

# Ancient Jewish Wedding Ceremony

Excerpt from the book *Finding the Afikoman*, by Christie Eisner

**Note:** This can be read before the second part of the third cup.

Jewish marriages were usually arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, but mainly by the father of the groom. Jeremiah 29:6 says, "Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands." Once the prospective bride was chosen, the bridegroom to be would go to her parents' home where she lived, taking four important things with him: A skin of wine, a sum of money called a *mohar* or "bride price," gifts for the bride should she agree, and a marriage contract called a *ketubah*. Any young man arriving at a girl's house with these in his possession would be obvious in his intentions.

First, the parents of the bride would be summoned and their permission would be sought. If they agreed, the bride was brought out and the hopeful bridegroom would pour a cup of wine known as "the cup of betrothal." If she accepts the proposal, she would say yes by drinking the cup of wine that was set before her. Once the bride drank this cup, the engagement was official, and the contractual phase of the wedding was initiated. A *mohar* or bride price was paid to the girl's parents and the *ketubah*, or contract, with the pledge of the groom to care for her, was signed. Now they were legally married and would have to go through a divorce to dissolve the marriage. This explains the situation of Joseph and Mary who were legally betrothed when Mary was pregnant with Jesus, but the consummation part of the wedding had not yet taken place.

The bridegroom then leaves gifts for the bride as a pledge to return for her in the future. He then leaves her to go build a bridal chamber on His father's house to bring her to, for the second part of the wedding known as the consummation. When would he be back for her? No one knew but his father, who had to inspect the chamber. Once it met his specifications, he would release his son to go get his bride. The common saying was, "no man knows the day or hour, only the father." This was the phrase, or idiom, that Jewish people in Jesus' day would understand to be talking about the time when the bridegroom would go to kidnap his bride.

While the bridegroom was away, the bride spent the time sewing her wedding garments and preparing to be a wife. From the day of her betrothal, she was set apart and was veiled when she went in public because she was known as, "not [her] own, [she was] bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Then, when the groom's father was satisfied that all was in order, usually within a year, the friends of the bridegroom would blow a shofar and proclaim in the streets, "Behold the bridegroom cometh!" And the bridegroom would go forth with a procession to the bride's house, usually at midnight, and "abduct the bride." That is the reason he was called, "the thief in the night" because he came suddenly at an hour unknown to the bride and she had to be watching and living with the expectation that he was coming any minute.

Four men would carry the palanquin, or carriage, on their shoulders to take the bride back to the groom's house. This was known as the *nissuin*, the taking or "catching up" of the bride. Ten virgins carrying tall torches accompanied the bride to the bridal chamber. It was here that the second part of the wedding called the consummation was performed, and it was sealed with another cup of wine, appropriately called the cup of consummation. The bride and groom would then enter the bridal chamber, or *chuppah*, for seven days to consummate the wedding. Then finally, the friends of the bridegroom would stand at the door and announce their coming out from the *chuppah* to family and guests that are waiting for the wedding feast to begin!