

Jewish Wedding Customs & the Rapture

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Christian writers throughout history have recognized an underlying theme in the Scriptures, that Jewish wedding customs form a pattern for the redemption of mankind. This is rather hard to miss, particularly when both Paul and John refer specifically to the “Bride” of Christ. But only recently have the Jewish wedding customs been used within the rapture debate, particularly to support the pretribulation rapture scenario.

While we agree that the Scriptures must be interpreted historically, in light of culture and historical context, we must proceed with caution, being very careful to substantiate an alleged custom with real biblical and historical data. It is not enough to merely assert something as a “custom,” and then use it to interpret Scripture. We must prove every detail, and also demonstrate that such an allusion was intended in a particular passage.

Pretribulationist Shenanigans

A serious problem arises when alleged details of a custom being promoted as fact cannot be documented, or when it is not clear that the writer or speaker had such a custom in view in Scripture. The modern pretribulationist usage of the Jewish wedding customs illustrates the problematic nature of “customs.” Contrary to what is portrayed by many pretribulationist authors and speakers, all of the details of such customs are not at all clear in history. Nor is there such a degree of consistency in the historical record as to make the scenario being promoted by pretribulationist writers reliable. For those who have investigated the claims being promoted by the prophecy peddlers, one quickly finds it extremely difficult to verify some of the specific details, particularly those details that are alleged to support the pretribulation version of eschatology. While we do not wish to make any specific charges of dishonesty, it appears that some pretribulationist authors may have made a few “adjustments” to the actual customs to make them fit their scheme. And as usual, pretribulationist writers borrow statements from each other without careful research and verification.¹

When reading pretribulationist literature which uses Jewish wedding customs to support their scheme, one quickly gets the impression that all the alleged details of the wedding scenario presented by these writers are easily verified from the historical record. And, historical sources lay out the scenario presented by pretribulationists as fact. But that is simply not true. In "[The Parables of Jesus](#)," Joachim Jeremias (authority on ancient Jewish customs) explains the problem.

*"The mistaken idea has arisen because we possess no connected description of a wedding feast from the time of Jesus, but only modern collections of material which attempt to construct a connected mosaic out of the scattered allusions to be found in the rabbinic literature. There is evidence that these collections of material are incomplete. This is not surprising in view of the situation with regard to the sources; the material is unlimited and widely scattered, and the picture is extraordinarily varied; then as now, wedding customs differed in different districts; moreover, after the destruction of the Temple, under the repeated impact of national disasters, they underwent far reaching restrictions; but above all, the occasional reports which we possess are widely distributed in space and time: in space they come from Palestine and Babylonia, while in time they are spread over many centuries."*²

It appears that some elements of the alleged custom being promoted by pretribulationist writers are fabricated in order to support their view of the rapture being pretribulationist (particularly as it relates to "imminence"). Having spent a few years trying to track down the source of some of the details promoted by these writers, it has become increasingly obvious that the alleged "customs" are reverse-engineered in order to fit with the pretribulation scheme, rather than being derived from real historical sources. Greg Killian's article, [A Jewish Wedding](#), illustrates this. Killian writes, "Meanwhile, the young man returned to his father's home, and the chadar goes under construction. - The young Jewish bridegroom would make the following speech as he was leaving: Yochanan (John) 14:2-3 'In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.'" The fact is, there is absolutely nothing in the historical record to suggest such a speech. Killian has simply inventing his own evidence to fit with the text. As each pretribulationist writer borrows material from other writers, more and more embellishments seem to be added.

These writers also attempt to use certain details that support their scheme, but ignore those that are problematic for the pretribulation scenario. Dr. Robert Gundry illustrates the problem.

"Furthermore, if a purported pretrib coming to fetch the church to heaven is supposed to reflect the ancient Semitic custom of a groom's fetching the bride to his home, what is Jesus' taking the church with Him back to earth right after the marriage supper, and for a thousand years, supposed to reflect? An ancient Semitic custom of the groom's taking his bride back to her home to live with her there for a long time? The pretrib reasoning gets itself into a pickle by injecting a marriage custom that isn't even mentioned in the biblical text at hand, and then giving that custom argumentative weight of an allegorical sort but not carrying out the allegory consistently. In fact, our ignorance of ancient

Semitic marriage customs exceeds our knowledge. And what knowledge we do have shows considerable variation in these customs.”³

When these writers present a scenario which they claim was the “Jewish custom” in Jesus' day, and then use this alleged custom as the foundation for their pretribulation rapture doctrine, they must be held accountable to prove that the scenario they have laid out is indeed biblical and historical. If they cannot prove all of the details on which they place the weight of their arguments, we should conclude that they have constructed one giant circular argument using fabricated evidence.

A Kidnapping? Or a Planned Procession?

In the attempt to support pretribulationism from the Jewish Wedding customs, some writers have promoted the myth that the coming of the groom for the bride was “imminent” throughout the engagement period. That is, she had no idea when the groom would come to snatch her away. She must always be in a state of readiness for his arrival. Zola Levitt writes:

“And she waited at home every night. She certainly didn't want to be caught away from home when the bridegroom came. The tradition was that he would come at night, even at midnight, and try to take her by surprise. Matt 24:42-44 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. You must be ready, for the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.' ... Yes, suddenly one night the groom would come. The bride's father and brothers would ensure it was the man with the marriage contract, then look the other way while the two of them and all their friends eloped! They were all whisked away into the into the night to begin the reception. ... Would they have no warning at all? Well, just this much. When the groom's party was close, they would shout; and when the bride heard that shout, she knew she was as good as married.”⁴

“The bride, for her part ... did a lot of waiting [C]ustom required her to be ready ... have an oil lamp ready in case he came in darkness ... she was to be ready to travel at a moment's notice. ... [T]he bride would assemble her bridesmaids and whoever would go with her to the wedding ... they were all to have oil lamps ready. They would wait at her house every night on the chance that the groom would come ... and sweep them all away to a sudden wedding ceremony. ... When the Father deemed all to be ready, the bridegroom would assemble his friends ... and set out in the night [T]he Jewish brides were stolen ... as the party would get close to her house, they were required to give her a warning. Someone in the party would shout! When the shout was heard, the bride and her party were to go out to meet the bridegroom.”⁵

Chuck Missler writes:

*"Although the bride was expecting the groom to come for her, she did not know the time of his coming. As a result, the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, which announced her imminent departure to be gathered with him. ... The Bridegroom has departed, and His return to gather His Bride is imminent."*⁶

Both Levitt and Missler are flat wrong. Levitt gives no source for his information. Missler cites the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia to support his other points regarding the Jewish customs. But, he misrepresented his source, which says plainly on pp. VII. 372-373 that the time of engagement was 12 months. The fact is, the bride knew the length of time of the betrothal; it was agreed upon at the beginning of the engagement. She knew the time of the groom's coming right from the start of the engagement. If not the actual day, at least that it would be at the end of the twelve month engagement. The coming of the groom was NEVER considered by the bride to be "imminent" during the 12 months of their separation. It is simply disingenuous for these writers to attach the idea of "imminence" to the bride's expectation. Not until the twelve months had passed, and the arrangements made for the consummation of the wedding, did she consider his coming to be "imminent." And even then, she was certainly made aware, in advance, of the day on which to make herself ready and to expect his arrival. His coming was not actually "imminent," in the sense pretribulationists use the term, until the shout was heard from the young men who ran ahead of the groom's procession.

In "The Parables of Jesus," Joachim Jeremias (authority on Jewish customs) quoted an earlier book written by his father in 1909, which described the ancient Semitic wedding custom.

*"In the late evening the guests were entertained in the bride's house. After hours of waiting for the bridegroom, whose coming was repeatedly announced by messengers, at last he came, half an hour before mid-night, to fetch the bride; he was accompanied by his friends; floodlit by burning candles, and received by guests who had come out to meet him. The wedding assembly then moved off, again in the flood of light, in a festal procession to the house of the bridegroom's father, where the marriage ceremony and fresh entertainment took place."*⁷ (emphasis mine)

This ancient Semitic custom does not fit the pretribulation scheme, where the groom is alleged to arrive at the bride's house secretly to snatch her away, without any warning. The Gospel accounts agree with Jeremias' historical account, also implying that the date of the groom's coming for his bride was fully planned and known by the bridal party prior to his arrival. Jesus' parable of the ten virgins is strikingly similar to the custom

described above by Jeremias. This passage of Scripture is the ONLY account of a Jewish wedding procession in the Bible dating around the time of Christ.

Matt 25:1-10

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

2 "Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 "Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,

4 "but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 "But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'

7 "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

8 "And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

9 "But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

10 "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

In Jesus' parable, all ten of the bride's maids had their lamps and oil in them while they awaited the groom's arrival. Are we to assume that the bride's maids were all waiting for a full 12 months with their lamps burning? Hardly! The picture painted by Jesus was of ten virgins accompanying the bride at her home **on the day of the groom's planned arrival**. He was scheduled to arrive half an hour before midnight in a grand procession, to take the bride to their new home where the wedding would take place. When the shout came that the groom was on his way, they took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom's party.

The bride's maids must have known the day of the groom's arrival, otherwise they could not have known when to bring their lamps and assemble at the bride's house! The whole purpose of the lamps was to participate in the festivities of the lighted procession once the groom arrived to fetch the bride. This fits perfectly with the custom described by Jeremias above. *"In the late evening the guests were entertained in the bride's house. After hours of waiting for the bridegroom,..."*⁸ Apparently, there was some delay in the groom's arrival in Jesus' parable. Jesus said they all fell asleep awaiting the groom's arrival. **At midnight** the announcement was made, *"behold the bridegroom cometh go ye out to meet him."* This fits perfectly with the above custom as well. *"After hours of waiting for the bridegroom, whose coming was repeatedly announced by messengers, at last he came, **half an hour before mid-night**, to fetch the bride; he was accompanied by his friends; floodlit by*

burning candles, and received by guests who had come out to meet him."⁹ In Jesus' parable, the bridegroom was half an hour late. This is why the virgins fell asleep. Instead of arriving at 11:30PM according to custom, the announcement finally came of his impending arrival at midnight! Even then the bride's maidens scurried around to trim their lamps. The foolish virgins were told to go quickly and buy oil for their lamps. This strongly implies that there was some expected time anticipated between the final shout and the groom's actual arrival at the home of the bride. Alfred Edersheim writes: "*The parable proceeds on the assumption that the Bridegroom is not in town, but somewhere far away; so that it cannot be known at what precise hour He may arrive. **But it is known that he will come that night.***"¹⁰ In Jesus' parable, the foolish virgins expected that the groom might come while they were out buying oil. Therefore, both the historical and biblical data strongly refutes the idea of "imminence" at any time during the betrothal period except after the shout on the scheduled night of the groom's coming.

In his Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Edersheim wrote that the custom in Jesus' day was to have the wedding **on a Wednesday**, allowing the first three days of the week for the bride to prepare herself for her groom's coming.

*"The marriage followed [the betrothal ritual] after a longer or shorter interval, the limits of which, however, were fixed by law. The ceremony itself consisted in leading the bride into the house of the bridegroom, with certain formalities, mostly dating from very ancient times. **Marriage with a maiden was commonly celebrated on a Wednesday afternoon, which allowed the first days of the week for preparation,** and enabled the husband, if he had a charge to prefer against the previous chastity of his bride, to make immediate complaint before the local Sanhedrim, which sat every Thursday. ... This circumstance enables us, with some certainty, to arrange the date of the events which preceded the marriage in Cana. Inferring from the accompanying festivities that it was the marriage of a maiden, and therefore took place on a Wednesday... On "the third day" after it, that is, on Wednesday, was the marriage in Cana of Galilee."*¹¹

Notice Edersheim stated clearly that the first three days (Sunday - Tuesday) were set aside for the bride to prepare. Since the day of the week was known (at least three days notice), it was impossible for a bride to be totally caught unaware, as pretribulationist writers claim. The day of the groom's coming for His bride was known by both bride and groom. It was also known by the bride's maids who came to her home to await the groom's arrival. And it was known by the friends of the groom, who accompanied him to the bride's home to fetch her.

The ONLY evidence we have in Scripture of the Jewish wedding customs, related to the arrival of the groom for his bride, is the parable of the ten virgins. And it does not support the pretribulationist scheme! Rather, it supports a posttribulation scheme, where there is some advanced warning. This fits perfectly with Jesus' teaching in this very same Olivet Discourse. Jesus indicated a fixed period of time prior to His coming. The Gospel must be preached in all the world first. He outlined a series of signs that would occur just before His coming "*immediately after the tribulation*" (Matt. 24:29-31). Then, He told the disciples, "*So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors!*" (v. 33).

After their recognizing the fulfillment of the signs described in verses 15-29, they would know His coming was imminent. This perfectly parallels the prior announcement made in the parable of the ten virgins, "*behold the bridegroom cometh.*" Even the three days notice could be analogous to the time between the abomination of desolation and Jesus' coming, clearly mentioned in Matt. 24:15. Pretribulationists cannot account for any prior warning, without destroying the concept of "imminence," which is so important to their system.

The Second Cup Indicates Consummation In Christ's Millennial Kingdom

The Jewish custom was for the bride to be given a glass of wine at the time of the engagement. This was called "the cup of acceptance." If she accepted the proposal, she drank from the cup, and the betrothal covenant was sealed. The parallel to the Lord's supper is striking, where Jesus gave the cup to His disciples. Yet, Jesus made an interesting comment at this event.

Matt 26:27-29

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

28 "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29 "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."

We know that at the wedding, the bride and groom again share a cup of wine together **for the first time** since the betrothal covenant was made. Yet, Jesus told the disciples that He would not share in the cup of wine with them again until the coming Millennial Kingdom. This rules out any marriage in heaven during the tribulation. If Jesus had Jewish wedding customs in mind, His statement clearly precludes a pretribulation rapture scenario! The consummation of the wedding must be posttribulationist.

The Seven Days in the "Chuppah"

Pretribulationists point to the fact that the groom would fetch his bride, and bring her into the bridal chamber (Chuppah), where they would resort for seven days immediately following the wedding ceremony. It is alleged that this represents Christ's coming for His Bride in a pretribulation rapture, where she is taken into heaven (the Chuppah) for seven years. This reasoning depends on some unproved assumptions. First, that "heaven" is the "bridal chamber." Second, the seven days are allegorical (meaning years) and represent the seven years of the tribulation, rather than taking them literally. Pretribulationists point to John 14:1-3 to support the idea of heaven being the bridal chamber. Jesus said to the disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." It is claimed that this was a reference to the groom's preparing a bridal chamber in his father's house.

It may be that Jesus had the "Chuppah" in mind here. But, heaven is not necessarily indicated by the word's "my Father's house." See our article on the Upper Room Discourse for an in depth discussion proving that Jesus was referring to His Millennial Kingdom, not heaven, in John 14. Jesus used the phrase "my Father's house" earlier to refer to the Temple, (John 2:15-17). And, the phrase "house of the Lord," used some 250 times in the Old Testament, always referred to the Temple, (many times referring to the future Millennial Temple). Finally, the Hebrew word "Chuppah" (bridal chamber) is found only once in Scripture, in a prophetic sense, where it clearly refers to the Millennium.

Isaiah 4

2 In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped.

3 And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy-- everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

4 When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,

5 then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. [Heb. - "Chuppah"]

Alfred Edersheim says basically the same thing. "[T]he Covenant-union between God and Israel was not only compared to a marriage, but the Tabernacle and Temple designated as 'the bridal chambers.'" ¹²

There is one other prophetic passage which indisputably has the Jewish wedding custom in view. And that passage does not fit the pretribulation model either.

Rev 19:1-11

1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for **he hath judged the great whore**, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

(KJV)

The context indicates this is the very end of the tribulation. Notice, those John saw rejoicing over the (past) destruction of Babylon were also rejoicing in anticipation of the “marriage of the Lamb” to come. The “Bride,” the true Church, is shown in direct contrast to this false church (Mystery Babylon). It is vitally important to recognize the sequence laid out in this passage. John did not describe any wedding or supper occurring here. He was a witness to a joyous bursting forth of anticipation on behalf of the “Bride” after Mystery Babylon was destroyed. What John actually witnessed, after the destruction of Babylon, was the saints rejoicing **because the time had arrived for the wedding of the Lamb**. John then heard a pronouncement regarding the Bride’s wedding garments. Then he heard a blessing pronounced on those called to the wedding supper. Immediately, John saw heaven opened, and Christ descending, followed by the angelic armies of heaven. It is quite clear, from Revelation 19, that at the

very end of the tribulation the marriage of the Lamb is still being anticipated right up until the second coming.

Does Revelation's mention of the Bride, the wedding, and the supper fit a pretribulation rapture scenario, where the Jewish wedding customs are followed? No! In fact, according to Judges 14:12, the wedding feast (supper) lasted for the full seven days. If pretribulationists are right, we would expect the wedding and the feast to commence at the beginning of the tribulation, not after the tribulation as Revelation 19 plainly indicates. If Jesus was referring to heaven as the seven years in the "Chuppah" in John 14:1-3, the bride should have "made herself ready" before the pretribulation rapture (around Rev. 4). And the "marriage of the Lamb" should have occurred at the beginning of the tribulation, and not at its extreme end. The pretribulation scenario has Jesus being intimate with the Bride in the "Chuppah" for seven years before Revelation 19 indicates the wedding occurs! Doesn't that make Jesus a fornicator? **Only immediately prior to the second coming do we find the excited anticipation of the impending wedding.** Only then has the Bride finally "made herself ready." And, as we saw, even this passage does not describe the wedding ceremony actually occurring, but simply indicates **the excited anticipation** of the wedding that is about to commence, followed immediately by the second coming. The expression "*the Bride has made herself ready*" implies that the Groom is about to go and fetch her!

The anticipation in heaven at the end of the tribulation is because the rapture is about to occur, and Jesus is about to fetch the remnant of His Bride who have endured the tribulation, and take the whole body of saints to the place prepared, the Chuppah, in the Kingdom. This view does not have the conspicuous problem of the Bride and Groom moving out of the "*Father's house*" right after the seven days in the Chuppah, back to the Bride's house. Since the Kingdom is where both Bride and Groom will reside, it makes perfect sense that this is where the Chuppah is located. And, it fits the concept of the "*Father's House*" and "*House of the Lord*" being the Temple, found everywhere else in Scripture.

The Marriage Supper

The marriage **supper** occurs AFTER the tribulation, on earth, not in heaven.

Isaiah 24:23 & 25:1,2,6-8

23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

25:1 O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee...

2 For thou hast made a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city: it shall never be built....

6 And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of morrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.

(KJV)

Isaiah 24:23 indicates the timing of this event, referring to the cosmic signs that accompany Christ's coming "Immediately after the tribulation," (Matt. 24:29), and His reigning in His Kingdom. Isaiah 25:2 refers to the saints rejoicing over the destruction of Babylon the Great, just as in Revelation. Verse 6 indicates that the Lord will prepare a great feast for His people **ON MT. ZION** in Israel. This is the marriage supper anticipated in Rev. 19, and it occurs immediately following the second coming, where Christ fetches His bride. Notice that verse 8 is the prophecy that Paul quoted in 1 Cor. 15:54 in conjunction with the resurrection & rapture of believers! Paul wrote, "**THEN** (Gr.- "at that time") shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Also, notice the reference to the "veil" and "covering" in verse 7. Upon the consummation of the wedding, the veil and covering was removed from the bride and she was intimate with the groom. Notice also that the veil and covering had been spread over **ALL NATIONS**. In this passage Christ is wedding his bride. And, even though the context is clearly "Jewish," the Bride is made up of the redeemed of "all nations."

Contrary to what is commonly taught, the marriage feast does not occur after the 7 days in the Chuppah. The feast begins right after the marriage ceremony, and lasts the entire seven days, (Gen. 29:21-27, Judges 14:10-18). Yet, Revelation 19 places both the marriage and the feast at the end of the tribulation. This makes the pretribulation scheme impossible to reconcile with Revelation.

One final thought. Some, including this author, are convinced that the Jewish Feasts give an outline of Christ's first coming in the Spring Feasts, and a pattern of His second coming in the Fall Feasts. If so, the Battle of Armageddon will most likely occur on a Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is the day the Jubilee begins, (Lev. 25:9). The "last trumpet" normally sounds ten days earlier on the Rosh Hashanna, the feast of Trumpets. But, every 49 years, there is one final trumpet, on Yom Kippur, to announce the beginning of the Jubilee. If the Feasts do indeed point to the end-time scenario, the seven days in the Chuppah should be interpreted literally, and would likely refer to the

seven literal days of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33). This feast, which occurs five days after Yom Kippur, is symbolic of the coming of the Millennial Kingdom. It is the most joyful celebration of all the feasts. It is the wedding feast of the Messiah, (Zech. 14). And, John referred to this feast in Revelation, in reference to the saints who "came out of Great Tribulation," (cf. the "palm branches" in Rev. 7:9 & Lev. 23:40).

My Attempts to Track Down the Source of the "Kidnapping" Myth

I have tried to uncover the source of the alleged "kidnapping" of the bride (or "imminent" coming of the groom) by several pretribulationist authors, and have been unable to do so. This rumor is being widely taught in pretribulation literature and on the internet. Several authors reference Zola Levitt as a source. I have also corresponded with Messianic rabbis and a pretribulationist author who promotes this alleged custom. Neither knew of any shred of historical documentation to support this alleged "any moment" (kidnapping) aspect of the Jewish wedding customs. I have examined the source material listed in the footnotes of some of these publications, and have failed to find any historical data substantiating this claim. In spite of my numerous attempts, I have not been able to track down any historical documentation for it.¹³ And there is certainly nothing in the Bible to support it (the biblical evidence seems to refute it).

The following letter, in the October 2000 issue of Zola Levitt's monthly newsletter, Levitt Letters, explains where Zola got his documentation for Jewish Wedding customs.

"Dear Staff at Zola Levitt Ministries,

"I really appreciate your ministry! Your teaching, letters and writing have been a blessing! "If you would please, tell me where Zola got his historical information on the ancient Jewish wedding. I would like to reference teaching that I am doing scholarship based on evidence. I notice the video from Jewish Jewels (Neil and Jamie Lash) suggests that the procession takes place at the beginning—at betrothal, I believe—taking the bride to the father's house to wait the year before the wedding ceremony (I suppose this could relate to the positional rather than experiential placement in the Lord). Zola's description certainly likes up with my understand of the Scriptures and prophecy, but this version could also be explained in about the same light (with a different slant). "Whatever the case, I would like to have the credibility of explaining where I got my information on this beautiful ancient ceremony. Thanks so much for your time.

Shalom, K.M. Jer. 29:11

"Dear K.M.,

"I started from a tract by the ministry called Friends of Israel. I believe the author was Marv Rosenthal, who is presently building an Israel model in Orlando, Florida. Over the years, the Lord helped me enhance the study with Scriptural and historical references.

Also, see my musical production of Beloved Thief, based on the same story, is available on video (offered [in our online store])." – Zola¹⁴

It doesn't appear that Zola did much independent research before promoting this alleged custom, which is now presented by many pretribulationist teachers as solid research. The above response is typical of the run-around I have gotten from other authors when asking for documentation. If anyone is willing to come forward, and provide proper historical documentation for the alleged "kidnapping" custom, I will be happy to add it to this article. If you don't see any additions in the box below, to date no one has come forward with verifiable historical documentation.

I wrote to Marv Rosenthal three times over a period of about a year requesting information and confirmation. I got no response. Finally, I spoke with Marv face to face on Jan. 28, 2003 at his Tampa conference. I asked him specifically about the kidnapping aspect of the alleged Jewish Wedding custom. He confirmed Zola Levitt's claim, that it was originally written by him in a booklet published by the Friends of Israel, his former organization. However, despite my specific and repeated requests for documentation information (or at least name the source), Marv was not able to provide any information for the alleged "kidnapping" aspect of the Jewish wedding customs.

I wrote this article originally in 1998, and it was prominently displayed on my previous website, The Last Trumpet, from 1998 through 2007. Despite my personal correspondence with several authorities, and my published challenge, to this day no one has offered the slightest shred of historical documentation to support the alleged "kidnapping" of the bride on a day of which she was not aware. The evidence I have uncovered suggests that Marv Rosenthal was the first to promote this idea, that Zola Levitt borrowed it from Rosenthal, and other pretribulationist writers borrowed it from Levitt and/or Rosenthal. I have no idea where Rosenthal got his information, since he was not forthcoming with his sources when I asked him to his face. I'll leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

Notes:

1. Compare Chuck Missler's **Personal Update**, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp.4,6 to an article written by Dr. Renald Showers, called **Jewish Marriage Customs, Behold the Bridegroom Comes**. It is quite obvious that Missler plagiarized Showers' article including the footnotes.
2. Jeremias, Joachim: **The Parables of Jesus**, pg.172
3. Gundry, Robert: **First the Antichrist**, pg. 94,95
4. Levitt, Zola: **An Israeli Love Story**
5. Levitt, Zola: **A Christian Love Story**, 1978
6. Missler, Chuck: **Personal Update**, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp.4,6
7. **The Parables of Jesus**, p. 173
8. *ibid*, p.172
9. *ibid*
10. Edersheim, Alfred: **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, V. VII

11. Edersheim, Alfred: **Sketches of Jewish Social Life**, chapter IX

12. **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, p. 663-664

13. Chuck Missler's article Personal Update, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp.4,6, which was plagiarized from Dr. Renald Showers (see note #1), has altered Showers' original wording making it appear that the groom's coming was "imminent." Missler includes the same footnote as Showers. Yet, neither Showers' article, nor the source he cites, makes the claim that the groom's coming was "imminent" during the betrothal period of separation. Showers' original article says "*Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the exact time of his coming. As a result the groom's arrival would be preceded by a shout. This shout would forewarn the bride to be prepared for the coming of the groom.*" His point was not that she did not know the day, but did not know the exact moment on the evening of his scheduled coming - hence she prepared herself to be ready on the day of his scheduled coming, and the shout announced when his coming was "imminent." Yet, in Missler's altered version he writes, "*Although the bride was expecting the groom to come for her, she did not know the time [Showers has "exact time"] of his coming. As a result, the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, which announced her imminent departure to be gathered with him [Showers has "the coming of the groom"]" (p.4). Then Missler interprets: "*The Bridegroom has departed, and His return to gather His Bride is imminent*" (p. 6). This is not at all what Showers meant, nor is it supported by the source in the footnote, which was also plagiarized by Missler as though it supported his altered version.*

14. Levitt Letters, Oct. 2000