

Facts About Wedding Celebrations

'Rebekah looked up and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. She asked Abraham's servant, "Who is the man who is walking in the field to meet us?" The servant replied, "He is my master." Rebekah took her veil and covered her face. The servant told Isaac all the things he had done (to find a wife for him according to Abraham's orders). Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent and she became his wife. He loved her' (Genesis 24:64 to 67). 'There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus was invited with His disciples to the marriage' (John 2:1 & 2).

Weddings have changed dramatically over time. When Isaac and Rebekah married, their lifelong marriage began as simply as Isaac inviting Rebekah into the tent and after the relationship was consummated, they were husband and wife. There was no ceremony. By the time Jesus came to earth, weddings were massive celebrations that lasted about three days. Many people were invited, food and feasting were enjoyed and the families of the bride and groom were expected to provide accommodation for the invited guests who had travelled long distances. After sin entered the world, God allowed polygamous marriages but that was not His original intention. After Jesus came, polygamous marriages were no longer acceptable (1 Timothy 3:2; 3:12; Titus 1:6). Cultural traditions began to be adhered to as though they were important and some of those traditions are followed to the present day. In reality, no traditions are important because they are man-made. What God expects of people within marriage are the only things that matter. Some of the modern wedding celebration traditions are joyful but unimportant. Some traditions are pagan and should be avoided. Many traditions are ancient but are adhered to in our day because they have been done that way for so long, they are familiar.

The word 'wedding' began in ancient Europe. Nowadays the words 'dowry' or 'bride price' is used but the ancient Teutonic word for the bride price was 'wedd', which was the 'down payment' or 'deposit' for the bride. Most marriages were consensual, however many young women were abducted and/or forced into marriage and that still happens in some countries today where little girls are being sold. Some of the abducted brides were so traumatised and miserable, many took their own lives because they believed it was their only means of escape. The method of financially securing a bride became preferable and they were literally bought, sometimes at a high price. The groom had to vow to marry the bride whether she wanted to or not and the wedd (bride price) would usually be negotiated and agreed to by the fathers of the bride and groom or a senior male family member. The wedd could be land, social status, political gain or coins paid by the groom to the bride's father. The 'wedd' has evolved into the modern tradition of the groom's family paying for most of the wedding ceremony. Although the 'wedd' is ancient, in some countries today a girl has no choice and can be forced into marriage as a very small child as young as one year old and the marriage has to be consummated before the little girl is eight years old. Yes, this really does happen in some countries today where women and girls have no rights, no voice and no say. Today, in Afghanistan under the wicked Taliban control, very young girls are sometimes forcibly dragged screaming away from their mothers after being sold by their cruel fathers and forced into unions with old men, who are in reality, vile paedophiles. In the Bible, women are valued. 'Who can find a worthy woman? Her price is far above rubies' (Proverbs 31:10).

Bridesmaids and the Bridal Shower date back to ancient times, however the giving of gifts at bridal showers is recent and dates back to the 1890's. This event is supposed to strengthen ties between the bride, her family and her friends and to provide moral support to help her prepare herself for marriage. In ancient times, the bride was sometimes taken a long distance away from the family and the shower was a way to either say goodbye or to strengthen the relationships so the bride would have support when she had future children. A willing bride had her bridesmaids and her childhood nurse to accompany them when they left her family to join the groom. Rebekah left her parent's house in Mesopotamia with their blessings, her nurse and her 'ladies' and followed Abraham's servant back to Israel (Genesis 24:59 to 61).

A Glory Box filled with household items were kept by young women in the hope of eventually being married, even before she had met a suitable suitor. This tradition started during the rationing period after World War Two when a young woman kept household items so she would have them when she eventually married. The 'Kitchen Tea' gift giving to the bride is a very modern idea. The Hen's night is a very recent idea and began after the 1950's.

The 'Buck's Night' originated in ancient Europe and in 16th Century England, to 'Buckle' meant to unite in marriage so the 'buck's night' came before the 'buckle'. Soldiers were the first to hold buck's parties. A groom would have a party and invite his friends the night before his wedding. He would bid farewell to his bachelor life but would pledge his continued allegiance to his fellow soldiers. In modern times the buck's night is usually held a week or two before the wedding.

The tradition of a couple not seeing each other the night before their wedding dates is due to arranged marriages. The theory was and still is, if a couple saw each other before the wedding it would give them a chance to back out of the marriage, which was a terrible scandal and brought great shame to the families so they were carefully kept apart. In the countries where arranged marriages still happen, couples are sometimes allowed to meet, hold hands, get to know each other a little bit but they do not have sex until after the wedding. Some couples choose to have their wedding portraits done prior to their wedding to make their wedding day less stressful and to give them more time with their guests.

Giving the bride away dates back thousands of years to the day when God brought his newly created daughter Eve to Adam (Genesis 2:22). More recently, in a Book of Common Prayer and the Church of England written in 1549, giving a daughter away in marriage was seen more as a business transaction and the transfer of property. It was the exchange of the property from one owner to the next and love was not considered to be important. Women were considered to be the property of men, first her father then her husband. That has evolved into a friendlier act of the father or male relative walking a bride down the aisle to meet up with her husband.

The White Wedding Gown and a veil were once a sign the bride was a virgin (Genesis 24:65). She would demurely cover her face with a veil which the groom could remove after the marriage ceremony was completed. In 1499 a young woman known as Anne of Brittany wore a new white wedding dress. A white dress became an accepted tradition when Queen Victoria wore a new glistening white gown for her wedding to Prince Albert in 1840. Prior to Queen Victoria's wedding, a bride wore a dress of any chosen colour and the dress could have been an old dress in good condition. The new white wedding dress with veil and train designed to be used only once is a very new tradition. Sometimes a Scottish bride will wear a white dress with sash made of her family's tartan draped over one shoulder or around her waist. There will be more about the importance of special white linen wedding attire later in this article.

Wedding Rings and other gifts of jewellery have been popular for centuries. Gold or silver rings were once used as currency prior to coins being minted and were a sign of wealth. In ancient Europe gold rings became a symbol of love and commitment in marriage and the ring was often etched with two clasping hands. The tradition of wearing the rings on the third finger is a very, very ancient tradition dating back to the Vikings. Ancient Europeans believed the third finger, now called the ring finger was directly connected to the heart via a vein called the 'vein of love' so the ring had to fit the third finger on the left hand. In pagan beliefs, wedding rings were erroneously believed to protect the bride from evil spirits. Wedding rings and other gifts were first mentioned in the Bible thousands of years ago. It was not Isaac who gave the wedding ring to his future bride Rebekah, it was Abraham's servant. 'Abraham's servant took a golden ring weighing half a shekel (approx 1/4 ounce) and two golden bracelets weighing ten shekels (approx 4 ounces)' (Genesis 24:22 & 30).

The tradition of wearing something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue is a very English tradition. The 'something old' signified continuity and it could be fabric, jewellery or an heirloom. 'Something new' signified an optimistic future and could be fabric or the wedding rings. 'Something borrowed' signified friendship and could be any item borrowed from a friend or a family member. 'Something blue' signified modesty, purity, fidelity and love and originates with Jewish weddings. In the Bible, blue, not white, signifies purity (Exodus 28:37). Sometimes, both the bride and groom wear a sash of blue on their wedding attire.

The modern tradition of smashing a glass or vase during weddings began after November 9th, 1938 to remember the 'Night of Broken Glass' or 'Kristallnacht' when thousands of innocent Jewish people were murdered in a ghetto by the order of Hitler, and so began the insane, cruel slaughter of millions of European Jewish people in concentration camps around Europe. When Gentiles break a glass at their wedding it should never be done joyously but they should always remember the terrible wrongs done to the Jewish people during the Second World War. Anti-Semitism, racism and hatred are never acceptable anywhere or at any time.

The Wedding Breakfast is so-called because it is the very first meal the bride and groom take together as husband and wife and is a new tradition that began in the 1950's. Before that time a wedding was often held at the bride's family home and guests would number according to the financial status of the bride's family. Very wealthy or royal weddings have been held in vast halls for centuries but weddings for the average couple were not held in halls until recently. There will be more about an important marriage supper later in this article.

The Wedding Cake was first seen in ancient Europe during the Roman Empire and was decorated with icons of fertility to symbolise fruitfulness, which were then an integral part of the wedding ceremony. Part of the cake was either tossed at the bride or crumbled over her head hoping she would be able to bear many

children. Some couples today still do that playfully without knowing the original ancient custom. Queen Victoria chose to top her wedding cake with tiny sculptures of herself and Prince Albert. From then onwards, some couples choose to have a tiny edible 'bride and groom' statuette placed atop their cake.

The Wedding Bouquet made of newly picked flowers is a symbol of fertility. Throwing it was supposed to bring about a wedding for another couple. In ancient Europe, taking a portion of the bride's clothing was supposed to bring along a groom for another unmarried bride. Unmarried women would literally destroy the bride's dress by tearing off pieces of fabric. From about the 14th Century to stop this happening brides would throw various items to the women such as flowers from her bouquet or her garter. This evolved into the recent tradition of the groom taking off the garter to toss it to the male guests and the bride now tosses her whole bouquet to the single ladies.

Wedding Bells were chimed in Europe to ward off evil spirits and to be sure the marriage would be happy and harmonious. Some brides sewed tiny bells to their bouquets or wore them around their ankles. Even today, wedding bells are often part of the wedding decorations. Golden bells were part of the Jewish High Priests clothing during religious ceremonies but were not used for weddings (Exodus 28:33).

The Bridal Waltz originated in 17th Century Europe. Royal weddings or those of wealthy families were grand events and it was the custom of the hosts or guests of honour to have the first dance of the evening, usually a waltz. Once the first dance was completed all the guests were free to elegantly join them on the dance floor. The first dance was a dramatic opening for high society with everyone dressed in their most formal attire. These opening dances were eventually accepted into weddings.

The Best Man was originally a player in the most horrific part of the ancient wedding culture. A bride and groom usually married from within their own community but when a man wanted to marry a girl from another tribe he would sometimes abduct her. His 'best man', the strongest, fittest friend or brother would aide him in this abduction and forced marriage. Once the young woman had been forcibly 'deflowered' ancient customs dictated she could never return to her family and she was trapped for life, happy or miserable. Sometimes her family was sympathetic and took the girl back but she could never marry. The family of the poor young victim sometimes took revenge on the groom by killing him. Sometimes the groom's entire family were killed which is what happened in the ancient past (Genesis 34:1 to 26; 2 Samuel 13:1 to 33).

The tradition of carrying the bride over the threshold began as a superstition in medieval Europe when people believed a bride was vulnerable to evil spirits entering her through her feet! To avoid bringing evil spirits into the house the groom carried the bride into their new home. Actually, carrying her into the house started when she was abducted and knowing she was going to be raped she often put up a terrible, screaming fight and would not enter the house willingly so she was forcibly carried.

An ancient 'honeymoon' began after the girl had been abducted although it was not called a honeymoon in those days. After abducting his young bride the groom would sometimes take her into hiding so the girl's family could not stop what was effectively rape. By the time the bride's family located them, it would be too late. Often the girl was held like a prisoner for months until she became pregnant then the 'wedd' would be negotiated. So much for a happy honeymoon! The English word 'honeymoon' was first used in 1546. In a consensual marriage, the modern style honeymoon originated in the 18th century as newlyweds would travel to visit family who had not been able to attend their wedding. In 1791 a honeymoon was considered to be 'a post-wedding holiday in mutual happiness and innocent enjoyments'. In the Bible, a couple enjoyed their honeymoon for an entire year. 'When a man takes a new wife, he will not go out in the army nor will he be assigned any business. He will be free at home for one year to enjoy his new wife' (Deuteronomy 24:5).

With all of these traditions, superstitions, ceremonies and cultural influences aside, when did marriage originate? Marriage originated when Adam and Eve first met in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:22), which was created by God solely to have a cosy home prepared for humanity to live comfortably (Genesis 2:8). Where did marriage originate? In the Garden of Eden. Whose idea was it to have wedding ceremonies? Humans invented wedding ceremonies thousands of years ago but there is no record of the very first one. Many people will be surprised to learn it was our Creator God Who instigated the commitment within marriage as more than just taking vows. Earthly marriage is a Spiritual covenant, an example for all mankind to follow (Malachi 2:14), a forerunner to the glorious Bride of our Messiah, Jesus. That is why violence in marriage, forced marriages and same-sex marriage is not acceptable according to God's rules. Those sinful actions undermine the glorious final 'Marriage' of the Groom, Jesus and His holy Bride of the Covenant. Earthly marriage should be to us, more than just a piece of paper, it is a holy covenant witnessed by God and adhered to all of our lives. One man and one woman joined together in holy matrimony. 'From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. A man will leave his father and mother and will join to his wife and the two will become one flesh, so they are no longer two but one flesh. What God has

joined together let no man separate' (Mark 10:6 to 9). In the eyes of God, homosexuality is unnatural and sinful. 'God gave them up to vile passions. Their women changed the natural function into that which is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men doing what is inappropriate with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error' (Romans 1:26 & 27). 'Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, in the same way as these, given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh (homosexuality and lesbianism) are set forth as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire' (Jude 1:7).

What is more surprising, God witnesses every wedding and takes note of a good relationship. A husband is not to deal treacherously with his wife in any way. He is not allowed to be violent towards her and must exercise self-control. Men are to love their wives and be good to them or their prayers will be hindered (Ephesians 5:25 & 28; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7) and fathers are to deal kindly with their children, not provoke them and not discourage them (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). God wants a loving stable environment for children to grow up and flourish physically and emotionally. Originally, God's plan was for one man and one woman committed to each other in marriage for life, living in harmony and unity, the husband to provide for the family and the wife to nurture and together raise healthy Godly children. 'God has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously though she is your companion and the wife of your covenant. He made you one to continue your spiritual blood-family. Why one? He sought Godly children. Therefore take heed to your spirit (exercise self-control) and let no man deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. "I hate divorce and he who covers his wife with violence! Therefore take heed to your spirit (control yourself) so you do not deal treacherously with your wife"' (Malachi 2:14 to 16).

God only allowed divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of some people but from the beginning that was never His plan (Matthew 19:7 & 8). Another thing God always insists on is the woman must be willing to marry the intended groom. She must never be forced into marriage. A small snippet of a much longer story is included here. 'What if the woman is not willing? ... If the woman is not willing then that is the end of the matter ... If the woman will not follow ... Then she is cleared ... Call the young lady and ask her ... Will you go with this man? She answered, "I will go"' (Genesis 24:5 & 8, 39 & 41, 57 & 58). Forced marriages are never acceptable to God because God never forces anyone to unite with His Son Jesus. One day, marriage on earth will cease forever and will be replaced by the covenant relationship with Jesus. 'The voice of the bridegroom and of the bride will be heard no more at all in you (humans)' (Revelation 18:23). 'The children of this age (on earth) marry and are given in marriage but those who are considered worthy to attain to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage' (Luke 20:34 & 35). Marriage has to be between two willing partners just like the Marriage with the Lamb of God has to be a willing partnership. 'The Holy Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" He who hears let him say, "Come!" He who is thirsty let him come. Those who desire (chooses, wants to) let them take the water of life freely' (Revelation 22:17). The Marriage Supper of the Lamb will occur after the first resurrection and only people who have been Spiritually cleansed by accepting Jesus, been born-again, had their sins forgiven and washed away by baptism in full immersion in water, will be invited to the Supper. Only Jewish people and genuine committed Christians will be invited to the Wedding of the Lamb. No unbeliever or wicked person will be invited to the Marriage Supper of Jesus but will be locked out (Luke 13:25; Revelation 22:15). This is the time when special white linen wedding attire and a marriage supper are important to our eternity. Those who have served God and have lived righteous lives will enjoy, 'The Marriage Supper of the Lamb'. 'Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad and let us give the glory to God for the Marriage of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready. She was given permission to array herself in bright, pure, fine linen. The fine linen is the righteous acts of God's faithful. Blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:7 to 9).

When Jesus comes to accept His Bride, it will be a very sudden event and only those who are Spiritually prepared will be invited (Matthew 25:1 to 46). God has given us His guidelines so we can prepare ourselves to be part of the holy Marriage Feast. To prepare ourselves we must be born-again (John 3:3, 5 to 7) and walk righteously every day of our lives. We must serve Him in obedience (John 14:15). If people fall away from the Lord during their lifetime they may be rejected. 'If a person does not remain in Me, they are thrown out as a branch ... the holy angels will gather them and throw them into the eternal fire and they will be burned' (John 15:6). If we willingly fulfil God's criteria, we will have a glorious eternal life. 'The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all mankind, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and Godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus our Messiah, Who gave Himself for us so He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession' (Titus 2:11 to 14).

Amen and God bless you.

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