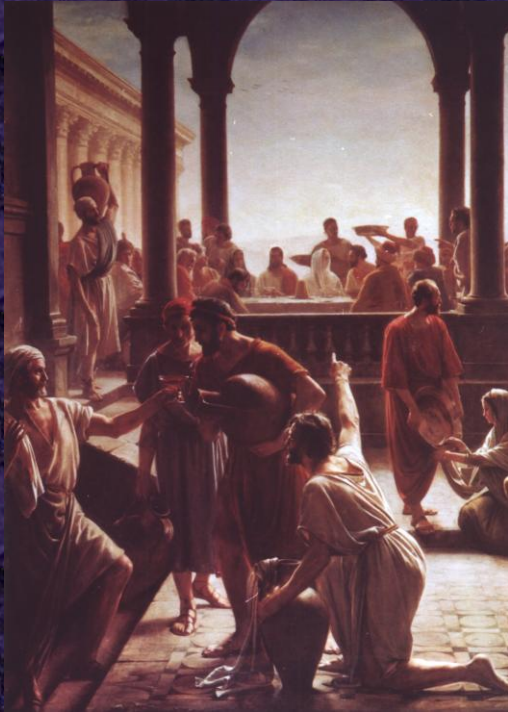


# Marriage in Cana



Notes on the details of Jewish Marriage and the circumstances surrounding Christ's first recorded miracle.



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**Betrothal (Erusin Qiddushin)**- A betrothal most closely resembles our modern-day engagement; however, there are many significant differences. Betrothal preceded the actual marriage by a period varying in length, but not exceeding twelve months in the case of a maiden. At the betrothal, the bridegroom, personally or by deputy, handed to the bride a piece of money or letter, it being expressly stated in each case that the man thereby espoused the woman. From the moment of betrothal both parties were regarded, and treated in law (as to inheritance, adultery, need of formal divorce), as if they had been actually married, except as regarded their living together. A legal document (the *Shitre Erusin*) fixed the dowry which each brought, the mutual obligations, and all other legal points. Generally a festive meal closed the ceremony of betrothal, but not in Galilee, where, habits being more simple and pure, that which sometimes ended in sin was avoided. "Men married at sixteen or seventeen years of age, almost never later than twenty; and women at a somewhat younger age, often when not older than fourteen." (The mortal Messiah, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, Vol. 1, p.223)

**Eve of the actual marriage (Nissuin, Chathnuth)**- The bride was led from her paternal home to that of the husband. First, came the merry sounds of music; then they who distributed among the people wine and oil, and nuts among the children; next the bride, covered with the bridal veil, her long hair flowing, surrounded by her companions, and led by 'the friends of the bridegroom,' and the 'the children of the bride-chamber.' All around were in festive array; some carried torches, or lamps on poles; those nearest had myrtle-branches and chaplets of flowers. Every one rose to salute the procession, or join it; and it was deemed almost a religious duty to break into praise of the beauty, the modesty, or the virtues of the bride. Arrived at her new home, she was led to her husband. Some such formula as 'Take her according to the Law of Moses and of Israel,' would be spoken, and the bride and bridegroom crowned with garlands. Then a formal legal instrument, called the *Kethubah*, was signed, which set forth that the bridegroom undertook to work for her, to honor, keep, and care for her, as is the manner of the men of Israel; that he promised to give his maiden-wife at least two hundred Zuz (or more it might be), and to increase her own dowry (which, in the case of a poor orphan, the authorities supplied) by at least one half, and that he also undertook to lay it out for her to the best advantage, all his own possessions being guaranteed for it. Then, after the prescribed washing of hands and benediction, the marriage-supper began, the cup being filled, and the solemn prayer of bridal benediction spoken over it.

**The Marriage Supper**- this feast was often lengthy, sometimes more than one day. Each sought to contribute, sometimes coarsely, sometimes wisely, to the general enjoyment, till at last 'the friends of the bridegroom' led the bridal pair to the *Cheder* and the *Chuppah*, or the bridal chamber and bed. Here it ought to be specially noticed, as a striking evidence that the writer of the fourth Gospel was not only a Hebrew, but intimately acquainted with the varying

customs prevailing in Galilee and in Judaea, that at the marriage of Cana no 'friend of the bridegroom,' or 'groomsman' (*Shoshebhayna*) is mentioned, while he is referred to in St. John 3:29, where the words are spoken outside the boundaries of Galilee. For among the simpler and purer Galileans the practice of having 'friends of the bridegroom,' which must so often have led to gross impropriety, did not obtain, though all the invited guests bore the general name of 'children of the bridechamber' (*bene Chuppah*). It was the marriage in Cana of Galilee. All connected with the account of it is strictly Jewish, the feast, the guests, the invitation of the stranger Rabbi, and its acceptance by Jesus.

**The House of Marriage**- As we pass through the court of that house in Cana, and reach the covered gallery which opens on the various rooms, in this instance, particularly, on the great reception room, all is festively adorned. In the gallery the servants move about, and there the 'water-pots' are ranged, 'after the manner of the Jews,' for purification, for the washing not only of the hands before and after eating, but also of the vessels used for the feast. Entering the spacious, lofty dining room, which would be brilliantly lighted with lamps and candlesticks, the guests are disposed round tables on couches, soft with cushions or covered with tapestry, or seated on chairs. The bridal blessing has been spoken, and the bridal cup emptied. The feast is proceeding, not the common meal, which was generally taken about even, according to the Rabbinic saying [Pas. 18 b.] that he who postponed it beyond the hour was as if he had swallowed a stone, but a festive evening meal. If there had been disposition to those exhibits of, or incitement to, indecorous and light merriment, such as even the more earnest Rabbis deprecated, surely the presence of Jesus would have restrained it. And now there must have been a painful pause or something like it, when the Mother of Jesus whispered to Him that 'the wine failed.' There could, perhaps, be the less cause for reticence on this point towards her Son, not merely because this failure may have arisen from the accession of guests in the persons of Jesus and his disciples, for whom no provision had been originally made, but because the gift of wine or oil on such occasions was regarded a meritorious work of charity.

**Purification**- [Comp. St. Mark 7:1-4] How detailed Rabbinic ordinances were in these respects, will be shown in another connection. 'Purification' was one of the main points in Rabbinic sanctity. By far the largest and most elaborate of the six books into which the Mishnah is divided, is exclusively devoted to this subject (the '*Seder Tohoroth*,' purifications). Not to speak of references in other parts of the Talmud, we have two special tractates to instruct us about the purification of 'Hands' (*Yadayim*) and of 'Vessels' (*Kelim*). The latter is the most elaborate in all the Mishnah and consists of not less than thirty chapters. Their perusal





proves, alike the strict accuracy of the Evangelic narratives, and the justice of Christ's denunciations of the unreality and gross hypocrisy of this elaborateness of ordinances. This the more so, when we recall that it was actually vaunted as a special qualification for a seat in the Sanhedrin, to be acute and learned as to know how to prove clean creeping things (which were declared unclean by the Law). [Sanh. 17 a.] And the mass of the people would have regarded neglect of the ordinances of purification as betokening either gross ignorance, or daring impiety.

At any rate, such would have been exhibited on an occasion like the present; and outside the reception-room, as St. John with graphic minuteness of details relates, six of those stone pots, which we know from the Rabbinic writings, were ranged. Here it may be well to add, as against objectors, that it is impossible to state with certainty the exact measure represented by the 'two or three firkins apiece.' For, although we know that the term *metretes* (A.V. 'firkin') was intended as an equivalent for the Hebrew 'bath' [Jos. Ant. viii. 2. 9.] yet three different kinds of 'bath' were at the time used in Palestine; the common Palestinian or 'wilderness' bath, that of Jerusalem, and that of Sepphoris. The common Palestinian 'bath' was equal to the Roman amphora, containing about 5 ¼ gallons, while the Sepphoris 'bath' corresponded to the Attic *metretes*, and would contain about 8 ½ gallons. In the former case, therefore, each of these pots might have held from 10 ½ to 15 ¾ gallons; in the latter, from 17 to 25 ½ gallons. Reasoning on the general ground that the so-called Sepphoris measurement was common in Galilee, the larger quantity seems the more likely, though by no means certain. It is almost like trifling on the threshold of such a history, and yet so many cavils have been raised, that we must here remind ourselves, that neither the size, nor the number of these vessels has anything extraordinarily about it.

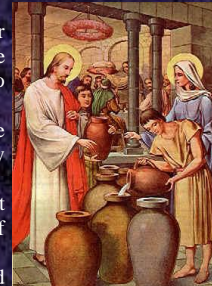


For such an occasion the family would produce or borrow the largest and handsomest stone-vessels that could be procured; nor is it necessary to suppose that they were filled to the brim; nor should we forget that, from a Talmudic notice, [Shabb. 77 b. So Lightfoot in loc.] it seems to have been the practice to set apart some of these vessels exclusively for the use of the bride and of the more distinguished guests, while the rest were used by the general company.



## The marriage of Cana recorded in the Gospel according to St. John

1. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there;
2. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.
3. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.
4. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.
5. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.
6. And there were set there six water pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.
7. Jesus saith unto them, fill the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.
8. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.
9. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants, which drew the water, knew) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom.
10. And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.
11. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.
12. After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and disciple; and they continued there not many days



### Points to Ponder

- A. "Mary seemed to be the hostess at the marriage party, the one in charge, the one responsible for the entertainment of the guests. It was she who recognized the need for more wine, who sought to replenish the supply, who directed the servants to follow whatever instructions Jesus gave. Considering the customs of the day, it is virtual certainty that one of Mary's children was being married... Jesus also had a close personal interest in and connection with the marriage and the subsequent festivities, which attended it. He and apparently five of his disciples (John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaneal) were "called" to attend. Since the short age of wine occurred near the close of the festivities, and since these commonly lasted from seven to fourteen days, it is apparent that Jesus' party was remaining for the entire celebration. Seemingly, also, he had some personal responsibility for entertaining the guests and felt an obligation to supply them with added refreshments." (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, Vol. 1, p. 135)

- B. "Marriage is vitally important in Judaism. Refraining from marriage is not considered holy, as it is in some other religions. On the contrary, it is considered unnatural. The Talmud says that an unmarried man is constantly thinking of sin. The Talmud tells of a rabbi who was introduced to a young unmarried rabbi. The older rabbi told the younger one not to come into his presence again until he was married... The Talmud recommends that a man marry at age 18, or somewhere between 16 and 24"
- C. "It will be borne in mind that once on a time, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and on a careful reading of that transaction, it will be discovered that no less a person than Jesus Christ was married on that occasion." (Orson Hyde, Journal of Discourses, 13:259)
- D. "How was it with Mary and Martha and other women that followed Him? In old times and it is common to this day, the women, even Sarah, called their husbands 'LORD'.. Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee... We say it was Jesus Christ who was married, to be brought into relation whereby he could see his seed, before He was crucified... I shall say here, that before the Savior died, he looked upon His own natural children, as we look upon ours." (Orson Hyde, Journal of Disclosures, 2:81,82)
- E. Mary Magdalen came in to anoint the body of Christ at the close of the Sabbath, following His crucifixion. According to Judaic Law, only a wife is allowed to give a burial because of the presence of the naked body. If Mary were not Jesus' wife, she would not have been permitted to perform the burial rites.
- F. At a Jewish Marriage, the bridegroom was responsible for the wine and food. Why did Mary go to Jesus and not he the bridegroom, unless Jesus was the Bridegroom?
- G. Christ said, "And Jesus answering said unto him... it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) The Doctrine and Covenants says, "In celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it... and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory." (D&C 131:1-3 & 132:4)

Scriptural text does not specifically state who was getting married that day in Cana. We are left to ask, what Jesus' role was, how many of Jesus' disciples were with Him, or if there was any real biblical significance to the marriage at all. It would seem safe to assume all the disciples mentioned in St. John, chapter 1 (Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, & Nathaneal) were present, since it would be absurd for Jesus to call them follow Him and then leave them alone in just a couple of days. (Remember that Nathaneal was from Cana of Galilee and may have also known the bridal party). **Any speculation beyond what is given as scripture should be considered just that and not taught as doctrine.**