

Shavuot as a Marriage: A Betrothal Contract

DAY OF PENTECOST

ACTS 2:1-21

One of the most beautiful images of *Shavuot* (Pentecost) is that of the marriage between God (the groom) and Israel (the bride).

In the biblical wedding service that G-d gave (Romans 9:4; Hebrews 9:1; 1 Chronicles 28:11-12), marriage consisted of two stages. The first stage is betrothal, called *erusin* in Hebrew. You enter this first stage of marriage as soon as a betrothal contract is made between the two parties. The written contract is called a *ketubah*.

During betrothal, you are legally married, but do not physically dwell with your mate. Betrothal is so legally binding that you cannot get out of it without a divorce, called a *get* in Hebrew.

Romans 9:1-5

9 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Hebrews 9:1

9 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

1 Chronicles 28:11-12

11 Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; 12 and the plan of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the Lord, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the storehouses of the house of God and for the storehouses of the dedicated things;

Messianic Fulfillment. In the New Testament (*Brit Hadashah*), we can see that Joseph was betrothed to Mary when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have a son named *Yeshua* (Jesus), by the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) of God, who would be the Messiah (Luke 1:26-35).

The Bible tells us in Jeremiah 2:2 that at Mount Sinai, God betrothed Himself to Israel, as it is written:

Jeremiah 2:2-3

2 “Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem,
saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, “I remember
concerning you the devotion of your youth,
The love of your betrothals,
Your following after Me in the wilderness,
Through a land not sown.

3

“Israel was holy to the Lord,
The first of His harvest.

All who ate of it became guilty;
Evil came upon them,” declares the Lord.’”

In Exodus 19, when God by the leading of Moses brought the children of Israel to Mount Sinai, God betrothed Himself to Israel. On Mount Sinai, God gave the Torah to Israel (Exodus 20:1-21). At this time, God was making a betrothal contract, a *ketubah*, with Israel.

The Book of the Covenant spelled out mutual obligations of G-d and Israel just as the *ketubah* spelled out the obligations between husband and wife. So, G-d made a marriage contract with Israel in Exodus 19:3-7.

Exodus 19:3-7

3 Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.

5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him.

In Exodus 19:8, Israel accepts God's marriage proposal. Israel answered in Exodus 19:8, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" -- we agree to do even before we have listened).

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In Exodus 19:2, Israel camped before the LORD. The word *camp* in Hebrew is *chanah* and in this case is singular, while Israel is plural. By this we can see that at that time all Israel had become one. This is also a necessary requirement for marriage (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31).

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Genesis 2:24

24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Ephesians 5:31

31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

The biblical wedding ceremony that God gave requires that the marriage be consummated under a wedding canopy known as a *chupah*. In Exodus 19:17, Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God and they stood at the *nether* part of the mount.

The word *nether* in Hebrew actually implies that the people stood underneath the mountain. This imagery gives the understanding that the mountain had become a *chupah* and Israel was standing underneath the mountain or under the *chupah*, the place where the wedding takes place.

Every wedding will have two witnesses. They are called the friends of the bridegroom. One is assigned to the groom and one is assigned to the bride. In Exodus 19:17, Moses (*Moshe*) is seen as one of the two witnesses whose job is to escort the bride to meet the groom under the *chupah* (Mount Sinai).

In order for the *ketubah*, the written contract between the husband and the wife, to be legal in consummating the marriage, it must be signed by the two witnesses, the friends of the bridegroom. Since we can see that Moses was one of the two witnesses, he had to sign the *Ketubah* (Torah) in order for the full marriage between God and Israel to be consummated.

Exodus 19:17

17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

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Moses returned from being with God on Mount Sinai, he did not sign the *Ketubah* (Torah). Instead he broke the two tablets (*ketubah*), which were in his right hand (Exodus 32:19), thus not signing the *ketubah* which God had made with Israel.

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Therefore, he did not allow Israel to enter into the full marriage. Moses broke the two tablets (*ketubah*) when he saw that Israel was worshiping the golden calf and thus were being unfaithful in their marriage.

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Exodus 32:19

19 It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

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