

The True Significance of

*The
Wedding
Covenant*

DO YOU KNOW THE REAL MEANING OF WEDDING TRADITIONS?



- 1** Why do ushers seat the families and friends of the bride and groom on opposite sides of the auditorium?
 - a. To sit with those they know
 - b. To show whom they support
 - c. To symbolize uniting two families
 - d. To see who has more friends
 - e. None of the above
- 2** Why do ushers unroll a white runner down the center aisle?
 - a. To keep the bride's gown clean
 - b. To protect the carpet
 - c. To keep others off the aisle
 - d. None of the above
- 3** Why are the parents of the bride and groom given special seating?
 - a. They are the honored guests
 - b. They signal the time to begin
 - c. They are part of the ceremony
 - d. None of the above
- 4** Why does the groom enter the auditorium before the bride?
 - a. To show he initiated the marriage
 - b. To officially begin the ceremony
 - c. To greet the bride
 - d. None of the above
- 5** Why does the father of the bride walk with her down the aisle?
 - a. To keep her from falling
 - b. To give the bride away
 - c. To endure a public ordeal
 - d. None of the above

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- 6** What is the real significance of the white wedding dress?
 - a. To symbolize the purity of the bride
 - b. To show the purity of marriage
 - c. To draw attention to the bride
 - d. None of the above
- 7** Why does the minister ask the question, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"
 - a. To demonstrate the parents' agreement
 - b. To give the father the final word
 - c. To include the father in the program
 - d. None of the above
- 8** Why do the bride and groom take each other's right hand during the wedding vows?
 - a. To demonstrate the unity of the vows
 - b. To give each other moral support
 - c. To seal the marriage contract
 - d. None of the above
- 9** Why does the minister address the bridegroom first in the wedding vows?
 - a. Because he is to be the leader
 - b. Because he represents Christ
 - c. Because he has more responsibility
 - d. All of the above
- 10** What is the real significance of the wedding ring?
 - a. It symbolizes eternal love
 - b. It illustrates unbroken fellowship
 - c. It is a picture of unity
 - d. None of the above
- 11** What is the special meaning of the veil which the bride wears?
 - a. To hide the bride's blushing
 - b. To shield her until the time to kiss
 - c. To add mystery to the event
 - d. None of the above

12 Why does the minister say, "I now pronounce you husband and wife?"

- a. To demonstrate his legal authority
- b. To conclude the wedding vows
- c. To confirm that they are now married
- d. None of the above

13 What is the purpose of officially introducing the couple to the wedding guests?

- a. To signify the end of the ceremony
- b. To show that the marriage has begun
- c. To remind guests how to address them
- d. None of the above

14 Why does the couple sign wedding papers?

- a. To fulfill state requirements
- b. To finalize the marriage contract
- c. To establish a public document
- d. None of the above

15 What is the significance of the guests signing the guest book?

- a. To let the couple know who attended
- b. To get an official count of guests
- c. To provide a book of remembrances
- d. None of the above

16 What is the special purpose of the receiving line?

- a. To kiss the bride
- b. To congratulate the couple
- c. To meet the bridal party
- d. None of the above

17 Why is a special invitation given to attend a reception?

- a. To minimize expenses of the wedding
- b. To get an accurate RSVP count
- c. To show which guests are special
- d. None of the above

18 What is the significance of food being served at a wedding reception?

- a. The guests are usually hungry
- b. Payment for gifts that are given
- c. Get acquainted with the new couple
- d. None of the above

19 Why does the couple feed cake to each other during the reception?

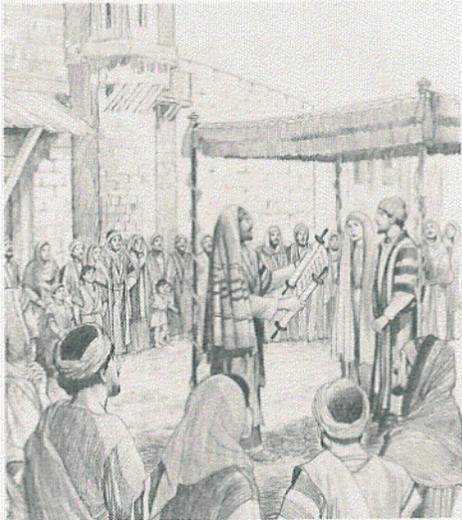
- a. To show how coordinated they are
- b. To add amusement to the celebration
- c. To show their care of each other
- d. None of the above

20 Why do the guests throw rice at the newly married couple?

- a. To initiate them to marriage
- b. To symbolize showers of prosperity
- c. To wish them good health
- d. None of the above

Your score

- 20 Correct You understand the significance of weddings.
- 19-17 Correct Your understanding is above average.
- 16-7 Correct You have many exciting truths to learn.
- 6-0 Correct You are the victim of meaningless traditions.



HOW TO DISCOVER THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF

Wedding Traditions

Like everything else in life, a wedding ceremony that is not directly related to the Lord Jesus Christ loses its real significance.

The traditions of a Christian wedding grow out of God's covenant relationship with Israel and Christ's relationship with the believer.

Further insights on wedding traditions are gained from the Jewish wedding ceremonies in the day of Christ. The correctness of interpretation can be confirmed, because God also uses the Jewish wedding to illustrate redemption and Christ's relationship with the Church.

THE JEWISH WEDDING	RELATIONSHIP TO SALVATION
1. The prospective bridegroom took the initiative and traveled from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride.	Christ left His Father's house and came to earth to gain a bride for Himself. (See Ephesians 5:25-28.)
2. The father of the woman then negotiated with the prospective bridegroom the price that must be paid to secure his bride.	Christ had to pay the price with His own blood. (See I Corinthians 6:19-20.)

THE JEWISH WEDDING	RELATIONSHIP TO SALVATION
3. When the bridegroom paid the purchase price, the marriage covenant was thereby established. At that point, the man and woman were regarded to be husband and wife, even though no physical union had taken place.	The believer has been declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for Christ. (See Ephesians 5:25-27.)
4. The moment the covenant was established, the bride was declared to be set apart exclusively for the bridegroom. The groom and the bride then drank from a cup over which the betrothal benediction had been pronounced. This symbolized that the covenant relationship had been established.	Christ symbolized this marriage covenant through communion at the Last Supper. (See I Corinthians 11:25.)
5. After the marriage covenant was in effect, the groom left the home of the bride and returned to his father's house. He remained there for a period of twelve months separated from his bride.	Christ returned to His Father's house following the payment of His purchase price. (See John 6:62.)
6. During this period of separation, the bride gathered her wardrobe and prepared for married life. The groom prepared living accommodations in his father's house for his bride.	Christ is preparing a place for His bride and is also sending pastors and teachers to perfect the bride for the coming wedding. (See John 14:2; Ephesians 4:11-13.)

Christ, the bridegroom, will return for true believers who make up His bride.



THE JEWISH WEDDING	RELATIONSHIP TO SALVATION
<p>7. After this period of separation, the groom, best man, and other male escorts left the house of the groom's father, usually at night, and conducted a torch-light procession to the house of the bride.</p>	<p>Christ will soon come from His Father's house in heaven accompanied by an angelic host. (See John 14:3.)</p>
<p>8. The bride was expecting her groom to come for her; however, she did not know the exact time. Thus, the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout.</p>	<p>Christ's return will be preceded by a shout. (See I Thessalonians 4:16.) We expect His return, but we do not know the day or the hour.</p>
<p>9. The groom received the bride with her female attendants and returned to his father's house.</p>	<p>The bride will be caught up with the Lord to be with Him. (See I Thessalonians 4:14-17.)</p>
<p>10. The bride and groom then entered the bridal chamber and, in the privacy of that place, entered into physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage.</p>	<p>Christ's union with the Church will take place in heaven for all eternity. (See I Thessalonians 4:17.)</p>

WHAT ARE THE TRUE MEANINGS OF WEDDING TRADITIONS?

1 Why do ushers seat the family and friends of the bride and groom on opposite sides of the auditorium?

ANSWER: [e]

This provides a covenant setting. Marriage is established by God as a covenant, not a contract. "... She [is] thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant" (Malachi 2:14). (See also Proverbs 2:16-17.)

The Hebrew word for covenant is *b'eriyth*. Strong's Concordance defines it, "In the sense of cutting; a compact made by passing between pieces of flesh."

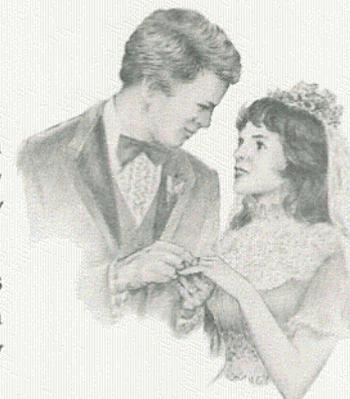
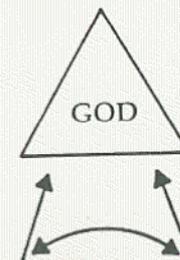
This word is pictured in God's covenant with Abraham. Before the covenant was made, Abraham, according to God's instruction, took selected sacrifices "... and divided them in the midst. . . . And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram . . ." (Genesis 15:10, 17-18).

When God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, He established a covenant with them in which the people were to pass between the pieces of a calf. (See Jeremiah 34:13, 18.)

Seating families and friends on each side of the auditorium symbolizes the sacrifices which they have made in order for the bride and groom to enter into this covenant.

HOW DOES A COVENANT DIFFER FROM A CONTRACT?

- A covenant is based on trust between parties. A contract is based on distrust.
- A covenant is based on unlimited responsibility. A contract is based on limited liability.
- A covenant cannot be broken if new circumstances occur. A contract can be voided by mutual consent.



2 What is the significance of a white runner in the aisle?

ANSWER: [d]

It is a symbol of walking on holy ground. A covenant is not made merely between two people and their witnesses. It is made in the presence of God, and He is actively involved in the agreement, since it is God that joins them together. (See Matthew 19:6.)

When Moses was in the presence of God, he was told to respect that presence with the command, "... put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

3 Why are the parents of the couple given special seating?

ANSWER: [c]

The parents of the bride and groom are part of the marriage covenant. The commitments they make during the ceremony are just as binding as the vows of the couple.

The final responsibility of parents for their sons and daughters is to determine with them God's will for a life partner. Thereafter, they serve in a chain of counsel for them and their children. Thus, parents enter in the line of authority, and they leave in the line of counsel.

"Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22).

4 Why does the groom enter the auditorium first?

ANSWER: [a]

By entering first, the groom signifies that he is the covenant initiator. This is important because whoever initiates the covenant assumes greater responsibility for seeing it fulfilled.

God initiated covenants with Noah, Abraham, and David. Christ initiated the covenant of salvation with us. God is still at work to fulfill His covenants, and Christ will soon appear with the sound of trumpets to consummate the wedding with His bride, the Church. (See I Thessalonians 4:14-17.)

Based on this, the following would be appropriate.

TO THE GROOM (Before the bride arrives)

As you come before these witnesses, are you signifying that you are taking the initiative in this marriage covenant, and that you will, by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, assume the greater responsibility in carrying out its terms?

5 Why does the father walk with the bride down the aisle?

ANSWER: [d]

This action has a twofold significance. The father is saying to the bride, "I am endorsing this young man as God's very best choice of a husband for you, and I am now bringing you to him."

At the same time the father is saying to the young man, "I am presenting to you a daughter whom I have earnestly endeavored to train up as a pure bride." In Scripture the father is responsible for the purity of the daughter before marriage. (See Deuteronomy 22:13-21.) Paul illustrates this responsibility in his preparation of the bride of Christ. "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Corinthians 11:2).

6 What is the real significance of the white wedding dress?

ANSWER: [d]

The white wedding gown symbolizes the purity of heart and life for which the husband is responsible in the life of his wife. During the marriage, he is to cleanse her by the Word of God, just as Christ purifies believers by the Word. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives . . ." (Ephesians 5:25-28).

7 Why does the minister ask the question, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

ANSWER: [d]

This question and its response symbolizes not only the full blessing of the parents, but also the transfer of responsibility to the groom by the father. A daughter is under the authority and responsibility of her father until she is married. (See Numbers 30:4–8.) It is, therefore, the father who transfers this responsibility to the groom. *“So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well . . .”* (I Corinthians 7:38).

Because of this, the question should be expanded.

TO THE FATHER

By walking down the aisle with your daughter, are you and your wife affirming that you are giving your full blessing to the marriage of your daughter with this man?

(Response by the father.)

Are you also hereby transferring your God-given responsibility for the care and protection of your daughter to this man?

(Response by the father.)

8 Why do the bride and groom take each other’s right hand during the wedding vows?

ANSWER: [d]

The open right hand offered by each party symbolizes their strength, resources, and purpose. By clasping each other’s right hand, they are pledging these to each other. Just as we depend upon the “saving strength of God’s right hand,” so each partner can depend upon all the resources that the other brings to the covenant relationship. (See Psalm 20:6.)

The handshake goes far beyond sealing a contract. It symbolizes the cleaving together of lives which is to be accomplished in the marriage covenant. (See Genesis 2:24.)

9 Why does the groom make the vows first?

ANSWER: [d]

He must be the leader and assume the greater responsibility to fulfill the marriage covenant. As covenant initiator, he must

commit himself to the purposes of marriage which God established in the beginning. These must be reflected in his vows.

SIX PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE

1. Companionship

True companionship grows out of a oneness of spirit. *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* (Amos 3:3).

2. Enjoyment

The principle behind enjoyment is self-control. *“Marriage is honourable [of great worth] in all, and the bed [should be kept] undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”* (Hebrews 13:4).

3. Completeness

God designed Eve to complete that which was lacking in Adam’s life. *“And Adam said . . . she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man”* (Genesis 2:23).

4. Fruitfulness

God’s first command in Scripture is, *“ . . . Be fruitful [Hebrew parah, make increase after your kind], and multiply [Hebrew rabah, increase with exceeding abundance of children], and replenish the earth [Hebrew male, fill up the world to overflowing] . . .”* (Genesis 1:28).

The command was repeated in Genesis 9:1 and explained in I Peter 3:7, *“ . . . as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”*

5. Protection

The husband is to protect the wife by laying down his life for her. (See Ephesians 5:25.) The wife is to protect the home. (See Titus 2:4–5.) Parents are to protect their children to raise up a Godly seed. (See Malachi 2:15; Psalm 112:1–2.)

6. Typify Christ and the Church

Marriage is to be a human object lesson of the divine relationship between Christ and believers. (See Ephesians 5:31–33.)

10 What is the real significance of the wedding ring?

ANSWER: [d]

It symbolizes transfer of authority, strength, and protection. There is difficulty in saying that it represents eternal love, since the marriage covenant ends at the death of one partner and since there are no marriages in heaven. (See Romans 7:1–3; Matthew 22:30.)

In Scripture, the ring is a symbol of authority and the resources which go with it. (See Esther 8:2.) In a covenant relationship, the ring symbolizes identification. The belt has also been used in Scripture as the token of a covenant. (See I Samuel 18:1–4.) The belt represented the initiator's strength and pledge of protection.

When God made a covenant with Noah, He put a symbol in the sky—a rainbow. When viewed from the sky, the rainbow is a circle. It was to be a continual reminder to God of the covenant that He had made. (See Genesis 9:8–17.)

11 What is the special meaning of the bride's veil?

ANSWER: [d]

The veil represents modesty and respect. It symbolizes the sanctity and the exclusiveness of the marriage covenant. It reminds the couple and the witnesses that the physical relationship is only to be entered into after the vows are completed.

There is further significance in the veil as it relates to salvation. When Christ fulfilled the conditions of His covenant for our redemption, the veil in the temple was taken away. (See Matthew 27:50–51.) Similarly, when a nonbeliever receives Jesus Christ as his Savior, the veil between him and Christ is removed. (See II Corinthians 3:14.)

12 Why is the couple pronounced husband and wife?

ANSWER: [d]

The pronouncement of husband and wife establishes a definite point in time for the beginning of the marriage. These words are to remove any future doubts in the minds of the couple or the witnesses about the validity of the marriage.

The establishing of a point in time is also important in salvation. When we confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we are united with Christ in salvation. (See Romans 10:9–13.) Public baptism and the authority of His Word then give the official pronouncement that we are saved. *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"* (John 1:12).

13 What is the purpose of introducing the new couple?

ANSWER: [d]

The introduction of the new couple establishes their change of names. In the marriage, the wife takes on the name of the husband, and the man becomes known as the husband of the wife. This name change is clearly illustrated in the covenant between Jehovah God and Abram. (See Genesis 17:4–5.)

God combined Abram's name with the promise represented in His name to form the new name Abraham. He is now known as "the father of multitudes," and Jehovah is known as "the God of Abraham."

14 Why does the couple sign wedding papers?

ANSWER: [c]

The couple signs the wedding papers to establish a public document. It is a continuing public record of the covenant. God wrote out the testimony of His covenant in Scripture. When Laban made a covenant with Jacob, a heap of stones became a witness. (See Genesis 31:43–55.)

15 What is the significance of signing the guest book?

ANSWER: [d]

The guests become the official witnesses to the covenant. By signing their names they are saying, "I have witnessed the vows, and I will testify to the reality of this marriage." The witnesses can also serve as God's reminders to the couple to be faithful to their marriage vows. Because of the significance of signing the guest book, it should be done after the wedding rather than before it.

16 What is the purpose of the receiving line?

ANSWER: [d]

The guests give their blessing to the couple and their parents in the receiving line. When Boaz entered into covenant with Ruth to be his wife, all the people that were in the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses." Then they gave their blessing. "... *The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel.* . . .

"And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age . . ." (Ruth 4:11, 14-15).

It would be appropriate for the guests to write a short word of encouragement on a card while they are waiting for the receiving line and give it to the couple or one of their parents.

17 Why is a special invitation given for the reception?

ANSWER: [d]

The invitation for the reception symbolizes the invitation to salvation. In the teaching ministry of Christ, He used the invitation to the wedding feast as an illustration of inviting people to partake of salvation. The wedding feast was free to the invited guests, just as salvation is free to all who will receive it. (See Isaiah 55:1.)

All who respond to Christ's invitation, both good and bad, must enter on His terms. The man who came without the proper wedding attire in the parable was cast into the outer darkness. (See Matthew 22:1-14.)

18 What is the meaning of serving food at the reception?

ANSWER: [d]

Food is part of the covenant celebration. One of the root meanings of the word *covenant* is "to feed." Following the marriage, a feast was customary to further symbolize the unity of the couple. Entering into a meal is itself a form of covenant. It is significant that the first event of Christ's ministry was attending a wedding feast, and His first miracle took place during that occasion. (See John 2:1-11.)

19 Why does the couple feed cake to each other?

ANSWER: [d]

This act symbolizes their becoming one flesh. By feeding cake to each other, they are saying, "This represents my body. As you eat it, I am becoming a part of you; and as I eat the cake that you give to me, you become a part of me."

A New Testament illustration of this type symbolism is in the Lord's Supper. Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, ". . . *Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you.* . . . *After the same manner also he took the cup . . ."* (I Corinthians 11:24-25).

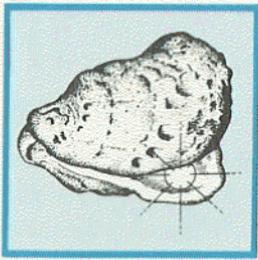
20 Why do the guests throw rice at the couple?

ANSWER: [d]

This gesture symbolizes marriage fruitfulness. When a covenant was completed, both parties would often establish a memorial garden.

In the marriage covenant, the garden represents children who are to grow up as olive plants around the family table. (See Psalm 128:3.) It is in the children that the two parents achieve their ultimate oneness, and it is through the children that God desires to enrich and reward the marriage covenant.

"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3-5).



THE HIDDEN MESSAGE OF THE LOST PEARL

"When I was eleven years old, my family took a vacation in Florida. One morning my brother and I went swimming. The shallow water revealed an oyster bed. We began digging up oysters. It was great fun. During the morning we accumulated quite a collection.

"Our greatest finds were not the live oysters, but dead oysters which still had both halves of the shell joined together. Many were closed shut, and we didn't know until we had pried them open whether they were alive or not.

"The live ones we threw back. The empty ones usually did not reclose, but remained partly open. These we set aside as our most prized treasures.

"Toward the end of the morning, I dug up a very nice, complete oyster shell which was in perfect condition. It was obviously dead because it was already open about an eighth of an inch and seemed empty. It was definitely one that I wanted to keep, except for one flaw—it had some kind of object trapped inside that rattled. I thought it detracted from the quality of my shell.

"The halves of the shell were still very tight and were hard to budge with just my fingers. It took all of five minutes to remove this rather large, round, perfectly smooth object. Having successfully removed it, and being pleased with my now empty and unblemished shell, I threw the object toward the end of the pier.

"At about the midpoint of its flight, a horrifying light dawned in my mind. I was old enough to have known, but young enough to have overlooked the value of what I had just thrown away. I had treasured what was secondary and had lost what was real. My focus had been wrong.

"I visually marked the location of the splash. With great care I slowly approached the spot, trying not to disturb the bottom. For the next half hour I searched diligently.

"Finally, when it was time to leave, I told my parents what I had done. Then we all looked for it. Our efforts were useless and our time was up. Our schedule demanded that we leave.

"When I was twenty-five years old, I got married. For some undefined reason, I rejected for seven years the suggestion that we have children. I thought I had valid reasons, but no one had ever talked to me about it. I had received no counsel or teaching from either family, friends, or church. No one seemed to consider it to be a critical issue. In addition, the world had all kinds of new medical methods for preventing pregnancy.

"As I look back, I don't remember hearing one dissenting voice. Down deep I always knew that I wanted children someday. I didn't really want to be childless all of my life. Eventually, I decided that I wanted five children. So, after seven years of some very difficult decision-making, we had our first child—a girl.

"To my great amazement, I found that I actually liked having children. In fact, having a child is one of the greatest things that has happened in our lives.

"The fears which had prevented conception for so long proved to be mostly imaginary. This new member of our family changed our lives. We discovered a multitude of rewards that we had not known we were missing.

"My wife and I have just been told that it now looks medically impossible for us to have any more children! Suddenly, all of our newly established family dreams have been erased. All of the excitement and anticipation of a newly discovered future have vanished. It seems as though there is a void in our lives—like four of our five children have just been killed.

"What makes the burden so heavy is that we had the treasure within our grasp and we threw it away. We saw the outer shell and mistakenly overlooked the treasure within. With our hands we plucked it out and cast it away. We tried to take God's timing into our own hands."

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