

'My Own Treasure'

⁵ Now then, if you listen closely to My voice, and keep My covenant, then you will be *My own treasure* (*Segulah*) from among all people, for all the earth is Mine. ⁶ So as for you, you will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.' These are the words which you are to speak to Bnei-Yisrael" (Ex. 19:5-6)

The concept of a wedding between *Adonai* and Israel is one of the most discussed *Midrashim* in all of Jewish literature. What is a *Midrash*? According to Jacob Nausner a *midrash* is "an ancient Jewish homiletic commentary on some portion of the Hebrew Scripture, in which allegory and legendary illustration were freely used." The majority of today's *Torah* portion discusses a wedding, if you will, between *Adonai* and His people, Israel. I am not alone, nor am I the first one to see this unfolding in Scripture. There are several key points in this week's *Torah* Portion (*Parasahat Yitro*) which, when put together, show that here at Mt. Sinai, we are the attendants of a sacred wedding. We have already discussed *Adonai's* betrothal to Israel in a previous *Torah* portion, *Vaera* (See my January 5, 2019 Message entitled *One or Two Brides?*) We discussed there that in Exodus 6:6-7, *Adonai* gave *Moses* five promises which He intended to carry out for Israel. Do you remember that four of these promises are the basis for the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder? This engagement, then, was a binding agreement between *Adonai* and Israel. Let's pick up on the wedding details in today's message...

A *Mikvah*

Before a traditional Jewish wedding, it is customary for the bride to go into the *mikvah*. (In some circles, the groom also goes, separately from the bride, of course.) Let us clarify what the concept of a *mikvah* means. The *Torah* requires a woman to immerse herself in a *mikvah* (a pool of gathered fresh and living waters) following her monthly menstrual cycle. During this cycle, the couple is to refrain from sexual activity until after seven days, and following her immersion. Before this separation can end, she must be immersed. During this time the woman has the status called, *niddah*, (Hebrew: נדה). The *mikvah* is much more than the usual "purification," however. It also carries with it the idea of rebirth.

The text states that their clothes were immersed but it also implied that they were immersed too. When the Holy One instructed Israel to immerse, it was as if the bride had to end her period of separation before being intimate with *Adonai*. Furthermore, at that time, every Israelite was like a convert to Judaism, who must immerse as part of his conversions. The immersion here refers to that of *Bnei-Yisrael* before receiving the *Torah*, but in the metaphor of the bride, however, it also refers to the immersion of a bride before marriage.

Under the *Chupah*

A "*chupah*" is the canopy under which a wedding takes place. The word "*chupah*," is also used in the Bible, both in Joel 2:16, "Let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber, and the bride from her *chupah*" and in Psalm 19:6 where it talks about the bridegroom, "coming out of his *chupah*." In Jewish thinking, the *chupah*: "... is a symbolic house. It is a single domain into which the groom welcomes the bride."

A *chupah* looks like a little house with open sides. Where was the *chupah* on Mt. Sinai? It is dearly seen in verse 19:16 where we read that when Moshe went up the mountain, "there was thunder and lightening and a heavy cloud on the mountain." May we suggest that the cloud was *Adonai's chupah*? Certainly! It was there that He welcomed Israel, as represented by Moses. Their new home or place of dwelling was to be eternally with Him!

The *Ketubah*

We come now to a central part to this wedding, the *ketubah*. The *ketubah* in traditional Jewish weddings is the marriage contract or covenant. It is a legally binding agreement between the bride and groom that governs their marriage. It is always a written agreement, which is how the word *ketubah* derives its name, from the Hebrew LeKatav, לכתב, to write. The *Ketubah* is read and signed during the Jewish wedding ceremony.

In this wedding at Mt. Sinai, what is the *ketubah*? What is the legally binding marriage covenant/contract between *Adonai* and His bride, Israel? It is *Torah*! Here in chapters 19 and 20, *Adonai* begins to give His *Torah* to Israel. The first part of the revelation of *Torah*, Scripture calls the *Ten Words*. We know them as *The Ten Commandments*. Next week we will see in Exodus 24 that all the revelation that Moses received from Sinai onward was put into the Book of the Covenant. This revelation comprises the *ketubah*. By referring to the *Torah* as a *ketubah*, we are, then, suggesting that it is not merely a nice ethical system, or list of do's and don'ts, but it functions as the sacred marriage covenant between *Adonai* and His people, Israel. It outlines the way the marriage is to be lived out. Its stipulations are what make this a happy and fruitful marriage. Its precepts describe how the marriage would function. Its pictures tell what the marriage would look like. Its judgments describe how each of the partners would relate to each other. For either party to violate this agreement is to violate the marriage itself. The Groom promised never to violate it. It was always the bride who did so. When it was violated, He sent prophets to rebuke *the unfaithful bride* and help her to return back to the *ketubah* – *Torah*!

The Ring

What is a wedding without a ring? A wedding ring is an outward symbol of the marriage. It is given as a token or pledge that the person who made the promises will, in fact, keep those promises. It also serves as an outward sign to others that particular man or woman is married, not fair game for would-be suitors. The *Torah* itself tells us what the ring is. In Exodus 31:13, *Veshamru B'nei Yisrael...* ¹³ “*Speak now to Bnei-Yisrael saying, ‘Surely you must keep My Shabbatot, for it is a sign (Hebrew, Ot) between Me and you throughout your generations, so you may know that I am Adonai who sanctifies you.’*”

The ring is *Shabbat*! We are told in these verses that *Shabbat* is a sign (Hebrew, *Ot*: אֹת). Just as the ring is an outward sign that the husband and wife belong to each other, so is *Shabbat* an outward sign for *Adonai* and Israel. It is an outward symbol that Israel and *Adonai* belong to each other.

In a marriage, if the ring were to be removed, people would have sufficient reason to question if the marriage was still intact. It is the same for *Shabbat*. Since it is a sign that *Elohim* is *Adonai Echad*, removal of *Shabbat* from the midst of Israel would be like saying that the marriage between *Adonai* and Israel is over. *Adonai* promises (Jeremiah 31:35-37) unequivocally that this relationship will not cease.

The House

If there is a wedding going on in this portion, then there must be a family structure and a place for the family to have intimacy. In chapter 18 the *Torah* gave some information about Moses' family structure. Here we were introduced again to Jethro (Hebrew, *Yitro*), Moses' father-in-law who comes to give him some practical help in organizing the judicial structure of Israel.

For the place of intimacy, the Groom begins to make provision for such a place right after the Ten Words. In Exodus 20:21, Moses received instruction concerning the *altar*, the place where the husband would meet with the wife in a special way. Next week's reading will give more details about their new *house*. This will be the place where this divine couple will meet with each other in the most intimate of fellowship. Like many families, this family would move and change locations of residence quite a bit. Hence, the place of the house would change over the years. Eventually, however, they would *settle down* in Jerusalem. As far as the *TNK* is concerned, the remnant, the faithful believers within all of Israel (*Yeshua-believing* Jews and Gentiles), is the bride. For the sake of this remnant *Adonai* has kept His wedding promises. We are this remnant that celebrates the nation of Israel and looks forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Jerusalem. *Shabbat Shalom!*