

## Excerpt from the book, “Before the Wrath”

Chapter: *More than I ever Dreamed*, © 2012 by Jay R. McCarl

When the Jerusalem Temple fell, everything changed.

The temperamental Galileans had started another rebellion and Rome finally got fed up. Their legions rolled down from the north, destroying everything and everyone in their path until they finally surrounded Jerusalem. The besieged Jews retreated into the inner courts of their mighty Temple—remodeled by paranoid King Herod to be an impenetrable fortress. Caesar had ordered the Temple not to be destroyed, but an over-zealous Roman soldier loosed a flaming arrow, and in A.D. 70 the massive sanctuary, along with the thousands of Jews hiding inside, was incinerated.

Survivors of the onslaught were crucified or sold into slavery and dispersed throughout the whole Roman world. It became known as the great dispersion—the Diaspora.

The Jewish people were experts at maintaining religious traditions, but now, far removed from their Promised Land and with their magnificent Temple in ruins, the center of their faith began to fade into memory. For the most traditional people in the world, things started to change.

In time, many Jewish traditions began to take on a more European flavor—and while western ways seeped to their age-old customs, others slipped away.

And you can easily spot some of the changes in the way they do their weddings.

For instance, modern Jewish weddings are full of unforgettable moments: the white canopy sheltering the couple, the bride and groom circling around the rabbi and smashing a glass while all the guests shout “Mazel tov!”<sup>1</sup>

But what were their wedding traditions like before the fall of the Temple? This is not an easy question to answer because few historians recorded anything about it. And why would they? Why would they waste valuable space on an expensive scroll recording the petty traditions of farmers and fishermen living in northern Judea?

That is why there just isn’t much historical information out there.

When the Temple fell, everything changed—and so did Jewish wedding traditions. And this is *really* important, because we need to understand what those traditions looked like before that dreadful change.

Many of the metaphors Jesus used pointed to a wedding—in particular a Galilean-style wedding. That means understanding what these weddings were like—and what they *weren’t* like—was essential to grasping His message in all its sublime force.

<sup>1</sup> Yiddish for “Good Luck!”

The trick was finding out what the Jews added and what was omitted during the centuries of their dispersion.

There are questions concerning the original timing of the use of the Huppa, the presence of a rabbi and the segregation of men and women at the wedding feast. The smashing of the glass was definitely a more recent development. It originated with a Middle Age Jewish custom of crushing a jar of perfume to commemorate the Temple's destruction and the beautiful aroma of a new life. And "Mazel tov"? It's a Yiddish custom that showed up in Jewish weddings around 1860 (A.D.).

The problem was, almost all of the available information about Galilean weddings was recorded in the New Testament of the Bible. After all, the Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and John were Galileans, and Luke would have interviewed Peter and Mary (at least), who were also from Galilee. And most significant, Jesus was from there, too. But over the centuries, though the Bible itself has not changed, our ability to spot the idioms in the text has faded like a man slowly going blind.

So I had to go back—way back—before the Romans burned the Herod's Temple. I had to look at the bits and pieces of modern and medieval Jewish weddings and set aside everything they added over the centuries of their dispersion. What remained is where I began.

I also had to consider the regional customs—modern and ancient—wedding traditions that were followed by Arabs and other surrounding peoples of that age.

Outside the Bible, resources on this subject are rare, but there were enough of them to grind out a new set of lenses to see what Jesus was saying—especially when He mentioned a wedding.

So, I put on these new glasses and started looking around. Gradually I began to notice references to the Wedding, the Bride, the Bridegroom and the Wife that, in all my years of Bible-reading, I had simply read right past.

At first glance, the imagery seemed mysterious and distant—flowery symbols with meanings veiled in a dark spiritual fog beyond all earthly penetration. But God wanted people to understand Him—simple people, all people. He was not concealing anything—in fact, He was revealing it.

When I began paying attention, I discovered marital metaphors everywhere in the Book. I rediscovered wedding psalms and poetry, wedding allegories and analogies in the Pentateuch, histories, prophets and gospels and marriage-related parables and types in the New Testament epistles and Revelation. It was *everywhere*.

There is also an abundance of Old Testament references and allusions to Israel as the wife of God—His exclusive title for His people, the Jews, and of which I have made no attempt to discuss here (it is an entirely different—though related—subject which, had I tried to weave it into the content of this book, would have bloated it beyond readability). There was already more than enough to talk about.

Even so, the same sort of relationship is often applied to the church in both the Old and New Testaments, where she is the betrothed bride of Christ, and that such attributions were neither random nor rare.

In this light, it is no wonder God refers to Himself throughout the Scriptures in masculine terms—it was divinely intentional and not some sexist plot by stealthy committees of misogynistic Bible translators.

As I wrote this book, I created a few hypothetical situations (the wedding processions, the arrival of the caravan and so forth) in order to immerse the reader into the everyday life and thought processes of the people of Jesus' day. These scenarios are, to an extent, idealized and assume a degree of romance, humor, good weather, available resources and family cooperation. Life was hard in those days—*really* hard, and I did not want to distract from the joyful future to which the Galilean wedding pointed by including some of the more painful depictions of everyday struggles. For instance, a quiet night in a village was rare. Had you lived back then, you would have heard all kinds of sounds echoing in the darkness—snoring, crying babies, vomiting, the moaning (perhaps even screams) of sick and dying people and more. You get the idea.

Neither did I address (to any reasonable extent) details related to family honor and a good name or how a ketubah emulated God making the covenant with Abraham or giving Moses the Ten Commandments. Had I done so, it would have produced engrossing but lengthy rabbit-trails that led away from central path of the book.

I pray you will fall madly in love with Jesus all over again, or perhaps for the very first time. I think you will see many things in the Bible as if for the very first time, even if you have read it a hundred times before. I know I did.

There was more than I ever dreamed.

## Selected Bibliography

**Important note:** Some of the authors listed below embrace a rationalist view of the Bible known as Textual Criticism, a position that largely or entirely rejects the possibility of miracles and of God speaking to people. I profoundly disagree with this position. Other listed authors may have backgrounds in various essential or non-essential doctrinal controversies or even aberrations. I chose to include them in my bibliography due to their excellent empirical data, even though their contextual interpretation of such may be questionable at best.

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