Biblical Custom of Marriage

Marriage began as a custom and symbol recognizing the sexual union of man and wife for the procreation of children as well as for the increasing, and thus the strengthening, of the nation. Marriage within the immediate family group was general. Close relatives frequently married, and refusal was difficult. Isaac and Rebekah were first cousins, as were Jacob and Leah and Rachel. (Lev. 18:12-13, 20:19) would have forbidden the marriage of an aunt and a nephew which produced the infant Moses, or that of Jacob simultaneously to two sisters (Gen. 29:30).

When one was forced to turn outside the tribe or clan, marriage to another Israelite family was easily accepted. However, marriage to a foreigner was fraught with dangers, such as possible dilution of the faith and the Hebrew heritage, as well as the advent of strange gods and religious practices.

Intermarriage with Canaanite women was forbidden under Mosaic Law (Exodus 34:16; Deut. 7:3-6), although like several other prohibitions this was often ignored. Exceptions were made for women captured in war who were prepared to renounce their country, its customs, and beliefs (Deut. 21:10-14), although it is doubtful whether this was a frequent practice. Matriarchal marriage occurred when a man went to live with and became part of his wife's family, as Jacob did with Leah and Rachel, either temporarily or permanently. When Samson married a Philistine woman, she continued living with her family; while Samson visited from time to time (Frequent biblical examples show that although marriage to a foreigner was unpopular, it was certainly practiced. Esau married two Hittite women (Gen. 26:34), Joseph an Egyptian (Gen. 41:45), Moses a Midianite (Exodus 2:21), and many more.

So great was the concern of the Hebrews that their religion might be diluted by intermarriage with those of other faiths that in some occasion wholesale divorce was ordered for those married to foreigners (Ezra 9:2; 10:3, 16-17). Purity of the faith was paramount, regardless of the destruction of homes and families. A similar idea was expressed by Paul, who condemned marriage with non-Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

No precise information exists on the normal age of betrothal or marriage. The bar mitzvah celebrating the coming of age of a young male in later Jewish tradition reflected the earlier idea of a boy being recognized as a man when about thirteen years old. A minimum age of thirteen for boys and twelve for girls was eventually set, although royal families may have held marriages at quite different ages from those considered normal for most people. By early Church Age times girls often married between twelve and seventeen, and boys between fourteen and eighteen.

Marriages were frequently matters of convenience for the family and rarely a concern of the heart. They were arranged by parents, and in some cases were even considered invalid if parental permission was lacking. Discussions concerning the marriage took place between the parents without the presence, consent, or frequently the awareness of the prospective bride and groom. Such custom was for the protection of their faith, family, property and nation (Judges 14:8-20; 15:1-2).

It was not necessary for the eldest member of the family to marry first (Gen. 29:26). Marriages arranged by parents are mentioned frequently in Scripture (Josh. 15:16; Judges 14:2-3; 1 Sam. 18:17, 19, 21, 27). Where a father did not actually choose the bride for his son, strict guidelines and advice were given (Gen. 28:6-9), although not always followed (Gen. 26:34-35). Rare indeed were signs of female initiative, such as Michal, Saul's daughter, expressing her love for David (1 Sam. 18:20).

Betrothal (Exodus 22:16; Deut. 20:7; 22:23-24) was a legally binding contract between the parents of the bride and groom. It had the legal status of marriage (Deut. 28:30; 2 Sam. 3:14), and anyone guilty of seducing a betrothed virgin was stoned for violating his neighbor's wife (Deut. 22:23-24). The prospective groom took possession and established control over his bride by the gift of the bride-price to her father (Gen. 34:12; I Sam. 18:25). The bride-price, often in the form of jewelry, was probably returned to the bride at the time of her father's death or earlier if she became a widow and was in need. The betrothal, which normally lasted one year, was a distinct part of a permanent relationship between a man and a woman (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5).

The prospective groom was exempt from military service (Deut. 24:5) and was already termed "son-in-law" by the bride's father from the time of the betrothal (Gen. 19:14). There remained a distinction, however, between betrothal and marriage (Deut. 20:7), and although Mary was considered to be Joseph's wife at the time of their betrothal, he did not have intercourse with her until after the birth of Jesus. If normal Hebrew practices were followed, this would mean after the baby was weaned, or at about three years of age.

The story of Jacob gives the first biblical example of a feast forming part of the marriage celebration (Gen. 29:22; Judges 14:10, Ps. 45:14). There was great family rejoicing at the wedding. Bride and groom acted as royalty for a week of festivity, doing no work. Both were arrayed in special fine clothing (Isa. 61:10; Ezek. 16: 9-13). The face of the bride always remained covered until she had been escorted by her parents to the bridal chamber. This would also explain the ease with which, on Jacob's wedding night, Laban was able to replace Rachel with Leah (Gen. 24:65, 29:23-25).

The procession through the streets of the groom and his friends with musical instruments (Jer. 7:34) was the highlight of the wedding ceremony. Closer to the Church Age period, both the bride's and the groom's processions would leave their respective houses to meet at a specific location, normally returning to the home of the groom for the actual wedding feast (Matt. 22:2).

The feasting, fine food, and merriment sometimes lasted for seven days (Gen. 29:27; Judges 14:12), or longer depending on the groom's financial capacity. The marriage was expected to be consummated on the first night (Gen. 29:23), the stained linen being retained as evidence of virginity. In NT times, the wedding of a virgin normally took place on a Wednesday. This provided adequate time for the husband to bring charges against her on Thursday if she were found not to be a virgin (Deut. 22:13-19, 28-29).

Thursday was the day for weddings of widows and those who were divorced, these newlyweds thus having uninterrupted time before the Sabbath. The wedding was never an excuse for the observance of the Sabbath.

Most marriages in Israel were monogamous, and only in certain periods was polygamy practiced, partly because of the cost that would have been involved in providing several bride-prices. Bigamy was acknowledged in Deut. 21:15-17, although it frequently led to quarrels between wives (1 Sam. 1:6) and other problems (Judges 8:29-9:57; 2 Sam. 11:13; 1 Kings 11:1-8). Kings were those most likely to indulge in large numbers of wives.

When a man died, it was considered important to preserve both the family name and the inheritance. Even where there were already children, it became the responsibility of the husband's closest male relative to provide for the widow and orphans. The deceased husband's brother normally entered into a levirate (or "brother-in-law") marriage with the widow (Deut. 25:5-10, Ruth 2:20, Gen. 38:8). This custom is called the Levirate marriage practiced by the Jewish people up to the present.

Think about these: Wedding customs that we borrowed from the Bible are not applicable to us because we are not Israelites. There is no command for pastors to officiate weddings. A wedding is said to be a "Christian wedding" only if the husband and wife are regenerate Christians. The real power of a marriage contract comes from the souls of the husband and wife who are filled with the Spirit and with the Word of God.

Erroneous Reasons for Relationship or Marriage:
- To fulfill or gratify sexual desires
- Social pressure
- Unexpected pregnancy
- To solve domestic problems
- To acquire status symbol
- To improve economic situations in life
- Pity or sympathy upon the person
- For trial - with intention to get away from it

Wrong Places to Find Your Right-Man or Right-Woman:
- Bars, pub houses, and clubs
- Beaches and resorts
- Drinking or sex parties
- Concert Hall or movie houses
- Entertainment place
- Mall and shopping centers
- Internet social networks
- Internet dating websites

Whom Not to Get Into Relationship With or Marry:
- Unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14-18)
- Habitual gambling
- Jealous person
- Neurotic or mentally sick
- A mama's boy or daddy's girl
- Egotist, arrogant and conceited
- Separated or divorced person
- Suicidal and menacing person
- Violent or pervert or sex maniac
- Physically or spiritually Immature believer
- Addicted to substance, alcohol or tobacco
- Member of cult or under demon influence

Solemn Advice to Christian Women before surrendering your body and soul to a man:
- Do not get into marriage until you understand that you are going to lose your freedom once married and therefore surrender your freedom only to someone who will cherish and not abuse you. Only maximum Bible doctrine in the soul can help you find the right one.
- You have to know much about him more than his online resume and profile.
- You must not surrender your soul and body to a stranger (who could be married or have kids). You must be clever enough to verify his civil status before anything else.
- You must be certain that he is willing to assume responsibility and carry on with it until his last breath.

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