

Living Waters Church
Exploring the Bible Series



Jesus and the Bride

Study Notes

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INTRODUCTION

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore the whole area concerning the Bride of Christ, and what it means to our faith and daily walk.

Our aim in this study is to keep to the Biblical and historical facts and to go on what we actually know rather than hypothesise or emotively defend traditions. We will be very clear where assumptions or speculations are made.

Our view is that an approach that tries to fill in and explain every detail is open to all sorts of errors, especially as the Bible gives us what we need to know rather than all we want to know. It is our Gentile thinking that wants to believe only after every detail has been defined and explained.

This study will use a combination of New and Old Testament writings, plus other sources to help provide cultural and historical background.

We do not aim to provide answers, but rather to provide a framework and an encouragement to study the Scriptures further, and seek the Holy Spirit to lead you into Truth.

We will never want you to take our word, but to be good "Bereans":

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Acts 17v11

Basis of Belief.

We are Bible Believers, and the whole basis of this study rests on the inerrancy of the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures. Whilst we need to allow for certain differences of interpretation, we believe that the original source is pure, and we do not allow for assumptions which require Scripture to be held in error.

Scriptures.

Scriptures quoted are generally from the New King James version.

These will be in italics throughout the notes.

Understanding the Big Picture.

It is always important to keep the 'big picture' in mind when understanding prophecy,

God's overall purpose from Adam's fall is to restore a people to Himself. These are His own special people, serving Him from the heart.

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Deuteronomy 7 v 6

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light 1Peter 2v9

Keeping this overall picture in mind will help us to unravel some of the mystery that surrounds Israel, the Church and the Bride.

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

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

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5v 30-32

SOME POPULAR VIEWS CONCERNING THE BRIDE

Over time there have been considerable discussions, interpretations and controversy about:

- The identity of the Bride of Christ;
- The significance, prophetic and spiritual meaning of the marriage process;
- The Bride, the Wedding and the end-times (eschatology).

The Identity of the Bride:

- The whole Church
- The true church within the wider church
- The remnant of Israel
- The remnant of true believers

The Marriage Significance

- The Love for the Bride
- The Marriage contract
- The preparation of the Bride
- Jesus comes for His Bride
- The Bride and Bridegroom
- The Wise and Foolish Virgins
- The Wedding Guests

Eschatology

- The imminency of the Rapture
- The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

BIBLICAL PICTURE LANGUAGE

The Bible is full of picture language in both Old and New Testament. This is no different to everyday life when we use metaphors, analogies, similes and so on to help make a point or explain something.

Some examples of this are:

- The number of Abraham's descendants (Gen 22v17; 32v12).
See also Gen 41 v49; Judges 7v12/1Sam13v5)
- Eagles Wings (Exodus 19v3-4; Deut 32v9-14; Isaiah 40v28-31; Psalm 91v1-4)
- Israel's Prophecy for his sons (Gen 49 v 1-28)
- Hinds feet on High Places (Psalm 18 v 32-33)
- Springs in the valley of Baca (Psalm 84v5-7)
- Trees of the fields shall clap their hands (ISA 55v12)
- Bulls of Bashan (Psalm 22)
- Your Word is a lamp to my feet (Psalm 119v105)
- Refiner (Malachi 3v 1-3; 1Peter1v7)
- The Shepherd (Psalm 23; Psalm 95; Isa 40v11)

We also see a lot of this in the Prophets, when at times prophets like Ezekiel were even called upon to act out their prophecies. This was the early form of visual aid!

Jesus also spoke in parables to illustrate spiritual truths through everyday life examples.

34 All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them,

35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world." . Matt 13 v 34-35

The question then comes down to how far we can legitimately take these within a literal interpretation of the Bible. The Bible certainly is an amazing book, not only because is the Word of God, but also the way in which the Lord has caused it to be written. It can be read on different levels, and there seems to be no end to what can be found in its treasure. For example we can look at the Bible as:

- ⇒ A literary masterpiece
- ⇒ A series of biographies
- ⇒ A historical work
- ⇒ Poetry
- ⇒ Prophecy
- ⇒ A mystery with deep underlying meanings

In all this we must remember that the Bible has a particular purpose, which is essentially to deal with who He is and man's relationship to Him. It covers such items as:

- Who created all things
- What He is like
- What happened to break fellowship with Him
- What we are like apart from Him
- His plan to bring a people back to himself
- The way back into relationship with Him
- The future and final restoration

The Bible has come as an unfolding revelation, as God worked through a particular group of people Israel. The last unfolding revelation was the coming of Jesus as Messiah, the establishment of the Church and the final prophecy concerning the end of time.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;
Hebrews 1 v 1,2

If we understand all this, then we are ready to consider the Jesus and the Bride !

Jesus And The Bride

TYPES OF THE CHURCH

Type	Scripture References	Israel	References	Comments
Ecclesia	Matt 16v18 Heb 12 v 22-23	YES	Acts 7v38	Church (Ekklesia) is a special assembly of people. Jesus referred to His Church as those who would come to Him. It also applies to Israel as those whom God called to himself out of Egypt. Jesus has created 'One New Man' Ephesians 2 v 11-18.
Body	1Cor6v15-17 1Cor12v12-27 Rom 12v3-5 Eph 4v4-16 Eph 5 v30-32	NO		The Church is uniquely referred to as the Body of Christ, and particularly with Christ as the Head.
Temple	1Cor 3v9-16 1Cor 6v19 2Cor 6v16 Eph 2 v 19-22 Rev 3v12 1Pet 2v5 John 14v16 & 23 John 15v4	NO		In the Old Testament tabernacle and Temple are external and physical. In the New Covenant we see a change to the abiding of the Lord in us, an us in Him
Kings and Priests	Rev 1 v 5-6 Rev 5 v 9-10	YES	Exo 19v5-6	It is God's purpose to have a 'kingdom of priests' who would both rule and represent Him.
A chosen race	1Pet 2v9 John 15v16&19 Eph 1v4	YES	Deut 7v6 Deut 14v2	Believing Gentiles have been grafted in to the chosen race through Jesus.
A Holy Nation	1PET2v9	YES	Exo 19v5-6 Deut 7v6	As part of the 'commonwealth of Israel, we also share in being His holy and special people
God's Own Special People	1PET2v9	YES	Deut 7v6	
Sons of God	John 1v12 Rom 8v14&19 Gal 4v6 Php2v15 1John 3v1-2	partly		Old Testament references to Sons of God tends to refers to heavenly beings. In Christ we have received the adoption of Sons. However Jews were generally claiming God as their Father (see John 8v41)
Sons of Light/Day	1Thess 5v5-9 John 12v36	partly	Luke 16v8	Sons of Light was a term also used by the Essenes at the time of Jesus
Sheep	John 10	YES	Psa 95 Eze 34v6-31	The whole concept of the Shepherd looking after sheep is linked to the Lord and His people.
The Bride (the Church is not specifically defined as the Bride)	John 3 v 28-29 Mark 2v18-20 (NB This refers to the Bridegroom's companions not the Bride)	YES	Isa 62v1-5 Hosea 2 v 14-23	John bears witness to Jesus as the Bridegroom. In Isaiah Jerusalem and the land of Israel is to be 'married'. The Lord rejoices over this as a Bridegroom for His Bride. In Hosea the Lord talks of a betrothal to unfaithful Israel that returns to Him.

A many-faceted diamond is a way of looking at the different aspect of the Church. In its whole it is a beautiful jewel in the Lords' hand. It is cut many ways so that each aspect has its own character that adds to the whole.

In this we have not considered teaching on the Kingdom of God.



CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Parallels to the betrothal and marriage relationship are used in the Epistles to bring across important truths about who and where we are in Christ, and the impact it should have our lives. All these give valuable insights and warnings about our walk with the Lord, and the importance of keeping ourselves set apart for Him. Ephesians 5 also shows the standard of His care for us

However these parallels are not in themselves fully indicative of the Church as being the Bride.

- 22 *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*
23 *For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.*
24 *Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*
25 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*
26 *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,*
27 *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*
28 *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.*
29 *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*
30 *For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.*
31 *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*
32 *This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*
33 *Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Eph 5 v 21 - 33

- 9 *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,*
10 *nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*
11 *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*
12 *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*
13 *Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*
14 *And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.*
15 *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!*
16 *Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh."*
17 *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*
18 *Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*
19 *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*
20 *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

1Cor 6v 9-20

- 4 *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*
5 *Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?* **James 4v4,5**

- 2 *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*
3 *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*
4 *For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!*

2COR11v1-4

- 2 *For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.*
3 *So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*
4 *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.* **ROM 7v204**

A LOVE STORY

The Lord uses the picture of love, betrothal and marriage relationship in talking of His relationship with His people. The language of love with its strong emotions, desires and sacrifice certainly express and help us to understand the Heart of God and His desire to have a people for Himself. Through this we should not only know and feel the deep truth in all this.

It is truly a Love Story of magnificent proportions, and should give us the yearning of a bride who cannot wait to be with her husband forever.

However this Love Story is full of betrayal, tragedy as God continually show His faithfulness to a people who wander away. Yet there is hope and an ultimate final return and gathering to Himself.

At the end of days The Lord will have His special relationship with His own special people.

The final chapter in this story culminates in the coming of Jesus to restore all things:

- 1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
- 2 *He was in the beginning with God.*
- 3 *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*
- 4 *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.*
- 5 *And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

- 10 *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.*
- 11 *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*
- 12 *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:*
- 13 *who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*
- 14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- 16 *And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.*
- 17 *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

John 1 v 1 -16

- 16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*
- 17 *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*

John 3 v16-17

- 18 *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*
- 19 *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.*
- 20 *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;*
- 21 *because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*
- 22 *For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.*
- 23 *Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*

Romans 8 v 18-23

Song of Songs

There has been much debate, even amongst Jewish sages, about the importance and relevance of the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon). Is it just an intimate account of two lovers, or does it have a deeper meaning in terms of the Lord's love relationship with His people, and desire of His people for Him.

Chapter 5 has the bridegroom coming unexpectedly, but the bride could not rouse herself in time. When she did he was gone and she tried to search for him, but was hurt by the watchmen.

This could be seen as the Lord coming for Israel, but then rejected. They yearned for Him to come, but did not recognise it when He did !

- 39 *"for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"*

Matt 23v39

The Song of Songs can be a study in itself and the rest is outside the scope of this study.

Israel as the unfaithful wife.

The Lord uses the betrothal and marriage example as a picture of His relationship with Israel. He has made a (marriage) covenant with Israel, which He will not break even though Israel has been unfaithful to Him.

We must apply the same lesson and warning to our own lives, and we have to admit that in many respects the history of the Gentile Church has not been that different !

The essential lesson is that God remains faithful, and despite ourselves will woo us back to Him. However this may well be done through His discipline, rather than a pining husband !

For this study we can look at two main examples:

Ezekiel 16

This speaks about Jerusalem and how the Lord chose her, redeemed her.

Key points are:

1. The Lord picked her up in filth and rejection
2. He caused her to live
3. He cared for her
4. He clothed and protected her
5. He made a (betrothal ?) covenant with her
6. Cleansed, annointed and clothed her
7. Adorned her with fine jewellery
8. Fed her with the best food
9. She became famously beautiful as a result.
10. Pride came in and she then 'played the harlot' with the nations
11. She turned her back on the Lord and committed abominations
12. God will judge her as a result, and she will be in disgrace
13. But God will not break His covenant (no divorce !)
14. He will establish His covenant and she shall know that He is the Lord
15. God will show His forgiveness

Hosea

Chapter 1

Hosea was commanded to have a harlot as a wife and bear children of harlotry. (1v1-11)

This was a picture of God and Israel.

Chapter 2

The Lord will punish, but He will also 'allure her and bring her into the wilderness.

In this is a time of hope, and mercy.

She will once again call the Lord Ishi (my husband) and not Baali (my Lord .. but also referring to the pagan god)

Note: 2v19 -20 The Lord will betroth Israel:

19 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

The Lord will betroth Israel.

Chapter 3

Hosea has to buy back an adulteress, who is loved by her husband.

Again this is a picture of The Lord bringing Israel back from spiritual adultery.

Here the unfaithful wife is made to have nothing ... as Israel shall not have king, prince etc

They will then return and seek the Lord and David **in the Last Days**

THE JEWISH MARRIAGE

In attempting to understand the significance of Jewish marriage customs in relation to Christ and His Bride we must bear in mind the following:

- Marriage traditions vary across the globe and can pass from one culture to another. The people of Israel have been foreigners in other lands many times during their history, often assimilating and taking on customs from the nations they have dwelt among. The marriage customs are unlikely to be an exception.
- Marriage traditions change down the ages therefore if we look at present day Jewish weddings, although some customs could have Biblical origins, we cannot assume that they all have relevance to the Bride of Christ.

We have very few specific accounts of weddings in bible days and so have to glean what we can from the little we have and some of the hints given in scripture. Even the Mosaic Law did not give express rules for how to carry out a marriage ceremony. The danger is that in our desire to match Jesus' sayings with the wedding traditions of His day, we may portray as fact customs for which there is little or no historical evidence.

We do have three marriage contracts from the fifth century BC which were found at the Jewish Garrison at Elephantine in Egypt. We will look at one of those later.

Biblical Marriage (Adam and Eve)

All we know is that Adam sacrificed a rib and God gave Eve to Adam (as a father would give his daughter. Interestingly Adam refers to leaving father and mother even before he became a father himself. Gen 2:24). They then became united through physical union and that was that. No fuss, no frills. From then on the only reference to marriage is when a man "took a wife".

It is not until Abraham wants to find a wife for Isaac that we have any more information. But we must remember:

- Abraham was a nomad from Chaldea
- Jacob was yet to be born
- Judah was not yet born
- The nation of Israel was yet to come into being
- Therefore this was not a Jewish marriage but a Middle Eastern one

So our first look at marriage customs is likely to be a general look at Middle Eastern ways of doing things and not specifically Jewish.

The Search, Gifts and Betrothal

- GEN. 24:** It was the groom's father who took it upon himself to find a wife for his son (1)
- v.5** the bride needed to be willing
- v.22** gifts were given to the bride on behalf of the groom (3)
- v.53** more gifts given to her brother (2) (Laban was acting in place of her Father), mother and bride
- v.58** she was given the opportunity to refuse
- v.61** she took maids as attendants (4)
- v.65** she veiled herself before her future husband whom she had never met (7)
- v.67** he took her into his tent and the marriage was consummated. (10)

Jacob Gen. 29:15

In Jacob's case things worked slightly differently, but we do see the origins of several customs. He was on the run and away from home so had to do his own searching and bargaining. It was his uncle who asked what he wanted as wages and Jacob offered to serve for seven years for Rachel. The agreement (5) was made and Rachel was now betrothed (6). His term of employment was the "bride price". (2) From that time Rachel was unavailable. The problem was that she was the youngest daughter and we read in v. 26 that it was not the custom to marry the younger before the elder. You might say Laban should not have arranged this, **but** he probably expected that by the time seven years were up Leah would be married. When the time came and she wasn't he had a problem, so he came up with this plan to trick Jacob into marrying the elder first and then the younger, thus keeping the tradition but not breaking his agreement. Why the extra seven years? Presumably to give each of his daughters equal value.

Notice in verse 22 that on the wedding day only the men attended the feast prior to the bride being given to the groom in the evening. She came to him veiled (7) and with an attendant or maid.(4) There then followed a compulsory seven days spent by the couple alone in a private room or tent set aside for the consummation of the marriage (10)

This pattern of the bride being given in exchange for some service or monetary gift seems to have occurred throughout the Middle East.

In **Genesis 41:45** Pharaoh gave, not his own daughter, but Asenath the daughter of the priest of On to Joseph as wife as part of his reward for interpreting his dream and coming up with a plan to save Egypt from the drought.

Reuel, the priest of Midian gave Zipporah to Moses after he had helped to water their flocks and agreed to stay in his employment. (**Exodus 2:16-21**)

Saul offered his daughter Michal to David in exchange for 100 foreskins of the Philistines, hoping that David would be killed in the attempt. But God was with David, he was honourable and Saul was then obliged to keep the agreement (**1 Sam18:25-27**).

The Matter of Virginity

In one case things happened the wrong way round with tragic consequences for a whole family. (**Genesis 34**). Shechem raped Dinah but subsequently wanted to marry her. He then asked his father to obtain her for his wife. They went to Jacob and offered any price he required to put things right (v. 11) but for some reason Dinah's brothers took over and named the price - a uniting of the two families through this marriage provided the men of the groom's family were all circumcised. They never meant to keep this agreement, but took advantage of the men of Hamor when they were recovering and slaughtered them all in revenge for the rape of Dinah.

So it is clear that that a woman's virginity was highly regarded and should be protected at all costs before marriage. Any violation had to be paid for even before the law was given to Moses.

In fact we discover in **Deut.22:13** that the father of the bride would keep evidence of her virginity in the form of a blood stained piece of linen from the marriage bed. This was in case at a later date the husband decided to divorce her on grounds of impurity.

It is generally thought that the bride price was equal to that of the penalty for rape or seduction because it meant the price of virginity. See **Exodus 22:15,16** and **Deuteronomy 22:29** which specifies 50 shekels.

Contracts of Marriage (5)

All the agreements we have come across so far have been verbal. In fact the Old Testament does not record any written contracts. But the apocrypha does:

Raguel called for his daughter Sarah, took her by the hand and gave her to Tobias with these words, "I entrust her to you; the law and the ruling recorded in the Book of Moses assign her to you a your wife. Take her; take her home to your father's house with a good conscience. The God of heaven grant you a good journey in peace."

Then he turned to her mother and asked her to fetch him writing paper. He drew up the marriage contract, how he gave his daughter to Tobias according to the ordinance in the Law of Moses.

Tobit 7:12-16

Although the law of Moses is referred to, there is very little in it other than a general principle that a husband became responsible for his wife's provision and wellbeing as her father had been before him. And that they were expected to remain faithful.

The Earliest Marriage Contract from 5th. Century B.C. (abbreviated)

Discovered in 1905 and written in Aramaic.

On..(date)...of the King, said As-hor the son of Teos, builder to the king, to Mahseia, an Aramaean of Seyne belonging to the quarter of Warizath, saying: I came to thy house that thou give me thy daughter Miphtahya to wife. She is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever. I have given thee as a marriage settlement for thy daughter Miphtahya the sum of five shekels royal standard; it is accepted by thee and thy heart is content therewith. I have delivered unto the hand of thy daughter Miphtahya as money for an outfit 1 karash 2 shekels... 1 woollen robe, new, striped, dyed on both sides... There is accepted by me and my heart is content therewith 1 couch of reeds with 4 supports of stone... 1 cosmetic box of ivory, new. If tomorrow or any other day, As-hor shall die having no issue whether male or female by Miphtahya his wife, Miphtahya shall have the full right over the house of As-hor and his goods and chattels and all that he has on the face of the earth without exception. If tomorrow or any other day, Miphtahya shall stand up in the congregation and say: I divorce As-hor my husband, the price of divorce shall be on her head; she shall return to the scales and she shall weigh for As-hor the sum of five shekels and two d., and all which I have delivered unto her she shall give back, both string and thread, in one day at one time, and sea shall go away withersoever she will and no suit or process shall ensue. And if he shall rise up against Miphtahya to drive her away from the house of As-hor and his goods and his chattels, he shall pay the sum of 20 kebhes and this deed shall be annulled, and I shall have not power to say: I have another wife than Miphtahya and other children than the children which Miphtahya shall bear to me. If I shall say I have children and a wife other than Miphtahya and her children, I shall pay to Miphtahya the sum of 20 kebhes royal standard, and I shall have no power to take away my goods and chattels from Miphtahya. And if I shall have removed them from her ...(erasure)...I will pay Miphtahya the sum of 20 kebhes royal standard. Nathan the son of Ananian has written this deed at the dictation of As-hor, and the witnesses thereto are Penuliah the son of Jezaniah, Jezariah the son of Uriah, Menaichem the son of Saccur: Witnesses"

Marriage Contracts are still written in Aramaic to this day and often beautifully decorated and displayed in the family home, as in the example given here.

We can see here that by this time the woman was regarded as a person with rights rather than a "possession" to be bought or sold. She could divorce her husband at a price and vice versa. In fact even today the Jewish marriage contract is mainly about how the wife will be provided for and what she will be entitled to in the case of divorce. It is the groom who makes all the commitments.

This contract was drawn up at the time of the betrothal and the couple would have shared a cup of wine to indicate their agreement. From then on the couple were as good as married although they would not see each other again until the actual wedding day. Some sources say that the bride to be would be veiled in public from that time to indicate that she was no longer available. (7)

The engagement period would in most cases be a year and during that time the groom would be preparing the marriage chamber and new home. Only when his father was satisfied could he go to claim his bride. During this period and for the first year of marriage he was exempt from military service.



The Dowry

It is also believed that the father of the bride would give her gifts. The purpose of this was not to bribe suitors but to give parental blessing and to comfort and equip her for her new life. (4) For example:

Maids were given by Laban to Leah and Rachel.

Achsah asked Caleb for a field and was given Upper and Lower Gulloth. **Josh 15:16-17**

He might also give her a portion of the bride price given to him by the groom.

Changing Traditions

The traditions regarding these various gifts did not continue in quite the same way. Even before the time of Jesus things had changed.

By 76-67 BC Simeon Ben Shatach, head of the Pharisees declared the Mohar should be written in the Ketubah to be paid to the wife only if her husband divorced her or he died. This made marriage easier, because the groom did not have to find the gift straight away, and divorce more difficult.

The Wedding Day

Before she could be married the bride had to go through a ritual purification bath (8). This was a practice she would have been quite used to, as women had to undergo this each month 7 days after menstruation finished. Even today in orthodox communities they will go to the Mikveh at this time.

This meant that the timing of the actual wedding was crucial. When you bear in mind that it was unlawful for a couple to have intercourse or even touch each other during a woman's "uncleanness", then the marriage could only be consummated after the Mikveh.

It is commonly thought that the groom could come late at night to "steal" his bride away at any time, accompanied by his friends all blowing trumpets. Thus the bride had to be constantly ready for him right through the betrothal period, or she would be taken by surprise.

Initially this seems to fit with the parable of the ten virgins, the Song of Solomon and other prophecies concerning the return of Christ and the Rapture. However this is very unlikely bearing in mind the required preparation and the fact that a feast had to be arranged, guests invited and wedding garments made.

Other sources say that there is no ancient account to verify this 'kidnapping' custom. It may be that she would not know the exact hour, but she would surely know when he *couldn't* be coming and when the preparations were made and his coming was imminent.

The Ceremony (9)

The ceremony was a simple one since most of the formalities were dealt with at the betrothal. It took place at the home of the groom's father. There were few witnesses.

The bride and groom arrive, having been paraded through the streets like a King and Queen, wearing crowns. Again it is the Apocrypha that gives us a picture in First Maccabees:

"They looked out and there they saw the bridegroom, in the middle of a bustling crowd and a train of baggage, coming to meet the bridal party, escorted by his friends and kinsman fully armed to the sound of drums and instruments of music."

The ketubah would probably have been read and they would again share a cup of wine. Then they would enter the bridal chamber (10) where the marriage was consummated and they would remain there for seven days.

Today this takes the form of a large square of silk supported by four poles under which the marriage takes place. The couple then spend a short while in a private room to represent the seven days before joining the reception.

Other traditions have been added or altered, such as the giving of a wedding ring, the veiling of the bride by the groom just before the marriage to be sure he is not being tricked like Jacob, the bride circling her husband seven times and the groom ending the ceremony by smashing a glass under his foot, but these are more recent additions.

It is difficult to be sure whether the wedding feast began during the couple's seven days in the chuppah or after they emerged to join in with great joy at the end of the week. But after all the celebrations they would go to the new home that the groom had so lovingly prepared and begin their life together.

Jesus And The Bride

BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MARRIAGE PROCESS

Having reviewed the key aspects of the ancient Jewish Marriage it is possible to consider how we can equate this to our relationship with the Lord. However it is important that we do not 'invent' meanings ourselves!

Marriage	Significance	References
1. The Search (SHIDDUCH)	God chose a people for Himself	Isaiah 54v 5-6, John 15v16&19 Rom 8v28-30 Eph 1v4 & 10-11; 2Th2v13
2. Bride Price (MOHAR)	The Father gave the Son	John 3v16, 1Cor 6v20, 1 Peter 1v18
3. Groom's gift (MATTAN)	The Son gave His life, eternal life and spiritual gifts.	Matt. 20v28, John 10v11-18, John 10v27-28, John 14v27, John 14v32, John 14v16-17, 1Cor 12v1-4
4. Dowry (SHILUHIM)	There is no dowry that can be provided. Does The Lord pay for this Himself?	Ezekiel 16v 1 – 63 (NB this refers to Jerusalem)
5. Contract (KETUBAH)	The Old and New Covenants Note: The covenantal character of God is our real guarantee of His Love and faithfulness	Exodus 19- Deut. 31, Jer.31v31-33, Hebrew 8v6-13, 2Cor 3v5-6
6. Betrothal (ERUSIN or KIDDUSHIN)	The Cup of Acceptance The time of waiting	2Cor 11v2, Matt. 26v27-29, John 14v1-3
7. Veiling (BEDEKEN)	Spoken for/Set Apart Sanctification.	2Cor 11v2, 1 Peter 1v15-16 2Pet 3v17, 2 John 7-11, 1John 2v15
8. Ritual Bath (MIKVEH)	The Cleansing Blood Washing of water with the Word	1 Cor. 6v11, Eph. 5v25-27, Titus 3v5; Heb10v25, 1 John 1v7
9. Wedding (KIDDUSHIN or NISUIN)	The Bridegroom comes with his father's authority Wedding garments are worn	Mark 13v32, John 14v1-3 Isaiah 61v10, Matt. 25v5-6, Ezek.16v8-14, 1Thess 4v16-18
10. Marriage Chamber (CHUPPAH)	The Heavenly Place of consummation	John 14v1-3,
11. The Feast (SE'UDAT MITZVAH)	The Marriage Supper	Rev. 19v6-9

Also remember the words of Jesus:

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.

30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven
Matt 22v30

WEDDING PARABLES OF JESUS

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

- 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.
- 11 "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'
- 12 "But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'
- 13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Matt 25 v 1-13



This parable is within the whole context where Jesus is teaching about His return, and notably is between the parable of the servants awaiting their Master's return, and the parable of the Talents. This discourse finishes with a statement of what happens when He returns:

- 31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.
- 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.
- 33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.
- 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:'

Matt 25 v 31 -34

The core message is about vigilance (we could interpret "watch" as "be careful") and having a reserve.

Points to note are:

1. The virgins go to meet the Bridegroom. This is according to the custom
2. It was at night. Traditionally it would be about 30 minutes before midnight.
3. The wise virgins had an additional supply of oil with them; the foolish only had what was in their small hand-lamps.
4. The Bridegroom delayed, so it was actually midnight before He arrived
5. **All** 10 fell asleep (so they were all caught by surprise!)
6. The foolish virgins had only allowed for what was expected (about 15 minutes) or just to 'get by'
7. The wise virgins would not or could not help out
8. The Lord came whilst they went to get a fresh supply, and would not let them in to the feast.

This parable has been used to establish the imminency of the Rapture, but it does not really fit with the wedding ceremony, and even the parable here, since the maidens were expecting a time. The issue is the delay of the Bridegroom that catches everyone out. The warning in 2Peter 3v1-18 about the last days is also relevant here.

In fact the wedding custom suggests that the coming of the Bridegroom was repeatedly announced by messengers beforehand.

It should also be noted that the parable is referring to the Bride's maidens not the Bride herself!

So who is the Bride?

The Wedding Feast

- 1 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:
- 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,
- 3 "and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.
- 4 "Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.'"
- 5 "But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.
- 6 "And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.
- 7 "But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.
- 8 "Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.
- 9 "Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'
- 10 "So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.
- 11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.
- 12 "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.
- 13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'
- 14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Matt 22v 1-14

This is an important lesson about those who would reject Jesus, or be too 'busy' for Him. The King tries repeatedly, but to no avail. Those invited even abuse and kill those sent to invite them.

In the end those who refused were destroyed (destruction of Jerusalem?)

Ultimately He issues an 'open invitation' to all and brings in all and sundry (probably the poor and outcasts, as the Gospel was preached to them)

Some may get to the feast, but will be cast out if they have not accepted the garment given to them. This could be the salvation in Jesus through grace. Some could still be trying by the Law!

The context is very important, as it is at the time when

- Jesus has cast out the traders in the temple and is teaching.
- The chief priests and elders questioned His authority
- Jesus gives the parable of the wicked tenant farmers,
- Jesus talks about the stone that the builders rejected, becoming the Chief Corner Stone.

- 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"
- 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.
- 44 "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."
- 45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

Matt 21v42-45

The Priest, Elders and Pharisees clearly knew that Jesus was talking about them. They had been invited to the feast, but had rejected the Son.

However even those that do come, must come to the feast on His terms.

There is a warning here even for us today. A religious spirit and a heart that becomes legalistic and callous may be found to reject the invitation, rather than receive with a grateful humble heart

- 19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
- 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Rev 3 v 19,20

Note the parable it refers to the guests, the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom's Father. It is also the wedding feast and not the wedding ceremony attended by a few.

We do not have any reference here to the Bride, and who she is.

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Revelation 19 v 5-9

- 5 *Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!"*
- 6 *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!*
- 7 *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."*
- 8 *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*
- 9 *Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."*

This part of the Book of Revelation has had many often conflicting interpretations, especially regarding:
When this is happening in according to views on the Tribulation, Rapture and Millennium
Who the Bride (or wife) is
Who the guests are

The key events here are :

- The fall of Babylon
- The Bride's fine linen is not the Robe of Righteousness but the Righteous acts of the saints
- The invitation to the Marriage Supper is followed by the Lamb appearing from Heaven with a great heavenly army
- Carrion are also invited to the great supper to eat the flesh of those fighting against Him
- The Beast and the kings of the earth gather to do battle
- The Beast and False Prophet seized and thrown into the Lake of Fire
- The rest of the armies are killed by the sword that comes out of the mouth of Jesus
- Satan is bound for a thousand years
- The Great Tribulation ends with the First Resurrection.

It may help at this stage to go back to the parable of the Wedding Feast where Jesus warns about those who reject Him, and those who would be invited (Matt 22v1-14). Certainly here He has destroyed all those who came against Him.

We should also consider where He is coming back to, which is Jerusalem (Zechariah 14v1-11)

It could be that He is coming to His temple:

- 1 *"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.*
- 2 *"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap.*
- 3 *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.*
- 4 *"Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years. Malachi 3 v 1-4*

Since the Bridegroom is coming to collect the Bride could this not be in Jerusalem, or even Jerusalem itself.

- 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.[chuppah]*
- 6 *And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.*
- Isa 4 v 2-6**

THE NEW JERUSALEM

- 1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.
- 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**
- 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Rev 21 v 1-3

Context:

- The Millennial reign draws to a close with the final rebellion led by Satan
- Armies surround the beloved city (Jerusalem)
- Armies devoured by fire and Satan now cast into the Lake of Fire
- Heaven and earth flee away as the great White Throne appears
- All the dead are judged and those not in the Lamb's Book of Life are cast into the Lake of Fire
- A new Heaven and New earth appear
- The New Jerusalem comes out of heaven prepared as a bride
- Description of the city is made of its splendour. Key points are
 - 12 Gates named after the twelve tribes
 - 12 foundations named after the Apostles
 - There is no temple there for God and the Lamb are its temple
 - God himself was the light, so no sun or moon
 - Throne of God and the Lamb are there
 - River of the water of life is flowing from the Throne
 - Tree of Life is there and there is no more curse

This finishes with the call in Rev 22v12-17:

- 12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.
- 13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."
- 14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.
- 15 But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.
- 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."
- 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

This sounds very much like a final consummation. The Lord is with His people in full intimacy and with no barriers between Him and man.

This is the only time where the Bride is specifically identified, and it actually seems to be **Jerusalem**

So whilst we rejoice in all the spiritual significance that the bride and marriage gives us, let us remember that to the Lord, the Bride is that place where He is with His people, joined to Him and abiding with Him forever.

THE BRIDE

If we want to take the view that Jerusalem/New Jerusalem is the Bride (and this is for you to decide in the Lord!) we should be able to see some other significant clues:

Jerusalem has been mentioned as God's Covenant city. It is His Holy Place for perpetuity.

Ezekiel 16

As we have seen previously this refers to Jerusalem and is a story of His faithfulness to a city that has been unfaithful to Him. It is a love-story, and a betrothal, but involving a city!

Isa 62

This refers to Zion and Jerusalem and especially v 4-5 where He rejoices over Jerusalem as a bridegroom. It even mentions that 'your sons shall marry you' and that the land shall be called Beulah or Married.

4 You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; For the LORD delights in you, And your land shall be married.

5 For as a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you. **ISA 62 v4,5**

The Lord has chosen Zion.

The many other places where the Lord says that He has chosen Zion. Some examples are:

Psa 2v6; Psa 48v1-2; Psa 50v2; Psa 102v12-16; Psa 132v13-17; Isa 4v2-6; Isa 12

Jesus and Jerusalem

Jesus clearly shows His love for the city and at the same time deep grief for what it has become (this in some links to the heart of God shown in Ezekiel 16).

Jesus cleanses the Temple there, and Laments over the discipline that would come upon the city:

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

38 "See! Your house is left to you desolate;

39 "for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" **Matt 23v37-39**

Jerusalem is the place He left when He ascended, and will be the place to which He will return to rescue her at her darkest hour. In Zechariah 14 we read how the Lord literally raises up Jerusalem and brings holiness and glory to her.

As in Ezekiel 16 it has been the place abandoned to other lovers, left desolate, but ultimately restored to Him. Its final glory is in the New Jerusalem which is His and where He dwells with His people forever.

The Bridegroom's party

If the Bride is Jerusalem, then the context of the Bridegroom and Bridegroom's party become clearer:

- Jesus refers to the disciples as the Bridegroom's companions
- John the Baptist refers to himself as the Bridegroom's companion
- The parable of the ten virgins refers to the Bridegroom procession and the wedding ceremony & feast
- The parable of the wedding feast refers to the guests of the groom and bride
- The Marriage Supper of the Lamb is for the guests of the Bride and groom.
- We are all invited to see the Lamb's wife.

Thus we rejoice with the Bridegroom over his heart's love. A city and a people for Himself. We are of course also that people.

This in no way diminishes the significance of the spiritual truths in the picture of the Church and the Bride, but we believe actually adds a much deeper and richer meaning.

CONCLUSION

As in all studies such as these, there are still many unanswered questions, and the fact is that no one outside of the Lord knows all the answers. There are times we need to recognise that the Lord in His wisdom may not have revealed everything just yet. As the David said:

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. **Psalm 131v1**

Conjecture is fine if we leave it at that, but becomes dangerous when we try and make the Bible fit our own ideas (wresting the Scriptures) and turn assumptions into facts.

We need to avoid taking parables, parallels etc. beyond their intended use. We also need to be prepared to learn the correct Jewish and middle-east customs of the era that help us to understand them better.

At the end of the day the Bible is its own commentary and it is best to read it as it is written, and receive the meaning as it is given. It is of course paramount to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth and reveal to us the deep things of God.

What we should take away from this study is not so much all the detail, but the essential message:

The Lord loves you and has chosen you
He treats you as His beloved bride
He has not only given Himself, but given the Gift of the Holy Spirit, who will keep you
He is indeed preparing a place for you, and is coming to bring you to Himself
The place of your rest is Glorious and is one of unhindered access to Him.
We shall see Him and know Him face to face.

For our part:

The New Covenant is His law in our hearts, so serve Him from there

Live in the freedom that He has won for you

Consider your life as one who is betrothed:

Be thankful

Be filled and be aglow with the Spirit

Live in purity and sanctification. Keep your vessel in honour

Do not lose your first love for Him! Keep a simple devotion to Him

Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord

Keep and grow a love for the Truth

Love the things that He loves and do not get entangled in desires of this world

It is also important to take to heart the parables of Jesus that we have heard about the ten virgins, the servants and the talents. We must never flag in zeal, and very importantly stay in the Body where we can encourage each other:

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

*25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. **Heb 10 v 23-25***

Finally we must fully recognise our unity in Christ and His divine purpose in bringing us together, for we all are by Grace chosen in Him.

Remember that He in Himself has brought together in one New Man both Jew and Gentile. The Church (lit My Assembly) is His own people who love Him and serve Him from the heart.

He so loves you that He gave Himself for you.

Let us close with last words of the Bible:

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Rev 22v20-21

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