

IN DE-FENCE OF MARRIAGE

How the Biblical foundations of marriage help us to understand the importance of a relationship with God

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Clearly we live in a day when many people are changing their view on marriage, including many Christians who are abandoning biblical foundations. It comes down to an acceptance or a rejection of the Bible being the authoritative Word of God. For that reason, it is imperative for anyone claiming to have a faith in God to have a clear understanding of the nature of marriage as it was ordained by Him, the One who came up with the idea of marriage in the first place.

For a truly inductive approach where you derive conclusions based on biblical facts, not your desires or arbitrary opinions, you first have to consider the way that the Hebrew language communicates meaning. That is especially important for an understanding of marriage, because the original instructions were given in Hebrew.

SINAITIC SCRIPT	DESCRIPTION OF SIGN	CANAANITE SCRIPT OF 13TH CENT BC	PHOENICIAN SCRIPT OF 8TH CENT BC	MODERN HEBREW SCRIPT	HEBREW NAME
	OX HEAD				ALEPH
	HOUSE				BEIT
	CAMEL				GIMEL
	FISH				DALET
	BEHOLD				HE
	NAIL				VAV
	SWORD				ZAYIN
	FENCE				CHET
	SNAKE				TET
	OPEN HAND				YOD
	CLOSED HAND				KAPH
	OX GOAD				LAMED
	WATER				MEM
	SERPENT				NUN
	PROP				SAMEKH
	EYE				AYIN
	MOUTH				PE
	FISH HOOK				TSADHE
	BACK OF HEAD				QOPH
	MAN'S HEAD				RESH
	TOOTH				SHIN
	MARK OF CROSS				TAV

The evolution of the alphabet among the civilized world is well documented. The first forms of writing, like Egyptian hieroglyphics, were highly pictographic in nature, and were fairly detailed. The first primitive alphabet that emerged from hieroglyphics is called the Sinaitic or Proto-Sinaitic script. The symbols were still somewhat pictographic, but with far less detail, and the sounds they represented could be combined into words. It was created around the time that the people of Israel became slaves in Egypt.

By the time they were freed from slavery 400 years later, written language had evolved into the Canaanite and Phoenician scripts that are shown in the middle columns on the chart on this page. The Israelites adopted the Phoenician script for their language of Hebrew, so that when Moses wrote the Torah, it would have been using those characters (also called Paleo Hebrew).

So different people groups were using the same Phoenician alphabet for their respective languages. That

continued until the time of Ezra when a new version of those letters called the Ashuri script was adopted, and that became the modern Hebrew script that has continued on until today.

It is helpful to consider the shapes of the original Sinaitic script and to compare them to the modern version, because it enables us to understand foundational meaning behind the words that use those particular characters. Here are a few selected letters and the objects that served as their root meanings:

- The letter **ב** *Beit* – from the word **בַּיִת** *bayit*, meaning “house”
- The letter **ה** *Heh* – from the word **הִנֵּה** *hine*, meaning “a man with arms raised saying, ‘hey!’”
- The letter **מ** *Mem* – from the word **מַיִם** *mayim*, meaning “water”
- The letter **ר** *Resh* – from the word **רֹאשׁ** *rosh*, meaning “head”
- The letter **שׁ** *Shin* – from the word **שֵׁן** *shen*, meaning “tooth”
- The letter **ח** *Chet* – from the word **חָיִץ** *chayitz*, meaning “fence, wall, enclosure”

One of the trends inherent in Hebrew is that a notable percentage of words that begin with a particular letter will be related in some way to the basic meaning behind that letter. To say it another way, the first letter often sets the foundation for the meaning of a Hebrew word. For example, words that begin with the letter **ב** *beit*, which is derived from the word for “house,” tend to refer to things or ideas of an inward nature, like someone dwelling inside a house.

And so it goes with each of the 22 consonants of Hebrew. But it is especially true when it comes to the letter **ח** *chet* (pronounced with a guttural “h” sound). Because it is symbolized by a fence or wall, words that begin with **ח** *chet* tend to be associated with ideas of “enclosures, boundaries, hiding and protection.”

One of those words is **חֹבֶל** *chov*, meaning “bosom.” In this word you have letters that give the sense of enclosing (**ח**) something that is inward (**ב**). In the Bible and Hebraic thinking, the bosom is an inward enclosure of the heart, so it is synonymous with the chest.

Several other words are derived from this base:

- חָבֵא** *chava* – “hidden” (just as your heart is hidden in your bosom/chest).
- חָבַב** *chavav* – “cherish” (you cherish something or someone when you hide them in your heart).
- חָבַק** *chavaq* – “embrace” (you press your bosom against someone else when you embrace).
- חָבַר** *chavar* – “couple, join together” (when your embrace goes beyond a simple hug, it implies joining together and becoming a couple).
- חֶדֶר** *cheder* – “chamber, inner room” (this kind of enclosure can refer literally to an apartment, or symbolically for one’s inward parts).
- חֻפָּה** *chuppah* – “canopy” (an enclosure under which a wedding ceremony is performed in the Jewish culture).
- חָתָן** *chatan* – “groom, bridegroom.”

It is significant to note that the meaning of “enclosure” is consistently associated with concepts related to marriage. In biblical times the groom (*chatan*) would make an agreement with the father of the bride as to how her family would be compensated for the loss of her services. The terms were recorded in a contract called a *ketubah*. So the groom gets his name (*chatan*) because he is not only being joined (*chavar*) to his bride but to his father-in-law.

After an initial ceremony called the *erusin*, a betrothal period began in which the bride

was hidden (*chava*) from the groom, who, at the same time, returns to his father's house where he prepares a chamber (*cheder*) to serve as a future dwelling place for he and his bride. Later the father of the groom sends him to claim his bride and to finalize the marriage in a second ceremony called the *nisuin*. At that point they meet beneath a canopy (*chuppah*) where they exchange their vows, including a declaration to cherish (*chavav*) one another. And they are permitted to embrace (*chavaq*) and to kiss.

That is a lot of related meaning that arises from the simple concept of a fence or enclosure. And there is no coincidence that the language of biblical marriage is connected in this way, because our God is not a God of coincidence, but of purpose. He has a purpose behind everything He does, including the way that He has ordained marriage.

Surely there is a principle behind marriage that goes beyond the simple notion of spending your life with another person, bringing children into the world, and being able to file jointly on your income tax return. Like something hidden (*chava*), it is a principle that is not readily apparent and is often overlooked. But when we look at the underlying meaning of the text, a very important principle emerges that speaks directly to the way that we ought to view marriage in our modern setting. What, then, has God hidden or enclosed in the practice of marriage?

From the very beginning, we were made for relationship. As part of the Creation account in the book of Genesis, we are told:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:26-27).

The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is a plural word used in a singular sense. In this verse, God is revealing part of His complex nature that as human beings we can't fully comprehend. But we do know from the greater context of Scripture that He is manifested in three ways as *Abba* (Father), *Mashiach* (the Messiah as God's Son), and the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit). Thus according to His very nature, God *is* a relationship. And He can quite literally say, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness.”

The word image has the underlying meaning of a shadow. And likeness has to do with the idea of a comparison. In other words, we have been made with some of the characteristics of God like unique personality and the ability to relate to others, but without the full sense of divinity. So the important thing for our consideration today is that since we are made in His image and likeness, we, too, are made for relationship. The question we might ask, then, is “What kind of relationship ought that to be?”

When God made Adam and placed him in Eden, he was given the job of taking care of the garden, and no doubt that was a lovely place to live. But you can't live alone if you are created in the image of God and thus made to be relational. So God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18).

The word translated as “helper” comes from a root that is used through Scripture in the sense of providing “strength” and “rescue.” It is used of God in Ps. 121:2 where it says, “my help comes from the Lord.” So the word should not be thought of in a subservient sense, just as we would not think of God being subservient to us. It is a picture of complementary resources and capability. When God speaks of a woman being a helper to a man, based on the underlying meaning of the word, she is the perfect complement to him through marriage, offering a source of strength that is not available to either of them when alone.

There is also an aspect to this word of being a rescuer—providing a solution to some kind

of a problem. The parallel is to the way that God rescued David in Ps. 70, using this same word translated as “help.” Anyone who has been married for some time can attest how our spouses have rescued us in some manner. The point is that God brings together a man and woman in marriage so that together they can help one another in difficult times, and to grow and function in a way that they cannot do separately. Those are characteristics of relationships.

We know also the Bible says that God formed the woman from one of the man’s ribs (Gen. 2:21). But she is not an exact clone. She’s enough like him to be intimate, but different enough to be complementary and necessary. So the relationship between a man and a woman is designed to be both harmonious by nature and diverse by function. And that is consistent with being created in the likeness of God. The relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit is like a divine three-part harmony. The same kind of harmony in diversity is intended in marriage.

In the book of Genesis the creation of the woman takes place somewhere in a location that is away from the man. And then God brings her to the man, which is like a father bringing a bride to a groom. She is in a different place and has to be brought to the man in order for a relationship to be established. And when they are brought together, in Gen. 2:24 God called that becoming **בָּשָׂר אֶחָד** *basar echad* – “one flesh.”

So just as traditional declaration of Judaism known as the *Shema* affirms that God is *echad*, meaning a composite unity (Deut. 6:4), a marriage is also a unity of a man and a woman—three persons united as one in the godhead and two persons united as one in a marriage. All this to say that we are able to fulfill our unique capability of forming a deep and enduring relationship, just as God is a relationship. and that is possible because we are created in His image and likeness.

Let it be said that it is the love of God for His highest expression of Creation—human beings—that led Him to provide the solution to our separation from Him by providing atonement through Yeshua, so that we all might share in the kind of relationship with God that He has always intended. Ultimately that is what God is communicating to us through the institution of marriage—it is a picture of the relationship *He* desires to have with *us*, made possible through our salvation. And as such, it is something that needs to be communicated without confusion. We are not to be wed to ourselves or to someone like ourselves, because that would represent relying on ourselves for our salvation, which is something we can never do. We need Yeshua for that.

That is the reason why Yeshua is depicted as the bridegroom in Scripture. It is a metaphor that depicts the kind of relationship that God desires to have with us:

- The prophets spoke of a day when faithful people would be wedded to Adonai.
“I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion” (Hosea 2:19)
- In Yeshua identified Himself as the bridegroom and the kind of relationship he has with his bride who believes in Him:
“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full” (John 3:29).
- Paul showed in Eph. 5:22-33 that there is a direct parallel between the relationship of the groom to the bride and the believing community of the church to Messiah. And he based that argument on the words from Gen. 2 where a man and a woman become “one flesh.” Paul also wrote in 2 Cor. 11:2 that like the enduring bond of marriage, believers are betrothed to “one husband” so that we might be presented to God “as a pure virgin.”

There is a strong correlation between not understanding the exclusive nature of marriage as God ordained and not understanding the exclusive nature of salvation through Yeshua. It is very informative that the same voices who are crying out for a new definition of marriage are likewise advocating an “anything goes kind of faith.” Be married to any other human being without any restriction. Believe in any god or gods or no god at all. It’s all good in their eyes.

But is it all good in the eyes of Creator of the universe? He has made it very clear, “I am YHWH, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another” (Isaiah 42:8).

For that reason, God gave us a practical, real-world example in the practice of marriage of the pure kind of relationship that He desires to have with us. He placed a fence around it, enclosing these truths in a custom that is near to His heart. When we preserve the practice in purity and consistency with His original intent, we bring glory to His name. But when we confuse the issue, it is like bursting through the fence, leaving it in tatters and the precious content that it protects vulnerable to loss.

We are witnessing the very breaking of the fence right now today in our midst. That is, except in a few places where people are standing up for righteousness, regardless of what others say or do around us.

A day is coming when we will stand before the most Supreme Judge of all. And we will be called to give an accounting of our lives. It will be our relationship with Yeshua that will spare us condemnation. When we believe in Him as Messiah and our atonement for sin, we will be welcomed into His presence, within a dwelling place that He has already prepared for us. And just like there is a celebration that meets God’s favor every time a man and a woman become united in marriage here on earth, in that day in eternity future, we will experience the blessing recorded by John:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, These are true words of God” (Rev. 19:7-9).

We need to remember those final words, regardless of what our nation or the world might desire and uphold. We have been given a valid defense of marriage, indeed a “de-fence” around marriage that encloses and protects its inner message—namely that God desires to have a personal relationship with us through Yeshua. And those are surely *the* true words of God.