

Rapture Prequels

THE JEWISH WEDDING

The film, *The Godfather*, opens with a wedding. One memorable quote from that opening scene has to do with a wedding custom. “No Sicilian can refuse any request on his daughter's wedding day.”

I can tell you I heard about that ‘custom’ for the first time in the film! I knew of no such custom growing-up in an Italian-Sicilian home.

I only say that to address the issue of how hard it can be to say definitively that something is definitely a wedding custom.

Been to any weddings lately? Customs and traditions are all over the place.

Thus I want to be careful saying anything definitively about Jewish wedding customs. Like all cultures, I think that there are probably some standard things, but that other things can vary.

I need a source, a good source, a reliable source, for the Jewish wedding. I have one!

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum is the founder and director of *Ariel Ministries*, an organization which evangelizes Jews in the effort to bring them to the view that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.

Fruchtenbaum was born in 1943 in Siberia. His family escaped to Germany in 1947 after his father had been accused of being a Nazi spy. At age 13 Fruchtenbaum came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. His father opposed this and forbade him to read the Bible, attend meetings, or otherwise meet with Messianic Jews. The family moved to Los Angeles in 1958.

After being forced to leave the family home, in 1962 he began his college education. He graduated with a BA degree in Hebrew and Greek in 1966. He then moved to Israel, where he studied archeology, ancient history, historical geography, and Hebrew at the American Institute of Holy Land Studies and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He lived through the Six Day War in 1967.

Later that year, Fruchtenbaum returned to the U.S. and entered Dallas Theological Seminary to continue his studies in Hebrew and the Old Testament. Three years later (1971) he graduated with a Master of Theology degree from Dallas. He and his wife then moved to Israel and settled in Jerusalem to work with the local church and to train young Israeli Jewish believers for Christian service.

They left Israel in 1973. Then in 1976 he joined the staff of The Christian Jew Foundation as associate director. At this time he struggled with the issue of discipleship and perceived a need for biblical and theological training for Jewish Messianic believers. This was discussed with other leaders and this turned into the ideas for Ariel Ministries. Late 1977, Ariel Ministries was established.

His doctoral dissertation, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, was completed at New York University in 1989.

It is from his research on the Jewish wedding customs that I have gleaned what appear to be the basics. What follows borrows heavily from Fruchtenbaum.

The first step in the Jewish wedding system was the arrangement, in which the father of the groom arranged the match with the father of the bride and paid him the bride price. This stage could occur when the bride and groom were yet children, and often the betrothed would not even meet each other until the day of the wedding.

Fruchtenbaum says this actually happened to his grandparents!

The arrangement prefigures Jesus paying the bride-price of our salvation, which was His blood shed on the Cross. In Ephesians five we read that He

loved the church so much He gave Himself for us. The discussion in Ephesians five compares the actions of Jesus to that of a bridegroom.

The second step in the Jewish wedding system was known as the preparation. This was the period of the betrothal. It lasted for at least one year but could last much longer if, for example, the arrangement was made when the bride and groom were children. During the period of the preparation, the bride was prepared to be a fitting wife for her mate. It was also the period of time in which she was observed for her purity, which is why the betrothal always lasted for a minimum of one year – to allow at least a full nine months to pass to make certain that the bride was a virgin at the time of the betrothal. If she gave birth before the year ended, then it became known that she was in a state of immorality.

The application of the stage of the preparation to the Bride of Christ, the Church, is that the Bride is even now in the process of being perfected for the Groom. In Second Corinthians 11:2 we read, “For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

On the wedding day, according to the Jewish wedding system, the groom would leave his home and go to the bride’s home to fetch her. As the groom returned to his own home with the bride, this would lead to a bridal procession.

The application to the fetching of the Bride of Christ is the Rapture of the Church, as depicted chiefly in First Thessalonians 4:13-18.

It is after the fetching of the Bride into Heaven that the final point of cleansing and sanctification comes. In First Corinthians 3:10-15 we learn of the Judgment Seat of Christ, when the wood, hay, stubble will be burned away and the gold, silver and precious stone will be purified.

According to First Corinthians 15:50-58, the Church will, indeed, be glorified, because, at that point, mortality will put on immortality and corruption will put on incorruption.

The Jewish ceremony was conducted in the home of the groom. Only a few – usually the immediate family and two witnesses – were invited to come in and observe the wedding ceremony.

The application of this fourth step to the relationship of the Church as the Bride of Christ is that there will be a ceremony in Heaven, and the few that will be invited to this ceremony are the few that will already be in Heaven. Only those who have already been resurrected will be able to participate in the wedding ceremony.

The main Scripture describing this is Revelation 19:6-8.

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 thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Whereas only a few were invited to the Jewish wedding ceremony, many more were invited to the marriage feast – to celebrate the marriage of the son.

The divine invitation to the wedding feast is sent out as the Tribulation comes to an end, just before the Second Coming. Following the Revelation nineteen passage referred to earlier in regard to the wedding ceremony, we learn about the invitation in verse nine.

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The marriage supper of the Lamb is not served at this point but the invitation is issued. Then the Second Coming is described (v11-16), followed by a 75-day interval (Daniel 12:11-13) during which both the Old Testament and Tribulation saints (the “many more”) will be resurrected to partake of the wedding feast.

The application to the Church as the Bride of Christ is seen in that relatively few attended the ceremony (which was held in Heaven) compared to the

“many more” who will attend the marriage feast (which will take place on earth). This is so because the Old Testament saints – to be resurrected during the 75-day interval after the Tribulation (Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2) – will join the few who already attended the ceremony.

A second group that will not be at the ceremony but will attend the marriage feast is the Tribulation saints, who will also be resurrected after the Second Coming (Revelation 20:4-6).

In addition to the resurrected saints, the wedding feast will include Gentiles who actually lived through the Tribulation. The Lord will gather all these Gentiles in the Valley of Jehoshaphat and judge them individually on the basis of their demonstration of faith in aiding and protecting the Lord’s brethren (the Jews). He will then bid the “sheep Gentiles” on His right, “Come, you who are blessed . . .” (Matthew 25:31-46).

And, of course, there is also the Remnant of Israel, of whom the Scriptures say, All Israel shall be saved. These are living Jews who survived the Tribulation to comprise the fourth group attending the wedding feast.

These four groups (the many) plus the Church/Bride (the few) will all attend the wedding feast, thus ushering in the Kingdom.

In the Jewish context, the groom was responsible to provide a suitable home for the bride. He did so during the preparation stage, the second stage as described earlier.

One of Jesus’ purposes when He returned to Heaven at the Ascension was to prepare a place for the Bride, as revealed in John 14:1-3.

Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

That place is elsewhere known as the New Jerusalem. Jesus is even now preparing a suitable home for the Church, and the believers will move into that home in eternity.

In Revelation 21:9-22:5 John is able to see the home of the Bride.

And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,...

According to verse nine, the Bride is now also the wife of the Lamb, because by this time the wedding ceremony and the wedding feast have taken place, and they have been married for a thousand years. After the thousand year Kingdom, John next sees the eternal home of the Bride and the eternal abode of the Bride is the New Jerusalem. Then he spells out the details of the New Jerusalem (21:11-22:5), which will be the home of the Bride.

I'm sure there were variations on these themes but I trust that these are the main framework.

You can see how much the rapture is prefigured in the Jewish wedding customs.

