

Study Handout: Jewish Courtship & Marriage in the Old and New Testament

1. **Selection of a Bride**

Marriage in ancient Israel was typically arranged by families. The father of the groom often initiated the match, sometimes through a trusted servant or intermediary. Important considerations included family lineage, covenant faithfulness to God, moral character, and the reputation of the family. While family authority was strong, women were sometimes consulted in the decision.

2. **Betrothal (Erusin / Kiddushin)**

Betrothal was a legally binding covenant. Once betrothed, the man and woman were considered husband and wife in a legal sense, though they did not yet live together or consummate the marriage. Because the agreement was binding, ending a betrothal required a formal divorce. This stage established the covenant relationship prior to the public wedding.

3. **Preparation Period**

After betrothal there was a waiting period, often about one year. During this time the groom prepared a dwelling place for the future household, often by adding a room or living space to his father's house. The bride prepared clothing, personal belongings, and items needed for the new home.

4. **Wedding Procession (Nissuin)**

When preparations were complete, the groom came with friends and companions to receive the bride. This event often occurred in the evening and involved a festive public procession. The bride, attended by her companions, was brought to the groom's home.

5. **Consummation**

After the celebration the marriage was physically consummated. Consummation completed the covenant union and formally established the new household and family unit.

6. **Wedding Feast**

The marriage was celebrated publicly with a wedding feast involving family, friends, and the wider community. The celebration included food, music, and rejoicing and could last several days. The feast served as the public recognition of the marriage covenant.

Scripture References for Further Study

Genesis 24 — Selection of Isaac's wife through Abraham's servant

Genesis 29 — Jacob's service for Rachel as a form of bride price

Exodus 22:16–17 — Legal foundation for the bride price (mohar)

Deuteronomy 22:13–21 — Laws concerning virginity and marital honor

Deuteronomy 25:5–10 — Law of levirate marriage

Judges 14:12 — Seven-day wedding feast in Samson's marriage

Ruth 3–4 — Kinsman-redeemer preserving family lineage through marriage

Strong's Definitions of Key Marriage Terms

Bride

Old Testament

Hebrew Word: kallah

Hebrew Spelling: כָּלָה

Strong's Number: H3618

Strong's Definition: Bride, a son's wife; daughter-in-law; newly married woman.
H3634 to complete, perfect.

New Testament

Greek Word: numphe

Greek Spelling: νύμφη

Strong's Number: G3565

Strong's Definition: Bride; a young married woman, a son's wife; daughter-in-law.

Wife

Old Testament

Hebrew Word: ishshah

Hebrew Spelling: אִשָּׁה

Strong's Number: H802

Strong's Definition: Woman; wife; female.

New Testament

Greek Word: gyne

Greek Spelling: γυνή

Strong's Number: G1135

Strong's Definition: Woman; wife; married woman.

Espoused / Betrothed

Old Testament

Hebrew Word: aras

Hebrew Spelling: אָרַס

Strong's Number: H781

Strong's Lexicon Definition: To betroth; to contract to marry; to pledge a woman to a husband.

New Testament

Greek Word: mnesteuo

Greek Spelling: μνηστεύω

Strong's Number: G3423

Strong's Lexicon Definition: To espouse; to betroth; to give in marriage.