesus leaves Earth to to prepare a place for His Bride. "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:2-4 ESV)
- The bride prepares herself for their marriage by righteous living.
- "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." ... "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:30-31, 36)
- Jesus will return to get His Bride. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ESV)
- "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." (Revelation 19:6-8 ESV)
- "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man." (Revelation 21:2-3 ESV)