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**ORIENTALISMS IN THE BIBLE**  
**"ORIENTAL CUSTOMS IN RELATION TO THE BIBLE AS**  
**RELATED WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE**  
**TO WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS"**

**A Thesis**  
**Presented to**  
**the Faculty of**  
**Asbury Theological Seminary**

**In Partial Fulfillment**  
**of the Requirements for the Degree**  
**Bachelor of Divinity**

**by**  
**Alfred Gaurishanker Bhatt**  
**June 1953**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Each man has his or her own individuality or peculiar way of presenting truths. This way also is true of writers and institutions. The writer was privileged to have been reared and trained in India, where a variety of customs and ceremonies are found, this being a country of many languages, customs, castes and religions.

This being the background the writer has the great privilege to study and understand the two ceremonies as found in other neighbouring Oriental countries. Also he being the son of a convert to Christianity from the Brahmin (priestly family) sect, has been well informed on Hinduism.

He wants to express his gratitude and deep appreciation to the Methodist Church in India, for giving him about sixteen years effective ministerial service, which has really contributed in his life the practical interpretation of the subject of the thesis.

Also he wants to express his great love and appreciation to his dear wife, who is a real help and partner and a source of inspiration in the treatment of this subject.

He wishes to acknowledge his gratitude first and foremost to the Lord for His encouragement, light, and



guidance as to the subject and development of the thesis;  
also Professor George Allen Turner for his counsel in its  
preparation and Asbury Theological Seminary.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. SUBJECT STATED

The main subject is "Orientalisms in the Bible." To be more exact and clear let us word the theme as "Oriental customs in relation to the Bible as related with special reference to weddings and funerals."

#### II. JUSTIFICATION

The main object of the thesis is to study Oriental customs of marriage and funeral in relation to customs in the Bible. In other words we might state, what more can an Oriental get from the Bible (both Old Testament and New Testament) than the Occidental. Also the purpose is to attempt to make a comparative study of both Eastern and Western countries and to show how the Eastern countries can help the Western countries to better understand Biblical customs. To be more specific we might state how that in the best way the East can make the best contribution to the Western form of both thought and interpretation in order to better understand the Holy Bible in relation to Oriental customs such as weddings and funerals.

### III. LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

We are aware of the fact that this world of ours includes many continents and countries. Hence we have a variety of both geographical and historical divisions. Again we have manifold groups of people having for their communication in life several languages and customs. It is in this latter subject that we are interested. Among many interesting customs of the Oriental countries, I propose to take two customs: (1) wedding ceremonies, and (2) funeral ceremonies.

Now to apprehend the problem, let me put my ideas as follows: In many of the Oriental countries these two ceremonies are very interesting and hence always attract our keen attention, which we will study in the proper place in the body of the thesis. But the main question to be discussed is about the wrong belief and the wrong and superfluous ceremonies. The writer has studied at length with manifold details to realize the great handicaps and shortcomings of such countries both physically, socially and spiritually.

God is the creator of the earth and of all that is contained in the earth and in the heavens. Yes, He is the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of mankind. He cares for us and He truly loves us as His own sons and daughters.

For our hope and salvation He gave His only begotten son. Also His word is the Holy Scriptures. The Bible (both Old Testament and New Testament) is a lamp unto our feet in the words of the great Psalmist David.

The ceremonies as such are full of doubts, superstitions and uncertainty and the only solution which can be sought is from the Bible. Of course the Bible is the great and mighty help, which can give comfort, enlightenment, and above all the great promise of hope and salvation offered by Jesus Christ for each individual, home, family, community and the whole world.

#### IV. LIMITATION

Our present topic is very inclusive, hence a special care will be taken to avoid details. The main thought and concern will be the real study of the Oriental customs in the light of the Bible, and to help the Western countries to better understand the Bible in relation to wedding and marriage ceremonies.

#### V. TERMS DEFINED

Marriage. 1. (a) The condition of being a husband or wife; the relation between married persons, spousehood, wedlock. (b) Marriage now, and (c) in the matrimonial state. (d) Communal marriage, Plural marriage, polygamy.

2. (a) Entrance into wedlock, the action or act of marrying--a ceremony, or procedure by which two persons are made husband and wife. (b) The nuptial ceremony together with the accompanying festivities; a wedding.

3. A particular international alliance or union.  
(a) A cross marriage, applied to the marriage of a man to the sister of his sister's husband.

4. Marriage blessing, bond, ceremony, choice, contrast, covenant, dinner, dowry, dues, duty, faith, tie, treaty, vow, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Death. The act or fact of dying; the end of life; the final cessation of the vital functions of an animal or plant or of an individual.<sup>2</sup>

Funeral. 1. Pertaining to the ceremonial burial (or cremation) of the dead; used, observed, delivered etc. at a burial.

2. The ceremonies connected with the burial (or cremation etc.) of the body of the dead person; obsequies, burial, (or its equivalent) with the attendant observances.

3. Funeral sermon

4. A burial procession

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's New International Dictionary, 2nd edition, p. 1506.

<sup>2</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. IV.

5. In various indefinite applications; (a) death, (b) grave, (c) monument.

6. As funeral biscuit, boat, cake, cup, party, undertaker.

7. To bury, to mourn for the dead.<sup>3</sup>

Ceremony. 1. A formal act or series of acts; often of a symbolical character, prescribed by law, custom, or authority, in the conduct of important matters, as in the performance of religious duties, the transaction of affairs of state and the celebration of notable events, as in the crowning of a sovereign, the consecration of a church.

2. A formal or conventional act of civility on etiquette.

3. Disparagingly--a mere outward form, a mere ceremony.

4. (a) Archaic--ceremonial pomp, state or display; (b) a ceremonial symbol as a crown or scepter; (c) a sign, a prodigy, a portent.

5. Ceremonial observance or usage collectively--or an established order, ritual observance, the social behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

6. Any stated formation as a parade or review.<sup>4</sup>

To sum up we see that ceremony is more specific than form, and implies some outward acts, usually of an impressive or dignified character associated with some religious, public, or state occasion--such as the marriage ceremony.

## VI. PROCEDURE

The subject of the theme is twofold, and each one is a vast subject in itself. For the proper treatment of the subject it is better to take both the customs separately; the order will be the marriage ceremonies first and the funeral ceremonies second. The study of each of the customs or ceremonies will naturally involve a great many details and if an earnest and sincere attempt is made it will form two volumes, one for each. But that is not our aim in the approach of the treatment of the subject as such. As it has been stated in the beginning of the introduction, we are to attempt a study of the ceremonies as they exist in present day form, and by underlining both the advantages and disadvantages and locating and recognizing the weak points and shortcomings, make an earnest and strong appeal to the Oriental countries

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

to seek better help and interpretation from the Bible, whose author is God--our God, the creator, sustainer, and redeemer.

For a better understanding of the subject to be discussed and studied, special attention and care will be given in following the logical approach under special divisions, headings and subheadings.

## CHAPTER II

### MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

#### I. COURTSHIP

"And Jacob served for seven years for Rachel and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." (Genesis 29:20)

"And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel (Genesis 34:3)."

"And he went down, and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson well." (Judges 14:7)

The study of anthropology in relation to culture is very useful in order to understand the question of marriage. Marriage is a social institution. This institution of marriage has probably developed out of primeval habit. It was customary among the primitives for a man and a woman (or several women) to live together, to have sexual relations with one another, and to rear their offspring in common. The man is to be called the protector and supporter of his family, and the wife is to be called his helpmate and the nurse of their children. This habit was sanctioned by custom, and afterwards, as time went on, by law, thus being transformed into a social institution.



Thus it is universally believed that marriage is a union of man and woman. Marriage is deeply rooted in the family rather than the family in marriage. It is very interesting to study marriage biologically, sociologically, and historically. But we shall not take up these issues now. Our study in the first part of the chapter will be mainly COURTSHIP made in Oriental countries in relation to the Bible and the Western countries.

With the Hebrews married life was the normal life. It was the belief among them that "Any Jew who has not a wife is no man." (Talmud) Marriage was regarded as awaiting everyone on reaching eligible age for marriage. Sexual maturity comes much earlier in the East than in the West, because of the climate. Thus the ancient Hebrews like the rest of the Orientals, regarded the family as the social unit. Much detailed study with the help of the sociologists will bear out the fact that the family is the social unit.

There are three great events in the family life: birth, marriage and death. Marriage was regarded as the most important event. It is a universally accepted truth. Of course the customs and ceremonies may vary as we will see from time to time, but the fact is just the same all over the world, both in the Oriental and Occidental countries.

The study on courtship can conveniently be made under the following subheads:

1. Courtship by capture
2. Courtship by purchase
3. Courtship of true romance
4. Courtship by parents being responsible

Courtship by capture. Courtship is the preliminary aspect or step of marriage. The Scripture verses at the beginning of the chapter help us to understand that courtship is illustrated in the times of the Old Testament. In Western countries there is much freedom, compared with the Eastern countries, among the young people in the matter of courting. It is so in all European countries, because of the coeducation and a different outlook and education on the whole question of marriage. In most of the Eastern countries the marriages are generally arranged by either guardians or parents, while in the Western countries they are mutually arranged on a purely romantic basis.

Once Madam Vijayalaxmi Pandit, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister of India, was asked a question by an American inquirer about courting in her country India. To his great astonishment and surprise she said, "In our country love begins after the marriage

ceremony, while in Western countries love begins before marriage." This sounds very strange to a western mind, but it is the common practice in most of the Oriental countries. There are always found advantages and disadvantages in the custom. Yet to the Oriental man, his custom is ideal.

Courtship by capture, though not very common among the Hebrews is found in rare cases here and there, especially in Judges. There are two references of capture: "Have they not divided the prey! To every man a damsel or two" (Judges 5:30), and "She...; the virgins her companions...shall be brought unto thee" (Psalms 46:14). In several other cases this method is hidden or overshadowed by other customs. Today in some of the Oriental countries this custom is very prevalent, especially among the Mohammedans. Recently when India received her independence, and Britain left her rulership over India according to the agreements, the question of making jurisdiction came between India and Pakistan. It is stated that while making adjustments the Moslems went to the extent, as they are sensual and fanatic, of kidnapping hundreds of Hindu women, especially young girls. Among many reasons of enmity between the two newly formed kingdoms one was capturing and kidnapping.

In India amongst the Kshatryas, one of the four castes (groups) of people God created on Earth, the marriage ceremony often involved the idea of capture. A young Kshatriya might obtain a wife by carrying away the daughter of another Kshatriya; but before doing so the law and custom required that he should have defeated her parents and kinsmen in open battle field. Here I give a couple of outstanding and historical stories of marriage by capture, which are very interesting:

1. **Swayamvara of Draupdi:** The story of Pandvas and Kavravas is given in Vedic Aryan tradition. There was a king in the neighbourhood who was about to celebrate a swa mvara for the marriage of his daughter, Draupdi. The delicate question of marriage was to be settled by an archery match, which sounds strange to the Occidental people. Pandavas came on the appointed day. They disguised themselves as Brahmas. The story of the simple ceremony was accepted by the tradition and is very interesting. The brother of Draupdi placed the nuptial garland in her hand, and led her, proclaiming to all present that she would be given in marriage to the fortunate archer who succeeded in striking a particular mark, which is an artificial fish twirling around on the top of a pole. Many aspiring young men attempted to strike. The ambitious Karna entered the list, but was not allowed to shoot, as the damsel declared that she would not marry a man of such mean birth. Finally, Arjuna stepped forward, drew his bow and struck the fish, and Draupdi pleased with his appearance threw the garland around his neck, and allowed him to lead her away as his wife.<sup>5</sup>

2. **Marriage of Rama and Sita:** The story of the marriage is a curious relic of old Hindu life. Rama paid a visit to Mithla at an early age and found that

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<sup>5</sup> J. Talboys Wheeler, The History of India, Hindus, Buddhists, and Brahmanical (London:), p. 23.

Sita was to be given in marriage to the hero, who had just succeeded in bending a certain enormous bow. Many aspiring and keen young men had tried, but failed with disappointment. Rama bent it with ease and pride, and thus obtained the beautiful bride Sita. The marriage rites were performed by Raja (King) Janka, the father of Sita. The sacred fire was burning in the altar and Rama was conducted to it by a procession of friends and kinsmen, and stood at the north east corner of the altar. Janka then brought his daughter and placed her by the side of the bridegroom. Rama took her by the hand in the presence of the fire deity, and accepted her as his wife. The couple were sprinkled with water, which has been consecrated by the utterance of Vedic hymns. As a sign of the marriage tie, one ceremony was that of bringing one end of the "Sari" the bride's dress and one end of the "Thiti" the man's costume and joining them with a knot, while doing ceremonial walking three times around the altar. The singing of women, and sounding of trumpets were the signs of announcement that the marriage was over.

In continuation with this story it will be proper to mention the act of kidnapping or capture of the wife of Rama. Immediately after the marriage Rama was required to go to the forest and the circumstances demanded that his wife Sita should remain at home, as she would not be able to stand the hard and rough journey and all the suffering and inconvenience that it would involve. Here is the thing which happened. A neighbouring king Ravana came with his army and took away Sita, and as a result to that flight there was a big war.

Even today we have happenings of captures and kidnapping among the aboriginal tribes and some warrior classes in India irrespective of castes or religions.

Courtship by Purchase. This custom was found amongst the Hebrews, as it is well illustrated in the Old Testament. Abraham gave costly gifts and materials to get a wife for Isaac. Similarly Jacob gave plenty of gifts for Rebecca. It is equally true in various Oriental countries. There is much overlapping between the act of giving dowry (mohar) and the act of purchase. In many cases there is not much difference made, because eventually it comes to the same thing for demanding money and land or in other forms as a price for the bride. Again I would stress the point of how it is true in a country like India among the various caste and religious groups. It is in other Eastern countries like China, Korea, and the Philippines. It is a great curse to the young people proposed to be married and not a blessing. It is a curse in two ways:

1. When the parents look to the money aspect, there is a constant fear of giving the daughter in marriage to an unequal suitor or match in age, appearance and talents. And the girl lives an unhappy life till she dies. Because there is the psychology that she has been purchased, she receives the treatment as a slave and servant. There is not much of mutual love and consent in all things. The husband may exhibit the love aspect, but very often he and his parents, and more so the mother-in-law bosses over the poor bride. They expect her to work hard in the

kitchen, in the house, and all these things create a sort of inferiority complex in the mind of the bride as purchased.

2. The second thing of study is that it is considered as a curse because in the majority of the cases, and always in the poor cases, financially the expense or the cost paid for the bride is arranged by the parents of the bridegroom (on making debt). It is understood between the parents and the bridegroom that he will be responsible for paying off the debts. Incidentally in the joint family system that burden comes to the newly married couple and that, of course, includes the bride. Literally it becomes the great financial burden of the bride. So there is not much sense and meaning for the wife. She lives a miserable life, and when the burden of having children is added it is nothing but a vivid picture of worry, starvation and suffering. Hence, I call it a curse.

In the present day the well wishers and reformers have started a movement to discourage such costly (and purchasing) marriages. I may say that the root cause of child or infant marriage is mostly based upon the money aspect. There is always the fact, if marriages are analyzed for inspection, that a poor father in need of money will go hunting for a rich family and arrange a child marriage of his daughter with the son of that family.

At this time, according to the family situation and custom, the girl's father gets the money. This money makes it a binding marriage, and God only knows about the future happiness of the couple in a happy love marriage. In many cases there are instances where inequality in age and talent is found and sometimes deformities and hereditary diseases; it is simply miserable for such couples to live together and never be able to secure divorce. It is a curse and a terrible punishment to the forthcoming innocent children. Thank God that the evil is being wiped out in India by proper education and legal action. I had the unhappy experience of dragging several such cases to the courts or seeking help for the immediate issuance of Court Orders to prevent such marriages. India is making good progress in this direction. The millions of people, masses in middle and extreme classes, are going to be helped and benefited immensely. The same can be said in regard to the Western countries. We may not have the same form of giving money, but in a true sense the richness of the bridegroom's party is sometimes much emphasized by the side of the bride. The Scriptures teach us to emphasize the simple marriage, and to encourage the most important things involved in the marriage. Christianity has the same principle all over the world, and does not entertain the idea of courtship by purchase because it is not good.



Courtship by true romance. The Hebrews' marriages do have some true romance. The book Song of Songs is a poem or a collection of poems depicting the natural beauty, charm, and natural attractions of two lovers. The main theme of the Song of Songs is the love between a man and a woman. "The Song of Songs is indeed a cycle of dramatic love songs rather than a drama in the modern sense of the word."<sup>6</sup> There are songs depicting the longing of the bride for her bridegroom (1:2-8).

Love's yearning: The joys of love are associated, in oriental fashion, with wine (4:10; 7:9), which cheereth God and man (Judges 9:13); and pictures herself as the chosen one of a glorious monarch (the rustic husband), beloved by his (imaginary) women of the harem (Psalms 45:14). In chapter 1:9-27 the bride and the groom praise each other. In verses 9-11 the bridegroom sings of the beauty of the bride, and in verses 12-14 the reply of the bride is given in a true picture of romance. In verses 15-17 the description of the duet of the lovers is given. The absorbed thought of marriage, love songs, and the dance of the bride are all different phases of romance. Among the Hebrews the scene of romance is depicted as happening while drawing water out of springs or wells,

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<sup>6</sup> Lyman Abbott, The Life and the Literature of the Ancient Hebrews (New York), 1901, p. 226.

while walking in the field, or while caring for the flocks. These opportunities furnish them a chance to see and to speak with each other (Exodus 2:16; Genesis 29:9-11; Isaiah 9:11-13; Deuteronomy 22:25-27). The following quotation is worth noting:

Love is strong as death and many waters cannot quench it; floods cannot drown it; and if a man would give all the substance of his house in exchange for love he would utterly be condemned; that is, the move and meaning of this cycle of dramatic love.<sup>7</sup>

It is a fact that romance is found everywhere. It differs only in forms, ways and methods. But in marriages romance is the important factor. Among fishes, reptiles, birds, lower mammals, and animals it is pictured and so it is true in human life. Romance is the wing of marriage, and it is necessary, provided it is in proper method and form. After all that is the attraction between two young people.

At this stage I would like to give some important features about romance in courtship in Oriental countries. Even though the marriages are generally arranged and worked out, there are some fine and curious things they have, which we may call some preliminaries in the form of attractions. They are as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> loc. cit.

1. Attractive clothes are used by both the young man and the young woman. Women outbid the men in the matter of clothing as they always like to wear coloured, gaudy, charming, and attractive dresses. Their national dresses are beautiful and fancy. They are very much liked and appreciated by the Western people.

2. For adding charm and beauty for attraction it is a common custom to use costly incense and oils. Also in order to look more beautiful girls would use "eyeshadow", some kind of black powder or ointment. Another decoration was reddening the hands and feet with red colour. Thus the make-up was a means of attracting the opposite sex.

3. The use of ornaments: The desire of self-decoration makes them put on all sorts of ornaments both of glass, silver and gold. When used proportionally on ears, neck, hands, and feet they are nice and grand, but when used disproportionally, as is very common among the primitive tribes, they become a real burden. Also it kills the beauty, because anything when overdone kills the beauty.

The savages and heathen believe that ornamentation increases the sexual allurements. The average Hindu woman, especially of the primitive type, would burden her body with heavy weights of ornaments of silver and in the cases of poorer people iron ornaments. The main ones are necklaces, hand bracelets, and feet bracelets. The weight

sometimes is increased from one ounce to ten or fifteen pounds. The nose ring hanging from the nose looks very strange.

There is one aspect of mutual love and attraction among the Orientals that is worth noting. The modesty and shyness, which is found generally among the women, is exhibited in mode of dress, walking, and conversing. They cover their faces with the dress called sari. This silent and shy modesty attracts the man.

The last thing I may mention is that the Orientals do not have much chance to write love letters and thus exchange their views. Of course, it is not true always in all cases, but by gestures and movements of the eyes they attempt a slight beginning of courting--but that too must be done very secretly because of the fear of the guardians, while in Occidental countries the young people have the full privilege of exchanging letters at length, and of making the real decision of marriage after making a thorough introduction to each other.

Courting by parents being responsible. According to Judges 14:1-15 in the case of Samson, the parents were responsible to get him a wife. It was the general trend of thought and custom among the Hebrews to have the care and responsibility of the elders to see that their children

are settled in life. It is also very true in all the Oriental countries.

Let us see very briefly the position in some of the leading Oriental countries. In China we find that virginity is highly prized in the celestial Empire. The girl who had succumbed to sexual passion is not happy. When the marriage question arises at her eligible age, her parents decide who and when she shall marry. She may object and even rebel, but she cannot escape her fate.

In looking at India we see that it is a land of many sects and religions. She has Hindus, Moslems, Parsees, Jains, Shiks, Buddhists, and Christians. Buddhism has spread from India to China, Burma, the Philippines, and to many other islands, so indirectly the social touch of Hinduism is given to these other countries. This is especially so in marriage customs and ceremonies. It is the father who is supposed to be the head of the family. It is his concern and duty to fix and arrange marriage for his daughter. In most of the cases the father's selection and consideration involves the following factors for the welfare and happiness of his daughter:

1. The origin of the bridegroom's family
2. Education and culture of the man
3. Temperament.

4. Financial position and material resources.

5. Any hereditary disease

6. Age, appearance and all those minor factors, which ought to be considered by the girl, because she marries and not the father.

7. Information about the family, as the daughter has to be a wife, where she has to serve in the joint family. The larger the family the harder and more difficult it is for the girl to adjust.

So, it is true that the daughter has to obey the father, because the belief is that the father always does the best for his child. The important thing I want to explain to the Western mind is that the girl, no matter from which sect or religion she comes, really begins to love her husband after the marriage, and in the strict sense of the word courtship and the love affair begin one then. How funny and strange it sounds! But it is so, and how important to note that she begins her love after marriage and remains true till separated only by death and not by divorce. There is utter sincerity and faithfulness towards her husband.

Sometimes the father becomes selfish and for the sake of money does not consider the future of the girl and gives her in marriage to any unsuitable person, who can be

much older in age than she. This kind of marriage can be called an unequal marriage and the girl is never happy. She cannot get free by asking for divorce, so we have disadvantages also.

Coming to the Old Testament the romantic attachments were not unknown (Genesis 29:20; 34:3; Judges 14:1; Isaiah 18:20), the girl or the woman in the case was not thought of as having a personal existence at her own disposal. She was simply a passive unit in the family under the protection and supreme control of father or brothers.

In Swamvara, the Hindu custom of courting, self-choice of the maiden is stated, but technically it is not self-will, but is suggested by the father or guardians. In the first instance, the damsel who was offered as a prize in archery, was required to express her approbation by presenting the garland to the winner. In another there was a competition in arms; and the damsel simply notified her choice in an assembly of Kshatryas by throwing a garland around the neck of the favourite suitor. Daughters were kept in utter seclusion, hence there is no such thing as a girl's choice. Generally there is always a guidance and suggestion by the parents and guardians in the selection matter.

Looking to the few good advantages the couple can claim to start their future united life, I personally

would think that the young couple should be consulted and wherever possible they should be allowed to have their own will of selection. By doing so the couple cannot blame anyone if they are unhappy.

## II. BETROTHAL

"And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, wilt thou go with that man? And she said, I will go.... And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them" (Genesis 24:58,60).

Betrothal precedes marriage, and generally it is common both in the East and in the West. Often times there is not much difference showed between the betrothal and engagement. It is the required ceremony confirming the expected proposed marriage.

"Betrothal with the ancient Hebrews was of a more formal and far more of a binding nature than the engagement is with us."<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact it was considered a part of the transaction of marriage, and was esteemed as the most binding part. Among the Arabs today it is the only legal ceremony connected with marriage. Our text

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<sup>8</sup> George B. Edgee, "Marriage," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 3 Volumes, 1997.



(Genesis 26:59,60) gives an example of an ancient formula of blessing for such an occasion.

"In Israel originally (Genesis 29:18) the marriage consisted in the giving of the bride to the bridegroom and the consummation that immediately followed. Later this came to consist of marriage (betrothal) made legally binding through some kind of a gift by the bridegroom and the consummation or wedding itself."<sup>9</sup>

It was customary among the Hebrews at the time of betrothal that the actual payment of the "mohar" by the young man is made. This payment gives him claim on the woman to be his wife. As a result, the Hebrew expression (espoused II Samuel 3:14; Hosea 2:21; Deuteronomy 20:7) is to be taken in consideration as something different from to be betrothed to one. Similarly a large variety of information can be stated about each Oriental country on the question of betrothal. We shall try to see briefly how far this custom is prevalent.

It is practised among the Hindus, Moslems, Parsis, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Chinese and many other groups and sects in Oriental countries. Even in the Christian countries (Western lands) betrothal is practised, which is technically called or termed engagement. In general, after the selection is made, the young people get the consent or approval of the two families concerned and in order to make

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<sup>9</sup> The Standard Bible Dictionary, Frank and Wagnalls Co., 1936, p. 554.

it legal before the community, they are required to perform this ceremony.

Betrothal Customs in Some Oriental Countries are as follows:

Betrothal in India. On this occasion the people come to the bride's place. It is a day of rejoicing for the parents of the bride. They decorate the house and in order to show their kind hospitality to both friends, kinsmen, and relatives, put up a temporary extension tent (Samayanna), where the guests can come and sit. Usually there is an informal program of amusing and entertaining items. There is special singing by women with musical instruments being played. Every one's presence means a great honor to the hosts, and the visitors and guests express their feeling of gratitude and blessings to the bride. Sometimes sweets and tea are offered and if the financial condition of the girl's parents is good, they give a big dinner party or feast to all the invited ones. As a regular custom, according to the rules and requirements of the community or caste, they attempt to make it a real success by putting into it all their energy and money. One interesting thing about the singing is that the songs and lyrics are mostly composed along the line of the thoughts and meditation. For each special occasion both

Betrothal and Engagement, they have different songs. While they sing, they not only wish happiness to the bride and bridegroom, but they also give an opportunity to all the nearest relatives to come into closer fellowship with the family, as they are named in singing. This informal social gathering on such occasion is a good means of renewing relationships.

At the end of the betrothal ceremony the outstanding thing to be noticed is the procession. When the procession is taken into the village, colony or town, children and women sing, band and musical instruments are played, and the bride and bridegroom ride either on a horse cart or elephant with an umbrella over their heads. Tens and hundreds of people come out from their houses, and see the procession through their windows. Some come out on the main road, and some go onto the roofs of their houses as spectators. This public procession in itself is the confirmation of the betrothal.

Secondly, the chief part played by the religious priest is worth noting. Especially is this so in the case of Hindus, Brahmins, or Pujaris, in the case of Moslems, Maulvies, Mullas and in the case of Parsees Dastur, who take the religious part and bless the young people proposing to unite in marriage. Also the priests are supposed to be the official witnesses of the fact of engagement.

They are to see that the conditions made, and especially the giving of dowry is carried out, and the promise is not broken to cause any distrust and friction. In some cases special records are kept in writing by the priests, so that there will not be any difficulty coming up on account of any omission or failure.

The child marriage and early marriage in infancy is a kind of betrothal in the strict sense, as the young bride is brought to the home of her husband only when she is matured. But unfortunately there is very poor understanding on this question of maturity by the masses, who are illiterate and do not realize the grave situation. Hence they start married life very early, maybe the girl is fourteen and the boy fifteen. There is much irregularity and in some cases they start married life even earlier. A leading Hindu says, "Early marriage is the greatest evil of our country. It has stood at the very springs of our nation's life, and prevents the normal expansion of which it is capable."

There are a good many details on this subject like customs, superstitions, et cetera, but we shall not discuss them here.

The Ceremony of betrothals in Persia. Similar to India Persia has several communities too, like Moslems,

Jews, Christians, et cetera. But they have important customs more or less alike. This ceremony is considered sacred. Here also the people are invited on this special and sacred occasion to the bride's home. In order to confirm the engagement there is a custom of giving a ring to the bride and clothes for the expected wedding. Also the public announcement is made by the priest regarding the dowry and marriage conditions. It is always hard and difficult to break the engagement. There are set rules and regulations for the one who breaks the betrothal. Except in reasonable and exceptional cases breaking the engagement is always discouraged.

The Ceremony of betrothals in Hinduism. There is practically no difference made between betrothal and engagement. It will be of a little curiosity and interest to know a few details involved in the ceremony. There are two important things to remember; first, it is considered as a sacred ceremony, and second, the priest's presence and part in the ceremony. He blesses the two young people to be engaged, and performs religious rites. The rites include several things, but the main thing is that the priest recites some verses from the Hindu Scriptures. Also he becomes a witness for the betrothal ceremony as conducted with all required rules and conditions, till

the completion of marriage. Especially in the matter of the dowry question he is a witness, so that none of the parties can change their mind and deceive the other party. In a way it is very nice to see everything completed in an orderly way.

The ceremony, in brief, is as follows: The bridegroom's parents invite the neighbours to come to their home and grace the occasion. Light refreshment is served, especially sweets, jaggery, coconut pieces and dates. During the week of the betrothal the bridegroom has the privilege of hearing songs sung by the neighbouring women, at his home. One part of the ceremony is a bath given to him with mustard water. It is supposed to be a ceremonial bath. The same process takes place at the bride's home, but instead of a mustard water bath, they help the bride in dressing and make-up, like blackening her eyes, reddening her feet and hands with henna. At the ceremony time the Brahmin priest uses an oil or a "ghree" lamp, one kind of a tree branch, coconut, thread, red powder et cetera. After reciting scriptures in Sanskrit and having offered prayers, he puts with his own hand a red teak mark on the foreheads of both the bride and the bridegroom. Thus the engagement is declared.

Very often some people spend lavishly on engagement. They even go to the extent of giving a regular big feast

to the village or colony people. It is only at such times of importance they can remember each other and show their love and courtesy. In Western countries the betrothal is quite simple. It is a private family concern rather than a community affair, and there is not much chance of extravagant expenses. But the underlying principle is almost the same. The Bible and the Christian teachings emphasize a simple ceremony and teach us that betrothal is necessary, as it makes a definite promise for marriage. It should be done in a very simple, sincere and true way. Then only is God ever present to bless the two young people and the two families concerned, to be united in a family tie or union, by the expected marriage rite.

Having made an approach in the detailed study of betrothal, it is necessary to note what bearing the Eastern custom can have upon the Western custom of interpreting the Bible. Betrothal in the East is a ceremony of a binding nature. It is legal. For example the union of Joseph and Mary was by betrothal as recorded in the Bible.

"To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary"  
(Luke 1:27).

There is no such reference in the Bible, which speaks about their marriage. Today as we see that in the West betrothal or engagement is not considered binding and legal,

we see as a result that many engagements are broken and even the marriages are broken sometimes. In order to understand the real and great meaning about the betrothal ceremony, it is necessary for a westerner to know the Orient customs. Now truly Joseph and Mary were united.

### III. DOWRY

"And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry" (Genesis 30:30).

"Ask me never so much dowry and gift" (Genesis 34:12).

"Pay money according to the dowry" (Exodus 22:7).

"The king desireth not dowry, but...." (I Samuel 18:25).

Among the Hebrews the second transaction before the completion of the marriage ceremony was the settlement of the question of dowry. This amount of dowry was generally arranged between the parents, their guardians or representatives, and was called the mohar (dowry) (Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:16; I Samuel 18:25). Its amount and kind differed according to the status and asking of the bride. When David declared that he was without means to procure the mohar for a king's daughter, Saul fixed upon two hundred foreskins of slain Philistines as the price (I Samuel 18:20-27). The true example of pure and sincere love is pictured in Shechem's love (Genesis 34:11). He is represented as declaring himself ready to meet any conditions. We can also see the case of Jacob (Genesis 29:15) and of Othniel (Joshua 15:16).



From a comparative study of Exodus 22:15 and Deuteronomy 22:28 it may be concluded that the average price paid for a bride to her father was fifty shekels. It was customary that the two parties should fix the amount of dowry. The groom's party had to give the said sum to the bride's father. This giving of dowry entitled him for his claim on her as his wife. The bride is to prove a virgin; for the law (Deuteronomy 22:20) prescribed that if immoral action on the part of the wife-to-be was proved she was to be publically stoned. It is a fact that among Israel, young women were sold in marriage who were no longer virgins; but in such cases the price was reduced. Hosea 3:2 may be taken as indicating that thirty shekels was the unusual price for a slave (Exodus 21:32).

There were various ways adopted for making payments previously arranged. Usually the bridegroom paid over the contract prior to the father of the bride or his representatives as is stated in such passages as Genesis 20:18,28; Isaiah 18:27; Genesis 34:11; Deuteronomy 22:29. The same custom holds good today among the inhabitants of Palestine. The custom did not allow the father to use the dowry money as he liked. He was required to spend a part of it for her benefit and future happiness. Laban had used the gain or contract money of his daughters; hence he was called a miser (Genesis 31:15). The opposite illustration is found in

Genesis 29:24,29 where he had given to Leah and Rachel each a slave as a handmaid. There is always a difference made in the giving of dowry and gifts. A father might give a gift to his daughter at the time of her marriage (Joshua 15:18). Such gifts may come from many relatives and friends and they are not to be associated with dowry. They are distinctly separate and as such become the personal belongings or property in her home. Such gifts cannot be given away or sold, because for the special reason that such gifts are always counted and considered as very precious gifts, being considered as a memory of love, family connections, and ties. Inheritance brought by the daughter in her husband's home (in chapters 27:36) is also called a gift and not a dowry. Also, all the things given by the bridegroom in the form of clothes, ornaments, jewelry and money (Genesis 24:53; 34:12) are certainly to be recognized as gifts. Therefore they are to be distinguished from the mohar (dowry) by being termed "muttan." It was necessary to demand actual claim upon the prospective bride through the actual payment of the mohar. As a result the Hebrew expression "eres" (espoused--II Samuel 3:14; Hosea 2:21; Deuteronomy 20:7) is to be taken as something different from "to be betrothed to one."

According to Israelite law regarding purchase and sale, the mohar cannot be considered as the purchase-price

of the maiden. Originally in Israel (Genesis 29:18) the marriage consisted in the giving of the bride to the bridegroom. Two things are important: (1) the promise of marriage (betrothal) made legally binding through some kind of a gift by the bridegroom, and (2) the completion of the wedding itself. Finally a writing "Kathambah" takes the place of the payment due to the bride.

Dowry among the Arabs today. It is the only legal ceremony related to marriage. This truth is verified according to Genesis 24:58,60. Its central feature was the dowry (mohar), which was paid to the parents, and to the bride directly. The act of giving dowry may take the form of service (Genesis 29:1; Samuel 18:25). It is customary in Syria that when the proposed marriage is approved by both the families, then next comes the question of final settlement of all the financial preliminaries, just preceeding the betrothal. It is accepted in the presence of witnesses. Then God's blessing is solemnly asked upon the union thus provided for, but to take place probably only after some months or perhaps some years.

Dowry among the Hindus of India. The majority of the population of India are Hindus divided and subdivided into ten sects. This custom of dowry is very common in

all of these sects, though it differs a little according to the custom of each group.

We shall not study all the kinds of dowries of both the extremes of poor and rich people, but just to form an idea I will state the extreme side of the rich. Usually the groom's side has to give dowry to the bride's side, from Rs. fifty to three thousand, ten thousand and even more. It all depends upon the social status of the person. But the fact is strange that there are some communities in which the bride's side has to give dowry of a large sum to the groom. If a man has seven daughters, there is a curse in one's life. His life becomes miserable. Hence the birth of a girl is not always a welcome. This is one of the reasons for infanticide cases among such castes.

In India this custom is widely prevalent among the Parsees (Zoroastrians) who came originally from Persia and Iran, and who settled down in India. Among them many young girls do not prefer to marry at all.

Dowry among the Persian People. It was customary among the people of Persia to give dowry. After agreements of marriage "Kaban letters" agreements have been written and sealed by the priest. After a few days they fix a time and a date to purchase clothes "Parcha" for marriage. They buy clothes from the town of the bride. The mother of the

bride usually gives her daughter enough clothes, which may last her a long time. Special stress is laid in providing enough "parcha" clothes to the bride.

Dowry among the Mohammedans. After the engagement has taken place it is customary among the Mohammedans for boy and girl or their parents to choose each a representative, who meet and decide what or how much money the boy shall pay to his intended wife. This money is called "Kaban" and the amount varies from ten to one thousand dollars, all depending upon the financial condition of the bridegroom's party.

The decision of the two representatives, regarding "kaban" amount of money, having been fixed, the priest certifies by two documental letters. The letters are called "kaban letters." These letters are kept by each party and in question of seeking divorce if needed the husband pays her the stipulated amount of "kaban" and all is over.

Broker and brokerage. The meaning of the word "Broker" means one who is paid an honorarium or a certain percentage of the settled agreement in any business. Usually he gets his share of fixed percentage from both the sides. It is true in fixing marriages with some people and communities, where they have such people who are a sort of a go-between who is to fix everything all right. When the

broker arranges a marriage a certain amount is paid to him in appreciation of his labour and skill. This amount is called "brokerage." Such people do not want much publicity for themselves as they do their job quietly. It requires a lot of skill. The Hebrews must have had such people, but we do not have any definite scripture references. In most of the Oriental countries this custom of brokerage is very common. The main cause for the middle man or a friend or a broker is due to the fact that the marriages are fixed, suggested and arranged, which is quite different than what is done in the Western countries.

Brokers in China. There are both men and women match makers, who are very smart and clever. Their dress, talk and approach are attractive and appealing. It is hard for one to enter into one's domestic affairs, and then again to guide them after convincing them on a matter such as marriage which is so personal a question. How strange for a Western man to hear this.

Cobbold, in his entertaining volume on China, says that matchmaking is not only a serious business, but a special function among the Chinese. All the preliminaries are effected either by a common friend of the families concerned or by a privileged class of persons (sung neung). The men of this class are called "do-be" and are a kind of menial class of people, supposed to do peddling, mending chairs and barbering.<sup>10</sup> They are not ideal and welcomed people in good homes.

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<sup>10</sup> Latourette Kenneth Scott, The Chinese, their History and Culture, 1946. Chapter two.

A contract, once it has been drawn up, is legally and morally binding. In case of any deceit or misrepresentation precautions are taken, but generally the contract is completed. Failure to fulfill the contract results in severe punishment.

Brokers in India. Generally they work along the same principles. Here I will give the milder cases of brokerage. As the money aspect of brokerage has already been illustrated, while describing the custom in China, I will not treat it here.

There are old women, who have the special liking to arrange marriages. They sort of pretend to be the friends and well wishers of the families. Thus in the capacity of friends they make their approach. If they succeed they are rewarded by a special present in the form of the national dress "Sari" or any article which will be liked and appreciated. Often gold ornaments are given.

Having studied the custom of dowry and brokerage, we come to the definite conclusion that the custom of giving the dowry is not good and healthy for the individual, the family and the community at large. There are manifold disadvantages, and it brings curses to the families instead of blessings. The present day social reformers and religious workers preach against the most prevalent custom.

The Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ do not approve and encourage this kind of costly marriage.

Thus having seen the dowry custom both among the Hebrews and the people of the Oriental countries, we should not neglect the one important aspect of it.

According to Israelite law regarding purchase and sale, the mohar cannot be considered as the purchase-price of the maiden. In Israel originally the marriage consisted in the giving of the bride to the bridegroom. It is proved by the following verses:

And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man; abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. (Genesis 29:18-20).

In the above illustration it is not the money aspect of dowry which is emphasized, but Jacob's true love and sincerity are worth noting. After all, one's attitude and understanding is what counts in marriage. Similarly the Occidental countries can read the Bible and have an interpretation of this nature that it is not the dowry always, which necessarily proves a successful marriage but one's love and sincerity and commonness.



#### IV. WEDDING CEREMONIES

"And...them that were bidden to the wedding" (Matthew 22:3).

"...man had not a wedding garment" (Matthew 22:11).

"...when he will return from the wedding" (Luke 12:36).

"When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding" (Luke 14:8).

There is not much by way of certainty about the ceremonies connected with marriage in Bible times. To start with there was nothing of ceremony except that of betrothal or the festivals following it (Genesis 24:3).

The first ceremony, the wedding procession, apparently a relic of marriage by capture (Judges 5:30; Psalm 45:15), was the first part of proceeding. The bridegroom's "friends" (John 3:29) went usually by night to fetch the bride and her attendants to the home of the groom (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29). The joyousness of it all is witnessed by the proverbial "voice of the bridegroom" and the cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh." (Jeremiah 7:34; Revelation 18:23).<sup>11</sup>

The wedding procession is arranged by night time.

The following reasons could be given for having the procession at night rather than at daytime: (1) Those people who are busy at their work in the day might attend. (2) It is the custom in Oriental countries, because there is the special Oriental love phenomena attached to the nights. The stars in the sky add extra beauty. (3) The lights and torches play the chief part by kindling, adding decoration and illumination.

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<sup>11</sup> George B. Eager, "Marriage," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume III. 1998.

The marriage supper. Generally they have the supper in the home of the groom. There is no hard and fast rule about the place of having supper. They can arrange at any convenient place, but as a rule the bride's people are supposed to be the hosts. Although the supper expense is paid by the groom, the bride's folks have to show kind hospitality.

When the supper is over and it is time to go, all the people rise up and move off with candles and torches burning in their hands. It is pleasant to watch such a procession along the unlighted way in the quietness of the starry night. It may be a village, a town, or a city. On each side of the street, from the house, house top, or balcony, crowds of people look upon the procession. There is an atmosphere of complete joy and the women take up the peculiar cry of wedding joy. At the house the bridegroom receives his friends. On this good occasion of joy speeches of congratulations are made, and poems are recited and sung in praise of the groom, and to the honour of the parents. It is usually at midnight the procession begins. The New Testament parable both of the wise and the foolish virgins who were overcome with sleep, bears out the fact regarding the late hour of procession.

Regarding the wedding feast one more word could be said. The hospitality was considered as a sacred duty.

And it is true that the supper was served to the great joy of all the guests on the occasion. An Oriental proverb is very significant of the feast: "He who does not invite me to his marriage will not have me to his funeral."<sup>12</sup>

To decline the invitation to a marriage was a gross insult (Matthew 22). The account in John 2 states that it was unusual in Galilee to have a "ruler of the feast." There was no formal religious ceremony connected with the Hebrew marriage as it is with us. There is not a reference or hint in the Bible. The marriage was consummated or completed by entrance into the chamber, in which stood the bridal bed with a canopy being originally the wife's tent (Genesis 24:67; Judges 4:17). Today in all lands of dispersion the name is still applied to the canopy under which the contracting parties stand or sit during the festivities.

The marriage was completed by the bride being led from the house of her parents into the house of the bridegroom. This act, the espousal proper (Song of Songs 3:11), signified not only the authority of the bride's father as being released and handed over to the control of her future husband (Song of Songs 7:12), but also that the bride

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<sup>12</sup> George B. Eager, "Marriage," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume III, 1998.

(Psalms 45:10). There is no reference whatsoever to the legal code or covenant of marriage. There are two references where we find in Malachi 2:14 the mode of expression chosen by the prophet, and the case of Ruth 4:11 is of particular interest to note. Also we find another illustration of Raguel. Only a few details are occasionally mentioned as follows:

The elaborately clothed bridegroom (Isaiah 61:10), surrounded by his friends of the bridechamber (Matthew 9:15; Judges 14:11) betook himself toward evening (Matthew 25:1) to the house of the bride. She was then led thence, veiled (Genesis 29:23,25; 24:65) and decked with rich ornaments (Jeremiah 2:32; Isaiah 49:18), surrounded by her friends (Psalms 45:4), accompanied by music and song with lights (Matthew 25:1) to the house of the parents of the bridegroom, into the bridechamber (Matthew 7:18). Now began the wedding week (Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:12), which was filled with eating, drinking, joking, singing, and dancing, the guests being clothed in wedding garments.<sup>13</sup>

Marriage songs were especially liked and appreciated by the people. The Song of Solomon is a good collection of love and wedding songs.

Another prevalent marriage custom was that the husband enters the family or clan of the wife.

Jacob with a covenant for his wives, served his connection with Laban, on the ground that Laban might take away his wives (Genesis 31:14-16,31).

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<sup>13</sup> The New Standard Bible Dictionary, loc. cit.

Anyone who married an heiress to keep the name of the family (Numbers 27:1-11) had to live with the family (verse 4).

The story of Tobias and Raguel (Numbers 10:7,10) is one more example.

Samson's marriage (Judges 14) states that his wife remained in the house of her parents. In all these instances the bride was not brought to the parental house of the bridegroom, and the joyous wedding week was held in the house of her parents.

Thus having seen the wedding ceremonies with the help of Scriptural references we can form an idea about the general custom. If compared with the other Oriental countries, they are very much similar. According to the different faiths and communities they might differ a little both in form and in nature, but the customs are just the same. Generally the betrothal and marriage ceremonies have several things or items in common. Singing, procession, musical instruments (especially drums), new clothes, guests being invited and great rejoicing are usually found in both the customs. And yet there is something more peculiar and a much more important attachment is given to a wedding ceremony as it confirms the seal of marriage.

Marriage Ceremony in Persia in general. At the beginning of the wedding ceremony the priest takes two threads, one red, the other white, twists them together and places them upon the groom's head. Then he takes two shorter ones of the same colors, twists them in the same way and places them upon the bride's head. These threads are emblems, the red of happiness, the white of purity, and their being thus twisted together means that the bride and groom were unlike these two colors. They are now to become one flesh, as Adam said of Eve, "This now is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

The longer threads upon the groom's head mean that his hand shall be longer over the bride; that is, that he shall exercise authority over her. As Paul says in the epistle to the Ephesians, "Wives be in subjection unto your husbands, as unto the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the Church, seeing Himself the Saviour of the body."

The priest also takes a little wine and water and soil from a church and mixes them together in a dish with a cross. The wine and water signifying blessing, and mixing as they do mean that the bride and groom are two different persons or elements, but that they will henceforth be united as one and become truly one flesh. Again

the priest takes in the ceremony the mixture of wine, water and soil and having stirred them thoroughly, with the cross he places the cross upon the hand of the groom directly. Again the priest gives that stirred mixture of wine, water and soil to the groom and he drinks the greater part. The bride drinks the remainder of the mixture. The significance is that the soil with wine and water is a mournful suggestion, and means that along with happiness and blessings there are bound to be sorrows also; that while sharing together the former they must also share the latter; that in the midst of life and happiness they must remember death. "For dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

Some superstitions attached to wedding ceremonies.

While reading the marriage ceremony the priest says, "Amen," at the end of each paragraph. Now if any man present should secretly tie a knot as each "Amen" is pronounced, it would cause a misfortune to the groom. While the ceremony is being conducted, if any man should go upon the roof of the house the result would be the same. Should a man buy a new knife and close it while the bride is riding on horseback, that too would bring the same misfortune upon the groom, but upon the knife's being opened the trouble will disappear. Immediately at the close of the ceremony if

the groom should put his foot upon the foot of the bride at the same time slightly pressing it this burden would fall upon her, but if she is quick enough and thoughtful enough to do this first she thus places the burden upon him.

In this manner a number of customs of wedding ceremonies and beliefs could be given, but we shall not take time. The ceremonies of the East compared with the West are slightly different. The customs in Western countries are mostly according to the customs and finally the law of the Christian countries. The Christian marriage act differs in every Western land slightly, yet the principles are just the same. The expenses and the processions they have are sometimes extravagant. In the matter of ideal wedding ceremonies both the East and the West have to learn from the Bible and especially from the New Testament. The weddings should be simple and less expensive.

In concluding the chapter on marriage ceremonies, it is very necessary to see the comparison and significance between the Easterners and Westerners. In the Eastern countries the marriage ceremonies are numerous in different variety. We have already seen a few customs and ceremonies among the Hebrew people and a few Oriental people. The following important lesson should be for the world of today:



Marriage as God ordained it; Sex as He created it; the Family as He instituted it, are among the highest, holiest, and happiest gifts which Omnipotence has bestowed.<sup>14</sup>

The Saviour tells us that when God's children are in wedlock, they are united by Him. Marriage is so holy that of all social sins its violation invokes the most appalling consequences. Sodom and Gomorrah were burned out of existence, because of a vile disregard of the holiness of marriage. Christ's discourses (Matthew 19; Mark 10), its obligation (Matthew 19:4; Romans 7:2; I Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31), it being confined to this world only (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25), and Paul's opinion (I Corinthians 7:1; Timothy 5:14); all these attempt to state the high ideals of both marriage and the ceremonies involved. The Western countries have a set Christian Marriage Act according to the state law, and the ceremonies are not very many except that the bride and the groom have to stand before the priest or church minister to take vows. They have to take part in few customs and ceremonies. The only similarity we can find between the East and the West is that they both have set ceremonies, yet much could be said that still would show how much can be learned from the Bible.

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Maier, For Better, Not For Worse? p. 76.

The following are the Christian pronouncements on marriage, walking in all the commandments and in accordance with the Lord:

1. Marriage is a Divine institution, established by God Himself.

2. Christian marriage is a blessed ordinance, which leads to multiplied benedictions both for those in wedlock and for the race in general.

3. Marriage is ultimately the moral state for most people.

4. Christian marriage is monogamous, the union of one man and one woman.

5. Christian marriage is established only by free will and mutual consent.

6. The marriage-union is life-long and has no termination, except by death.

7. In the choice of a companion of life, the decisive factor should not be wealth, physical attraction, higher education, and social position, but common devotion to the Lord and Saviour.

8. In the Christian family, the husband is the representative before God and man; the wife is the helping companion. The sphere of his highest activity is the home.

9. An allowed purpose of Christian matrimony is the procreation of children.

10. Christian marriage must have a spiritual basis on the reverent acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and the family altar is to be the effective pledge against shattered promises and broken hearts.

11. Christian marriage must be marked by an intensity of self-sacrificing love.

12. To prepare themselves for these blessings and to meet these high requirements, young people should

ask the help of God in leading clean, courageous lives, and avoiding all concessions of impurity.<sup>15</sup>

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11).

Thus, the Bible has references and teaching which interprets marriage and marriage ceremonies to be simple, honourable, and holy. The Westerner can easily find that from the teaching of St. Paul and our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### V. POLYGAMY

"And Gideon had three-score and ten sons of his body begotten; for he had many wives." (Judges 8:30)

"And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem..." (II Samuel 5:13).

"But king Solomon loved many strange women...(I Kings 11:1).

Meaning of the term. According to Matthew 19:4, marriage is the choice of one man and one woman of each other for a life family relation. There is hypocrisy beneath the word "polygamy." It is plural marriage. There is no word of definition so long as we can look upon it as violation of the marriage relation. Polygamy practically means exactly "polygamy" (γυνή, mune,) i.e. it describes a many-wived man.

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<sup>15</sup> The Church's Marriage Code, Chapter I.

Different forms of marriages named and defined  
briefly:

1. Monogamy: Mating one individual with one of the opposite sex.
2. Polyandry: Union of one woman with two or more men.
3. Polygamy: Union of one man with one or two women.
4. Exogamous Groups: There are two ways in which a group becomes exogamous: (1) Where neighbouring hordes, or groups of kindred, live on friendly terms with one another. (2) Where neighbouring groups live on bad terms. The result is war and capture of women.
5. Endogamous: A horde marrying in and in is called endogamous.<sup>16</sup>

Origin of Polygamy. It is plainly evident that polygamy is primarily the outcome of tribal disputes and wars. When there are different clans and they had taken different places of abode, collisions and frictions would soon occur between them. The women and children are driven to the abode of the conquerors. In many instances, widows and girls are captured. These surplus women become either wives or concubines, which means one and the same thing, which we call polygamy.

Woman is the weaker party, and hence she endures what comes to her lot as a slave or concubine. The following quotation will explain it still better:

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<sup>16</sup> Eager, op. cit., p. 1999

In polygamy we do not see her in the real sense "helpmeet," originally destined for men--"bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" for whom, "he would leave his father and mother" and to his single self he would cleave for life.<sup>17</sup>

Thus polygamy kills monogamy, with its unity in labor, thought, and feeling, with its moral ideal and spiritual influences.

The Old Testament and polygamy. The marriage of Abraham and Sarah seems to have been an original love marriage, and they must have kept the ideal of that love match. Still we find according to the Scriptures Sarah under the influence of polygamous ideas. Therefore she presents Abraham with a concubine. When God gave her a son in her old age, she compelled Abraham to drive out the concubine Hagar and her son into the wilderness. This sending away of Hagar and the child was unbearable and grievous in Abraham's sight (Genesis 21:11).

The conditions of Jacob's marriages and his children were of polygamous nature (Genesis 35:2-26). In such marriages we cannot expect to see true affection and love. This fact is proved by the fact of Joseph being sold for slavery in Egypt by his own brothers (Genesis 37:28).

David was a singer of sweet and noble songs and wanted to be a righteous man with his whole heart. Yet,

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 2:18,24; Matthew 19:5-6.

along with the other contemporary kings and landlords he began to have a polygamous career. There was a case of murder among his children. The son in whom he had much pride and hope organized a plot against his throne, and lost his life in the attempt.

David left his throne to Solomon. He was a very bright and wise man, yet in his old age he ruined himself by the wiles of the women with whom he had loaded his harem. Because of his careless life his kingdom was divided and split up at his death, and there was never again a united Israel (I Kings 11:12).

Thus we can say that polygamy must be blamed for untold bad results. Polygamy is a moral wrong.

Polygamy was the prevalent form of the marriage relation in the Old Testament. There seems to have been no limit to the number of wives and concubines a man might have. He could do this as long as he could afford to maintain them and the children by them. As a matter of fact, only men of wealth, chiefs, or kings had many wives.

The Bible students draw our special attention to the large households of Gideon, David, and Solomon (Judges 8:30; II Samuel 5:13; I Kings 11:1).

Elkanah (I Samuel 1:1-2) and Jehoiada (II Chronicles 24:8), each of whom had two wives, may have been common coup (Deuteronomy 21:15).

Polygamy discouraged according to the Bible. Prophets discouraged polygamy (Genesis 2:18), and monogamy was presented as an ideal. Plurality of wives first occurs among the degraded countries (Genesis 4:23).

But Noah is the husband of one wife, and so is the patriarch Job. The ideal homes described in II Kings 4; Psalms 128; Proverbs 31 are all monogamous homes. Hosea and Isaiah were monogamists.

Polygamy unnatural. Polygamy is a greater crime against nature than polyandry. It is a wrong to a woman in denying to her the rights and privileges of monogamous marriage.

The eunuch. The eunuch is everywhere among all nations and peoples. The lord of the harem must be served by emasculated men. This class of men are exerting their influence in public and government offices. They are enjoying public positions.

Weakness of polygamy. The following few disadvantages can be mentioned:

1. The woman has been held to the lowest and most primitive works and menial labor.
2. She has been debarred from society.
3. As a rule we find that the polygamous nations are weak compared with monogamous nations.

The following poem, a lyric, will well illustrate our point:

A war steed coursed out the wind-swept north,  
Jarring the crags with hoofs of fire,  
Snuffing far battles with nostril wide,  
Neighing the joy of fierce desire.

The crisping herbage of arid plains  
Had toughened his sinews like bands of steel;  
The snow-fed waters of Zarafshan,  
Had nerved the might of a northern will.

The war steed grazed in fertile meads,  
Drinking the waters of indolent streams;  
He rested at eve, on bloom dight beds,  
Toyed with by maidens in the goldening gleams.

They charmed his ear with dalliant song;  
They closed his eyes in witchery's glee;  
They fed him the vineyards' wildering draught--  
He slept in the breath of the lotus tree.

White bones lie strewn on the flowering mead,  
In flesh-rank grass grown high and dark.  
The carrion bird hath flown--hath died--  
Riseth the war horse? Neigheth? Hark?<sup>18</sup>

The above lyric may be taken as the epitaph of any polygamous nation. The last words are significant, as they explain the meaning.

We will now turn to a brief sketch of study of Polygamy in other Oriental Countries.

Among Mohammedans of India and Persia. A Moslem is allowed to marry four wives. All four wives are legal

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<sup>18</sup> C. Caverno, "Polygamy," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume IV, p. 2417.



and they have equality with each other in relation to their husband. He is to love them all equally, and can divorce any one or all of them at his pleasure. Mohammed, to check the frequency of this practise, decreed that a wife divorced for three successive times should not be taken back a third time by her husband until she had been married to another man and divorced by him. After that, her first husband could marry her again. The "Koran," religious book has references of sanctioned permission for polygamy. As long as a man could afford to keep a number of wives he was allowed to do so. This sounds very similar to Hebrew custom.

Polygamy among Hindus of India. This custom was very much spread among the Hindu gods, and hence many religious followers of Hinduism, on the strong religious and logical argument, have encouraged polygamy. Of course the principle holds good here also that as long as one can afford it he can marry more than one. As a rule it is not as bad as the Moslems. Among the numerous sects of Hinduism, only a few sects have this custom. The greater blame goes to the religious heads, as they are associated with gods and goddesses. The temple girls Dev-Dasis who are dedicated to gods are a great hindrance in the moral life of the people, which eventually leads to the idea of polygamy.

Polygamy among the Chinese. This custom was prevalent in China, too. The kings, rulers, and landlords could afford to keep more than one wife. The Chinese emperor had a great number of wives, chosen out of the fine beauty of the country. If Macartney is right, it was a piece of tremendous bad luck for these wives. If the Emperor happened to die all his women were at once removed to an edifice palace, and there they remained for the rest of their lives.

In China polygamy was for two main reasons. The need for male births, and the custom of ancestor worship made polygamy almost an essential condition in China. Confucianism allows polygamy.

Having presented the case of polygamy both among the Hebrews and in some of the leading Oriental countries, it is necessary to see the other side also. It is not always that this custom of polygamy is accepted. Even in the Old Testament, monogamy has been considered as an ideal custom. The prophets discouraged polygamy. As we have already seen, Noah was the husband of one wife, and so was the patriarch Job. Also Hosea and Isaiah were monogamists. When the prophets represent Jehovah's relation to Israel the figure of marriage is used. It is a jealous husband choosing and betrothing to himself one beloved wife (Hosea 2; Isaiah 11:1). The books of Proverbs and

Ecclesiastes exalt the place and character of the wife in the undivided love. Monogamy was the rule among the Jews in Roman times but with few exceptions. The New Testament discredits and discourages polygamy (Matthew 19:4-5; I Timothy 3:2,12). Also, St. Paul in his letters and epistles is very clear in his teaching of monogamy. Christ, our Lord and Savior, has discouraged polygamy and encouraged monogamy. Referring to the Old Testament teaching of the prophets and the New Testament teachings of Christ, the Westerners can interpret the Bible as upholding strongly the teaching of monogamy.

She is in the real sense a "helpmeet" originally destined for men--"bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:18). For whom he would leave his father and mother "and to his single self he would cleave for life" (Matthew 19:5-6).

In the Old Testament the reference to levirate marriage is worth noting. Whenever there was not any heir, and a woman was left as a widow, she was privileged to marry the brother of the deceased. The levirate marriage probably was limited to such cases in which the father had left behind no children at all. The later law (Numbers 27:4) provided that the name of the father could be preserved through the daughter. This example supports our point, that the man died leaving no children

behind by his wife. This is purely an illustration of monogamy. As the custom demanded a son heir, for the ancestor worship and to succeed the father, the marriage was worked out. Hence we conclude that monogamy is ideal and healthy. There is peace of mind, unity, and co-operation in the family. Of course, the Westerners do not have much of the problem of polygamy, but still much more could be accomplished in a better understanding of the interpretation of the Bible, especially the books of the prophets and the New Testament emphasizing the teachings of St. Paul and Jesus Christ.

## VI. CONCUBINAGE

"But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had,..." (Genesis 25:6).

"....and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (II Samuel 16:22b).

"And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart" (I Kings 11:3).

The discussion of polygamy has already referred to this question of concubines. Both are interrelated. The Old Testament recognizes Concubines (Hebrew--*pilegshim*), (Greek--*παλλακίς*), and the (Arab--*belkes*), that is, female slaves (handmaids, or maid servants). They belonged to the husband and were subject to his authority (II Samuel

15:16; 16:21). They were the property of his wives, and had been given over by these to the husband. Sometimes the concubines, on suggestion of their mistresses offered themselves as wives, and yet continued to be under the authority of their mistresses (Genesis 16:4). Bilah, the female slave of Rachel (Genesis 29:29) was made the concubine of Jacob (35:22). Such concubines could belong either to another people or race or be Israelites. According to Deuteronomy 21:10-14 the captive women became either the concubines or wives by law. Also the reference in Exodus 21:7-11 tells us that the parents were responsible in giving their daughters in marriage.

The verses in Deuteronomy 15:12-18 and Jeremiah 34:8 have direct bearing on the assertion that the slave, either a man or a woman, should be made free. Here it is reminded that Israel was made a bondsman, hence he should not forget it. The prophet Jeremiah was asked to proclaim liberty unto them.

#### Outstanding reasons for this custom of concubinage.

1. At the time of war the conquerors drove women and children into captivity. Men were killed in the war, so the question was raised about the widows and spinsters. The only alternative for these women was in subjecting to these strangers and becoming their concubines. As the rule the chief or the fighter has the greater number of them.

Prisoners of war bring many women, so by sale and gift there is a great incoming of women into the country. The woman is always a weaker party. She endures what comes to her as a slave or as a concubine.

2. A second reason which could be given is the want of children and especially sons as heirs. For instance (Genesis 16:1-6) Sarah, Abraham's wife, bare him no children; hence she gave her handmaid, Hagar, to her husband Abraham, by whom Ishmael was born.

3. A third reason for this custom could be the amount of wealth and riches a man had, when he can afford to supply concubines. For instance, Solomon was a rich king, and he had seven hundred wives and three concubines (I Kings 11:3).

According to this custom the status of women is degraded. The ideal union or marriage is pictured in the following Bible verses:

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh"(Genesis 2:18,24).

"And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:5-6).

But as we look into the lives and conditions of life of concubines, they are far from the ideal of the Scriptures. They are no better than even servants and slaves. The more we think about the problem of the concubines the sadder we feel for their degraded condition of existence. It proves the superiority complex on the part of the man, and naturally the woman gets the inferiority complex. It is sad that the man has his upper hand always over the concubines. As such, they are at the mercy of the man.

Concubines in Oriental countries. Having made a little survey on the subject of concubines in the Old Testament, it will be helpful if we trace the custom of concubines in some of the leading Oriental countries. The study in brief is as follows:

Concubines among Mohammedans. We have already mentioned that the founder of the Moslem faith, Mohammed himself, had many wives and several concubines. The Holy Scriptures of the Moslem faith, the "Koran," gives consent and permission to keep more than one wife. This idea of concubines is very closely related to the question of polygamy; both are interwoven. Technically they mean the same thing, to have more than one wife or concubine.

Of course, the difference is made in the status of the wife and the concubine, as the latter is far inferior to the former in the matter of treatment and her rites. The concubine does not have any matrimonial rights whatsoever. She just happens to live there, either by compulsion or her willingness, and becomes the victim of her Master's passion. Her matrimonial life is meaningless, as at any time or any moment it might fade away. This is the main reason for poverty, as there is a lot of irregularity and ignorance about the whole matrimonial question. As a result of this the population is increasing. The result is starvation, scarcity and poverty.

A Moslem is allowed to marry four wives, and they are termed legal wives, but there is another kind of wife or concubine called "Seka." There is no restriction or limit to the number of concubines. There are several reasons and beliefs for these plural marriages among the Mohammedans:

1. They believe that it is a sin for any woman not to obey man's wish in the matter of marriage, and hence man is regarded as superior to woman.
2. The second reason is the natural depravity of human nature.
3. The third reason is the richness and wealth to be able to afford to keep concubines.

Usually the kings, rulers, chiefs, landlords, and rich businessmen can afford to keep many wives and concubines.



Therefore, among the Moslems, they are the people who own these concubines. It is customary among the Moslems that this kind of loose living often leads women on a wrong path of life, which is prostitution.

Concubines among the Hindus. Hinduism does not have this custom in excess as compared with Mohammedanism. There are very few cases of concubines. Of course, the custom of polygamy is very much prevalent, but not so much the custom of concubines. The same principles apply here, that the kings, the chiefs, and the rich men can keep concubines. Among certain sects of Hinduism, they have temple-girls (Dev-Dasies), whose duty is to do the ceremonial dance on special occasions and festivals. These girls have been dedicated to gods and goddesses by their parents. Their home is the temple. In that kind of environment they are often tempted, and thus contact the public people who go there to worship and often the temple priests. Thus they live an immoral life. These temple girls are as good as concubines, and when they go to the extreme they are no better than regular professional prostitutes.

Comparing the question of concubines of Hinduism and that of the Hebrews there is much similarity regarding the practices. But as we study the references among the Hebrews

(Deuteronomy 15:12-18; Jeremiah 34:8) they were forbidden. This is also true in the teachings of Christ and St. Paul. Also we see it being discouraged among the Hindus to some extent.

Also among the poorer classes and tribes the concubines are found, and they do not understand about their existence. In such homes they are a menial class or coolies (labourers).

Concubines among the Chinese. Among the Chinese the woman's place is minor. The need of male births, and the custom of ancestor worship make polygamy almost an essential condition in China among certain classes. Confucianism allows polygamy. Where marriage proves barren or provides no male heir, the husband loses no time in allowing another woman to enter his house as his wife. It seems that the first wife is selected by his parents, but the second wife is selected by himself.

There is also the custom of keeping concubines. A concubine is always either sold or hired, but in some cases there are stipulations. A wealthy man has sometimes as many as fifty, but this is something of a rarity. Some may have twenty or twenty-five, but the vast majority have to be content with two or three. According to the law and customs, certain rights and privileges are retained

by the first wife. Strange as it may appear to the western mind, the first wife often influences her husband in the choice of her rivals--wives and concubines. In doing this, she as a wife does not lose any domestic rights.

According to the Scriptures as time went by there was a gradual process of progress in removing this great social evil. Therefore, Christianity has the message for China in the matter of concubinage.

Having seen the custom of concubines among the Hebrews of the Old Testament, and among the people of a few Oriental countries, we can state that this custom is almost common. It is always associated with polygamy. Our study is not only of the Old Testament, but is of the whole Bible. As we have already seen, that even in the question of polygamy the prophets discouraged it (Genesis 2:18), and monogamy was presented as an ideal, so it is in the case of concubinage. There were several leading men of Old Testament history who were monogamists, like Noah, Job, Hosea, and Isaiah (II Kings 4; Psalms 128; Proverbs 31). As time went on there was found much progress and improvement in the solution of this question of polygamy and concubines. Jesus taught the true meaning of marriage, and that was monogamy. After Him, St. Paul laid much stress on this subject and he outright discouraged both polygamy

and concubines. There are some of his epistles, which have the advice to the young and to all in general. In the New Testament there may be a few scattered cases of loose life and immoral character, but there is no such definite reference to concubines in the New Testament. In one case of a woman Christ said that she had five husbands, but this incident can be termed as a loose character on the part of the woman. The history of the Hebrews in the time of the New Testament is completely changed, mostly due to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Similarly, in the neighbouring and surrounding Oriental countries the same change has been taking place. Thus, with the help of teaching and preaching the problem of polygamy and concubinage is much lessened. After having this clear understanding on the subject I appeal to the Western reader to read and interpret the Bible with the meaning and message that the Bible totally discourages both polygamy and concubinage.

## VII. WIDOWHOOD AND LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

"A father of fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation" (Psalm 68:5).

"The Lord will destroy the house of the proud; but he will establish the border of the widow" (Proverbs 15:25).

"And in those days...there arose a murmuring...because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1).

"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hephher...and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hogla, and Milcah, and Tirzah" (Numbers 27:1).

A widow is a person whose husband being dead and gone feels herself as lonely and helpless. Her life becomes dependent and miserable. Hence, widows in the Old Testament are considered to be under the special care of Jehovah (Psalms 68:5; 146:9; Proverbs 15:25). Sympathetic love and regard to be shown to them is a mark of true religion (Job 31:10; Jeremiah 1:27). We find rich counsel in Deuteronomy 24:17).

The word is first mentioned in the New Testament in Acts 6:1. "There arose a murmuring of Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." Paul charges that they should be particularly cared for, especially those that are "widows indeed," i.e., poor, without support, and old. (I Timothy 5:2-16).<sup>19</sup>

In I Timothy 5:9-10 is indicated about the owner of widows. Paul directs Timothy as to the condition of the enrollment of widows.

No widow should be "enrolled" (catalogued) under sixty years of age, or if more than once married. She must be well reported "for good works" a mother having brought up children, hospitable...having washed the saints' feet. Chrysostom and Tertullian make mention of this order of widows. They will be assigned to ecclesiastical duties, e.g., supervising the orphans and thus being supported at public expense.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Edgee, op. cit., p. 3084.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 3103.

Throughout the Old Testament widows appear as needing assistance and help. Their condition must have been poor and sad. Legally they had rights on the property of their husbands:

Absalom played the role of the heir of his father David, when he took possession of the concubines left behind in Jerusalem by David (II Samuel 16:20-22). A similar meaning is implied in the conduct of Abner (II Samuel 3:7) and in the demand of Adonijah (I Kings 2:13-22; Genesis 35:22). Furthermore, there was a custom that a son should marry his stepmother, which indeed is forbidden in Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20; Leviticus 18:8), but it was common custom down to the time of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 22:10).<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand we have widows living by themselves with their sons or other dependents (II Kings 4:1; II Samuel 14:5; Numbers 1:6); also in the case of Zarephath (I Kings 17:8).

A widow herself had no right of inheritance to the property of her husband. There were no fixed rules concerning the care of widows in ancient Israel. Their defenseless position and helplessness was much used as an advantage by many people in advancing their own selfish interests (II Kings 8:1; Isaiah 10:2; Micah 2:9). The prophets came forward to rescue them as their champions (Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 6). Deuteronomy instructs that the gleanings of the field and the vineyards should be kept

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 556.

for them (Deuteronomy 24:10, 21; Ruth 2:2), and includes those who should have a share in the tithes of the third year and be invited to take part in the sacrificial meals (Deuteronomy 14:28; 26:12).

The position of the childless widow was particularly sad. She enjoyed no consideration even when her husband was living (Genesis 16:4; I Samuel 1:6).

Levirate marriage. In order to study the question of levirate marriage it is necessary to know the meaning of the two words:

**Patriarch:** This word or name is used for Abraham, Jacob and David. The term is used (Genesis 5:11) in the histories of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, et cetera of the "patriarchal dispensation."

**Levi:** The term is used in Number 18:2-40, tribe of Levi be joined into. Also, in Genesis 42-45, and Genesis 46:11 there is made mention about it.

Among the patriarchs and the Levites this custom was common. Levirate marriages are closely connected with the problem of widows. In case a husband died without leaving behind a son even by one of his concubines, the ancient custom was that his surviving brother should marry the wife, in order to preserve the name and inheritance of the Jew. The first son born was counted as the dependent

and heir of the dead brother. This attempt was to give to one already dead and gone a son by the means of the "levirate mirriage." (from "lever" plus "lat" meaning husband's brother). This was due to the custom of ancestor worship. The custom demanded a son-heir. For the widow this custom presented a valuable right. In Deuteronomy 25:5-10 this custom is sanctioned, and the brother-in-law can refuse to enter such a marriage. The custom prescribed of drawing off the shoe (also Ruth 4:7) signified the renunciation of the inheritance of the brother (in Psalm 60:18).

The attempt in Leviticus 18:16; 20:21 to forbid such marriages was not successful. In Matthew 22:24 the use of Deuteronomy 25 is discussed. If there were no sons, daughters had the right of inheritance (Numbers 27:1). The levirate marriage was probably limited to such cases in which the father had left behind no children at all. The later law (Numbers 27:4) provided them the name of the father, which could be preserved through the daughter.

The status of widows in a few Oriental countries:  
Widowhood in Hinduism. Hindu law does not allow widow marriages. Hence the condition of widows is pitiable. Almost among all the sects or communities of Hinduism the status of widows is just the same. Lately some of the advanced people and a few reformers have started a revolution



by asking to abolish this custom. Looking to the grave situation of the whole problem, they have encouraged remarriages. In the joint family system the widow's position becomes worse than a servant or a slave. Briefly we mention here how she stands in society. When her husband dies she has to adopt dressing in simple "saris," black in color for a couple of years. After that period she may put on white, but simple saris. Her hair is to be removed from her head, and of course, all the ornaments are to be removed from her body. It is a sad and pathetic sight to see the ceremony of removing her good clothes and ornaments, as soon as the husband dies. It is heart breaking to see the glass bracelets and the bands broken with two stones--signifying her dark future. We simply cannot bear the sight and hear the heartbreaking crying and mourning of the widow. She beats her head and breast, and mourns over the fact that for ever she will have to live a simple and dependent life. The worse part of it is that she cannot remarry. If she is very young and of a promising age, it is still worse for her. In the olden days, they used to have a custom of "becoming suttee." That is to say that when the corpse of the husband is being burnt on the pyre, the true widow burns herself, with the consent of the community, along with her husband. She ends her life with the understanding that both the souls

will have reunion in their reincarnated life as husband and wife. It a sad custom. In the British time, Lord Hastings, then the Governor General, stopped this custom by law.

The heaviest curse of Hinduism falls upon the high caste widows, because the widow is supposed to be responsible for her husband's death, and to have caused it by some sin of her own in a previous existence. Her head is shaved with a razor, and for a year she must eat but one meal in a day with frequent fasts. All her jewels and ornaments are torn from her; she is clothed in either a plain black or white cloth. Often she becomes the drudge of the house, and if she is young and beautiful a worse fate frequently awaits her.

The main thing to be seen among the Hindus is that the remarriage is forbidden, and hence there are many disadvantages. The first curse is of becoming slaves of the joint family, and no real happiness in life can one find. Secondly, often for their maintainence, some of them have been compelled to become professional women-prostitutes. They are always looked down by the public. It is the general belief and current superstition that if a man sees early in the morning the face of a widow his whole day will be spoiled and it will be an unlucky day for him. Thus they are looked down upon. But lately the high castes

have made it possible for widows to earn their livelihood by way of securing possible work, and especially teaching work in schools is given to the Brahmin widows. The other widows do laborious work for other neighbours. At times there are found some good people, who help them in different ways. Some widows in temples take up some work in the temples, and some become true worshippers of gods and goddesses, and thus they are called (nuns) priestesses.

Widowhood in China. The same condition was prevalent in China as regards the status of widows. They were forbidden to remarry. Confucius, the founder of the Confucian faith, never recognized the right of a woman to rid herself of her husband. In this respect China shows great disrespect to women in comparison with the women of the civilized nations.

Eight hundred years ago Chu Hsi pronounced that for a married woman death from the cruelty or neglect of a husband was preferable to remarriage. This implication is carried out until today. Hence, many widows are found as mothers of illegitimate children or ending up their lives as prostitutes.

Widowhood in Western countries. Generally in all Western Christian countries, remarriage is permissible. The simplicity in life and the mourning in the life of

the widow is permanent, as it is all over the world. Yet the future status can be improved by remarriage. Secondly, she does not suffer so much, like the widow of an Oriental country, because the woman is always respected, and as such she has her rights in society.

Conclusion. Having seen the problem of widowhood both in the Oriental countries and in the Occidental countries, it is better that we see also, how the Westerner can better interpret the Bible in relation to the question of widowhood. We have already seen and studied with the help of the Old Testament books the status of the widow. Also there are some Old Testament references, in which it is stated that the prophets, as their champions, came forward to rescue them (Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 6; 24:19; Ruth 2:2). The gleanings of the fields and of the vineyards and a share from the tithes should be given to them. Also regarding the claim or heritage, the widow was helped, although indirectly. For instance, in the Levirate marriage she gets a son by her husband's brother, and the child becomes the legal heir of the dead brother. Thus indirectly in the name of the son the mother gets her property all back. Of course, the legal heir is the son, so she becomes an administrator or guardian for the son's property. The New Testament offers more hope and teaching

for the good and happiness of widows. Christ took special care to give teachings on the importance of widows' rights and standing in the community. Christ condemns the high seats of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. Here Christ accepts a widow's two mites and gives more important advice (Mark 12:40-44). Another interest of Christ is illustrated in the miracle of the widow's son at Nain being raised (Luke 7:12). Thus we can state that Christ had His concern, love, care, and sympathy for widows. The New Testament, through the epistles and letters of St. Paul, teach us the same thing--to care for the widow. Hence the Westerners can interpret the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, with the light and understanding that the widows' condition and status is always encouraged. As time went on, there began a greater improvement in the question of respect, treatment, and sympathy towards widows.

Levirate marriage in India. Similar to the levirate custom among the Hebrews, we find the same thing among some sects of Hinduism. The question of an heir always brings up this matter. The widow's brother-in-law is entitled to marry her, and the son born becomes the heir of the dead brother's property. This custom is not very common

or easily found. Only among the kings and rich people is it well illustrated. The poor and middle classes have the custom, but they only seem to be emphasizing the loose moral life and not so much the heir question.

### VIII. DIVORCE

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement..." (Deuteronomy 24:1).

"Thus saith the Lord, where is the bill of your mother's divorcement..." (Isaiah 50:1).

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement..." (Matthew 5:32).

The meaning of divorce is to seek a separation by either of the parties and thus dissolve the union of marriage. The subject of divorce is of much importance for consideration in relation to the marriage ceremonies. It will be of much interest to study the divorce problem among the Hebrews, and then in some of the Oriental countries, especially in relation to the study and solution in the Bible.

The Old Testament does not teach very clearly on the subject of divorce. As a matter of fact, marriage was considered as more or less like individual law. Later on, it had a larger concern of the society.

The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21:9) speaks of the known rights of daughters, the prophet Ezekiel (16:34-41) speaks of the known law concerning the adulteress. The carefully guarded position of the first born son (Deuteronomy 21:15-17) necessarily presupposes fixed regulations concerning marriage as spoken of as "bulath" (Deuteronomy 22:22; Genesis 20:3; Deuteronomy 24:1; Isaiah 54:1) as acquired by a husband, "taken into possession"<sup>22</sup>

As we study the history it can be stated that the customs and prescriptions of marriage were not all of Israelitish origin. They were taken over from Canaanite civilization. Also, the Babylonian law (c. 2000 B.C.) had exercised its influence upon Israel through the medium of the Canaanite civilization.

While discussing this vital question of divorce the question arises about Jesus' attitude. Did Jesus allow under any circumstances the remarriage of a divorced person during the lifetime of the partner to the marriage; or did He allow absolute divorce for any cause whatsoever? The question has much bearing on momentous issues, social and civic, as well as religious. It is safe and advisable to search the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament books. During the first half of the century A.D. what do the scribes and writers say regarding the teaching of Jesus on this subject? If we had only the

the gospels of Mark, Luke, and the epistles of Paul, there could be only one answer given. Christ did not allow absolute divorce for any cause (Mark 10:2; Luke 16:16; Galatians 1:12; I Corinthians 7:10). The Old Testament permission was a concession. It teaches to a low moral state and standard, and thus was opposed to the ideal of marriage given in Genesis 2:23.

"The position of women in that day was far from enviable. They could be divorced on the slightest pretext and had no recourse at law."<sup>23</sup> Almost all the rights and privileges of men were withheld from them. What Jesus said in relation to divorce was more in defense of the rights of the women of His time than as a guide for the freer, fuller life of our day. Jesus certainly did not mean to recommend a hard and enslaving life for women. His whole life was one long expression of full understanding of them and sympathy for them.

There are two sayings attributed to Christ and recorded by the writer of the first gospel (Matthew 5:32; Luke 9:9), which differ slightly from what is stated in Mark and Luke. Here he seems to allow divorce for "fornication." It is said, "save for fornication," an exception

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<sup>23</sup> Bager, op. cit., p. 552.



is made (I Corinthians 7:15) which allows remarriage where a Christian partner is deserted by a heathen. The meaning here gives us to understand that "fornication" is taken in its wider sense (Hosea 2:5; Amos 7:17; I Corinthians 5:11). Divorce with a Jew carried with it a right of remarriage, and the words, "causeth her to commit adultery;" (Matthew 5:32). This shows that Jesus assumed that the divorced women would marry again. Hence if He divorce, He also allowed remarriage. Our Lord had not come to set aside the authority of Moses. He was by a Jewish-Christian tradition.

It is very important to make a detailed study of adultery, fornication, and harlots, with the help of the Scripture references as follows:

Adultery and Fornication. The prohibition of the seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:17) is indeed a general rule. The logical and natural question would be, "What constitutes adultery?" The rigidity of prescriptions relating to the virginity of the woman who was sought in marriage (Deuteronomy 22:13-21,23) shows that the chaste life on the part of a woman before marriage was to be the rule. If she was convicted of guilty conduct in early times, she was burned (Genesis 38:24).

In later times she was brought naked (Hosea 2:5) before the assembled people of the locality and by them stoned to death (Ezekiel 16:38-40; 23:45-47; Deuteronomy 22:20; John 8:5). The same punishment was for the man when he seduced the wife of his neighbour (Deuteronomy 22:22; Leviticus 20:10). According to the reference (Leviticus 19:20; Numbers 5:11-31) the woman has to suffer much. The husband was granted much more liberty. The verses in Exodus 22:15; Deuteronomy 22:8 deal with the subject of adultery.

Harlots. They were found not only in the cities (Corinthians 6:15; Isaiah 23:15; Proverbs 7:6-23) but also in country districts (Genesis 38:15). The expression, "harlot," (Proverbs 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27) implies that this practise was carried on in Israel originally by foreign women. Married women made a long absence of their husbands from home the occasion of having dealings with other men (Proverbs 7:18,20). The house of the harlot was a sort of inn where anyone, even an enemy of the land, might stop (Joshua 2:1). Women who yielded themselves at sanctuaries in honor of the deity were a great immoral sign. It is evident from Amos 2:7; Hosea 4:13 and also from the measures of the kings, Asa

and Jehosaphat, of Judah (I Kings 15:12; 22:46) and the prohibition in Deuteronomy 23:18.

The demand of Jesus and the apostles are remarkable not only for their incisiveness, but above all for their new religious basis (Matthew 5:27-32; I Corinthians 6:9-20; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-8; Titus 2:2-6; James 4:4-8.).

Divorce and harlots in Hinduism. Among the many sects of Hinduism this custom is occasionally found. It is always on the ground of some solid reasons, either (1) adultery, or (2) hereditary disease, which may be harmful to the children. The divorce is always difficult to secure as the conditions are sometimes very difficult to fulfill. Among the primitive tribes the people pay very little attention in the matter of divorce, and make divorce easy. There is always a strict rule and law to carry out the required conditions to make the divorce. The divorce is always to be sanctioned, either by the village Panchayat or a Court of Law.

In the same manner, other religious groups like Mohammedans, Parsees, Sikhs, and others have their divorces worked out. Of course, it is not so common and frequent as they are in the Occidental countries.

Harlots in Hinduism and among other groups are quite common. Very often they are in secret. The professional harlots are generally found in large cities. They are either private on their own accord, or sometimes they are licensed by the local government. They are also found in some of the temples where they are called "dev dassies" (temple girls).

Divorce and harlots in China. This custom is found in China also. The status of women in China is very low. Similar to India, women are considered as inferior to men. Among Chinese people divorce is common. It is secured by the husband on several grounds:

1. The committing of adultery.
2. The presence of sterility.
3. Thieving.
4. Disrespect or insulting father-in-law or mother-in-law.
5. Jealousy in connection with other wives.
6. Talkativeness.

Confucius, the founder of the Confucianism faith, never recognized the right of a woman to rid herself of her husband. In this respect, China shows great disrespect to women in comparison with the women of civilized nations.

Harlots are found in large towns and cities. There are many factors and reasons involved in their becoming harlots, both private and professional. Sometimes they are approved by the government and thus licensed. As it is common in most of the countries for two reasons; to increase the government income by tax, and to avoid any unhealthy happenings in good localities of the town by mean and low people.

Divorce custom in Persia among the Mohammedans.

To make divorces impossible they fix as kaben something that cannot be obtained. For example, they sometimes fix eight or nine pounds of mosquitoes or house-fly wings as the kaben a husband must pay his wife, if he would divorce her. This, he of course, cannot pay.

There is a story about a Mohammedan woman. Her "kaben letters" required that if her husband wished to divorce her he must give her about thirty-two pounds of mosquitoes. In the course of time he began to dislike her and intended to divorce her but it was impossible for him to furnish the stipulated "kaben." He was determined, however, to be free from her and so he began to mistreat and abuse her until she herself changed her "kaben" from thirty-two pounds of mosquitoes to a piece of vineyard. When he gave her that she was divorced.

Sometimes in "kaben" letters instead of a sum of money or a vine ard, or mosquitoes, or a field, they will write for securing divorce from his wife, a husband must give her an arm or foot. This being impossible to furnish, the husband who really wants his wife divorced will so abuse her that she will be obliged to say, "kabenan halal janim azed," which means "I make my kaben legitimate to you, now let my soul free." Even though she gets a small amount or nothing, she becomes a free soul.

As in other countries Persia has harlots, too. The reformers always discourage both the custom of divorce and harlotry.

Divorce custom in Western countries. The problem of divorce is very great in all Western countries. Wherever the churches have worked hard, and proclaimed the teachings of the Bible and of Christ, there have been great results and changes. Outside the Christian community the problem of divorce is very heartbreaking. Its disadvantages are many and the condition of children becomes very precarious.

The uncertainty of married life is always there. There is often found a fear of suspicion and doubts on each other's part. It is too much to feel the freedom in every phase of life.

The custom of harlots is common, too. They are generally found in big cities in thickly populated areas.

Conclusion. Some of the Oriental countries as time went on, proposed reforms in the field of divorce and harlotry. It has been true in all other aspects of life. There is always room for improvement and progress. This problem of divorce is too great in the Western countries and the results are really heartbreaking. While the churches are at work to stop the custom, the Oriental countries--and especially the Hebrew people--have much to say and teach to the Western countries in connection with the question of divorce. The interpretation of the Bible and, in particular, of the New Testament will serve the great purpose for Western countries. Jesus' entire teaching and theology may be described as a transfiguration of the family. God is a father and man is a child, and there is a parental love shown by the father towards the son, always. The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:18) well illustrates the repentance on the part of the son. In the same manner we have to listen to the teachings of Jesus in the matter of divorce and come back to Jesus. As to the explicit doctrine of Jesus concerning marriage and divorce, there would seem to be little difficulty of interpretation.

Unwelcome the teaching of Jesus may be to many modern minds; impracticable or injudicious it may appear under modern conditions; overstrained morality,

it may be as Renan called it; but in its main features this teaching certainly cannot be called complicated or equivocal or obscure.<sup>24</sup>

Adultery is strictly forbidden in the moral code and is denounced by the prophets as a crime comparable to stealing, murder, false swearing and idolatry (Exodus 20:14; Jeremiah 7:9; 23:10; Hosea 4:2; Malachi 3:5). The husband must provide his wife with food and clothing. In the New Testament love and fidelity on the part of the husband, and obedience on the part of the wife are inculcated (Acts 15:29; Ephesians 5:22-23; Thessalonians 4:3-6).

The teaching of Jesus begins, as it so often does, with the text from the Hebrew Scriptures, which scripture He had solemnly told His people, He had come not to destroy, but to fulfill. "He which made them,..." says Jesus, quoting from the book of Genesis, "made them male and female,..." and the twain shall become one flesh (Matthew 19:4-5). "They are no more twain, but one flesh" (Matthew 19:6). Therefore to put away one's wife, and marry another, Jesus does not hesitate to say is for the man to commit adultery; and to put away one's husband and marry another is for the wife to commit adultery. Marriage being ordained of God for the union of two in one flesh, is in

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F. Greenwood Peabody, Jesus Christ and the Social Order (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 151.



its intention for two only, so long as they both shall live. Every kind of argument about unhappy homes and trouble and confusion in married life is answered in Jesus' simple words: "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). "Whosoever shall put away his wife...and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Jesus' high idealism concerning marriage is sensed in the following incident. Being asked one day by the Sadducees, what would happen under his strict doctrine of the marriage tie if in the resurrection a woman found herself among many legitimate claimants. Jesus does not hesitate to say that the relation of marriage is based on physical conditions, and is not to be a characteristic of heavenly life. (Matthew 22:28). In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven (Matthew 22:30).

## IX. WOMANHOOD

"And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman and brought her unto the man" (Genesis 2:22).

The place of the woman is great in the days of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. According to Genesis 2:22 she was made from the man's rib, and hence called a partner and helpmeet. These days we talk much

about Christian home activities, in order to emphasize the need of improvement and progress both in the home and community, and in the present day world. If anyone can best influence and contribute in this field, it is the mother. Some man has well said, "All great men of the world have become great, because they owe so much to their respective mothers." Thus we can clearly see what a great place the woman plays in the life of the world. As we have already seen in the study of polygamy, concubinage, and divorce, the Old Testament says more about the upper hand and superiority of the man over the woman. It is equally true in the other Oriental countries. Of course, the Western countries are exceptions to this question of their attitude and treatment of their women. But as time went on, even among the Hebrews (in the Old Testament) attempts were made to raise the status and honor of women. We express our great thanks and gratitude to God for His guidance in making constant efforts, even until today, to secure the rights and privileges of women.

Womanhood in India. The condition of women is degraded in Hinduism. In speaking about the wrongs of Indian womanhood, it might be well said that the women of India are patient sufferers and usually accept their fate without

murmur. No great religion has degraded women more than Hinduism. The sacred code of Manu has done more than anything else to determine the position of women and to fix her destiny. The following verses will show her destiny:

It is the nature of woman to seduce men in this world, for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females. One should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister, or daughter; for the senses are powerful and master even a learned man.<sup>25</sup>

Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as god by a faithful wife. Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males of their families.<sup>26</sup>

For women no sacramental rite is performed with sacred texts, thus the law is settled; women who are destitute, of strengthened knowledge of Vedic texts, are as impure as falsehood itself; that is a fixed rule.<sup>27</sup>

In India after her independence there has been a constant cry from the women's side asking for more reforms. The following extract from a recent article of Thursday, May 14, 1953 under the heading "Women's role in human progress will illustrate more;" Joy of living:

Speaking about the responsibility of the housewife, Mrs. Renuka Ray, president of the Silver Jubilee session of the All-India Women's Conference, replied:

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<sup>25</sup> Sherwood Eddy, "Manu Code, 11, 213, 215," India Awakening (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1911).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., V., 154; IX. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., IX. 18.

"The great tragedy of India is that in the vast majority of present-day homes, the house wife is not trained to understand or perform her duties. Women are ignorant of the most elementary rules of health and hygiene. Planned parenthood, through which we can help the building up of a healthy race, is unknown to the vast majority of both men and women. Women do not know how to lead disciplined and well-regulated lives themselves and far less how to train their children. The psychology of the child is a closed book to them. The joy of living has gone out of our homes. We must bring about those conditions through which women are equipped to undertake the basic services."<sup>28</sup>

Womanhood among the Moslems. The condition of woman in Moslem lands has ever been the festering sore of Mohammedanism. Its polygamy, divorce, and concubinage have been its curse. The very heaven of the Koran is conditioned upon the eternal degradation of womanhood. Similar to Hinduism, Mohammedanism has placed upon woman the heaviest burden of all, and left her lowest in the social scale.

Woman's position in China. In China it might well be said that the advantage of marriage is on the man's side. The wife's position after marriage becomes as that of a slave. She marries the whole family, where it is a joint family, and she is duty bound to work for them all. The place of the woman in China, according to the Old Chinese sage and philosopher, in the world is a minor one.

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<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Renuke Ray, "Women's role in Human Progress," The Overseas Hindustan Times, Thursday May 14, 1953.

The doctrine of Confucius insists upon the inferiority of the female sex, which was created specifically for the purpose of begetting children and to give pleasure to men. A woman is not better, in the opinion of this sage, than a slave. There is an old Chinese proverb which says that one son is equal to ten daughters, and the implication of this firmly held belief may be considered to express the relative social positions of the two sexes. The object of marriage is the continuation of the family; for this reason, the perpetuation of the male line is of primary and essential importance. The wife's part is that of a bearer of children. According to the teachings of Mencius, the disciple and successor of Confucius, the daughters are of minor importance to Chinese parents; in fact, they are considered nuisances and sometimes burdensome. In poor families they consider daughters as a serious liability, and for this reason they are sold into slavery or prostitution.

Conclusion. Having thus observed the existing conditions of women and general attitude of men towards their women in various countries, it is high time to come to the point of great resolution and decision towards revolution and progress. In this matter, the Western countries offer

much by way of an ideal teaching to the women of the Oriental countries. Above all, the deep concern and the social teaching of Jesus is of great importance. Christ did give an important place to the woman in His thinking. There are several instances and stories to prove Christ's teachings and main concern about the women's status in the society or community. We hope and trust that while the world is dreaming of making progress in all directions, we are quite sure that the consideration of women will not be minor, and they will have their equality with men, as they have already in some civilized countries. The gospel of St. Luke states that the devout women named Mary called Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others, ministered unto Jesus of their substance (Luke 8:2-3). Thus special attention is given on this question of the status of women in the gospel of St. Luke.

## X. CONCLUSION

The detailed study of marriage ceremonies, under the subheads of courtship, betrothal, dowry, polygamy, concubinage, womanhood, levirate marriage, divorce, and womanhood have enabled us to understand the great importance of marriage ceremonies.

An earnest attempt has been made, wherever possible to show how the Oriental countries can influence the

Occidental countries in interpreting the Bible. The discussion in all the chapters, under the sub-heads, help us to understand and comprehend the relation between man and woman. They two form the union through the ceremony of marriage. The chief aim of each sub-head under the main chapter on "Marriage Ceremonies" has been to evaluate facts of the Oriental countries and thus help the Occidental countries to interpret the Bible accordingly. While making the comparative study of both the East and West, it is not our main object to locate the shortcomings of one and define accordingly. It is always possible that two different persons may differ in their talents. Yet, each one can help the other by way of sharing and giving the best which she has. We have already brought out these facts very vividly, emphasizing this one main aspect of better interpreting the Bible. On each issue as the world progressed there have been changes and reforms. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament books are witnesses to these great facts. The teachings of Christ and the efforts of St. Paul in his ministry have contributed more light and understanding on the question of marriage ceremonies as a whole. The New Testament teaching stands for an ideal marriage ceremony always.

### Putting Christ in your home. How?

1. Before you marry. You will surely seek the Lord's leadership in the choice of a companion. Marriage is an appropriate matter for earnest prayer.

The second consideration is the religious experience of the person you plan to marry. In the days of courtship this question of one's sincere commitment to Christ.

2. When you marry. The wedding of a Christian couple is a significant spiritual experience. Its significance can be heightened by the manner in which it is conducted. The weight of responsibility rests on the minister. The church wedding adds spiritual warmth and dignity to the meaningful occasion.

3. After you marry. A new home ought to be dedicated to God. Immediately after the marriage ceremony is the appropriate time for a young couple to set their home apart unto the Lord. "A man shall sanctify" (Leviticus 27:24).<sup>29</sup>

According to the teachings of Christ the following things can be discussed:

Three requisites of marriage: (1) Is a happy marriage possible without being preceded by love? (2) Does a genuine marriage presuppose certain conditions of health? (3) Is a Christian marriage bound up with certain definite forms of marriage law?<sup>30</sup>

There should be three parties to every marriage bond, the man, the woman, and Christ. Your marriage should be built around Christ. He should be the head of your home, the unseen guest on all occasions, your guide in

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<sup>29</sup> Joe W. Burton, Tomorrow You Marry, Chapter 8.

<sup>30</sup> Piper, Christian Interpretation on Sex, p. 153.



all your personal relationships. The essential thing is that you take some time each day to worship together.

To sum up the teaching of the Bible: It was God who made the race "male and female" (Genesis 1:2). It was God who commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). It was God who said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him an help-meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). It was God Himself, who brought the bride to her husband in the first marriage (Genesis 2:22). It was God's word that declared to all ages, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). If we look into the New Testament, we shall find that the pages of the New Testament reinforce this divine institution, for it is Jesus Himself who says that in the beginning His Father instituted marriage (Matthew 19:4). We see Christ's own high esteem for marriage shown at the very outset of His public ministry. Christ accepted an invitation to a wedding in Cana. The miracle performed at this time was one of those unnumbered miracles which were to bear tribute to His Divine sonship (John 2:21). To Him marriage was so sacred that He strictly forbade bungling man to interfere with its divine claims (Matthew 19:6).

Christ's endorsement of matrimony is supported through the Scriptures. The prophets of the Old Testament used the fitting symbol of marriage, the intimate union that exists between husband and wife, to explain and impress on the minds of the countrymen the magnificence of Jehovah's grace to Israel, and the mystic union that bound Him to His people. In the New Testament the same explanation continues. Writing to the Ephesians, St. Paul compares the love which a husband bears for his wife to that self-effacing devotion with which Jesus loved the Church.<sup>31</sup>

Thus we can see the greatness and importance of marriage and ceremonies in relation to the society. If Christianity is to encircle this field and influence all marriages on Christian teachings, according to the Scriptures, certainly we will have a new social order. In those sections and countries, where Christian marriages have taken place strictly according to the Christian teachings, the results have been great and wonderful. Are we not some of the citing examples of happy Christian homes? May God grant that all countries in the whole world may come to realize the Fatherhood of God and His teachings through Christ on a better society or world through the order of marriage. In other words, may all people one day accept Christ as their Saviour, and have the Christian order of marriage for them with its awaiting manifold blessings. Thus the Bible has much to contribute towards the better and richer understanding of this subject of marriage ceremonies, both to the Oriental and Occidental countries.

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<sup>31</sup> Maier, op. cit., p. 74.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FUNERAL CEREMONIES

In this world of ours there are three important occasions in the life of man: (1) Birth; (2) Marriage; (3) Death. It is the third aspect of life, of which we are more concerned in this second part of the thesis. To support this statement that "death is a universal factor," one may give the following simple Indian story:

In a certain home there occurred a death of one dear member of the family. As usual, as it happens all over the world in one form or the other, there followed a cloud of wailing and mourning. The excessive form of mourning and lamentation was really heartbreaking. It was not mere crying and shedding tears, but also beating the breast and while lamenting for the deceased, they were actually hurting and torturing themselves physically. This was the expression of mourning. While they were still weeping and mourning a Sadhu (saintly man) came to visit them. He, seeing them much troubled and sorrowful, said, "I will see that your dead one will arise alive, with one condition; that one of you go out and search for me any hut, house, or palace where any death has not visited. You will then get your son back." So the leader of the house goes in search, but all in vain. He comes back saying, "I did not find any home where death has not taken place." So the Sadhu gave consolation to the bereaved family, saying, "You are not the only one in this world, upon whom this sorrow has come. It is God's will and desire, so mourn not."

Having realized the fact of universal death, our problem is the custom of "funeral ceremonies." After making an approach to this subject of funeral ceremonies from several angles, we shall attempt to see how the Bible or the Christian teaching can best help the Western and the

Eastern countries in the making of the proper and helpful interpretation. Above the ceremonial aspect, the Bible and Christianity has a wonderful and great message of hope and salvation to offer. That is the main approach to our subject or problem.

### I. BURIAL CEREMONY IN GENERAL

"In the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth."

The general study of burial ceremony among the Hebrews is of much interest. The general modes of burial are as follows:

We may distinguish five methods of disposal of the corpse, which have undergone countless modifications as outgrowths of race, climate, soils, and grade of culture.

Exposure. The bodies are not sealed up, but are left to destruction on the ground (rare), or are hidden in clefts, caves, in the hut where death took place, on trees, scaffolds, platforms, in boxes or caves, in long pens, or dead houses, or in towers of Silence.

Aquatic Burial. The corpse is placed in the water, or under the water, as among some of the Hindus, who consign dead bodies to the Ganges.

Inhumation. The corpse is buried in a single grave, which is often shelved or recessed in pits or Golgothas, in cairns or under mounds, under the floor of the home or in concrete structures.

Encysting. The body is enclosed in rude boxes of wood, stone, or other materials, which are placed in dolmens, vaults, sepulchers, or house-tombs.

Cremation. The corpse is burned and the ashes are abandoned, scattered, buried, boxed or inurned.

A few of the general important customs among the Hebrews are as follows:

The mourning garment. Upon the news of the death of a relative or an important personage, people rent their garments and put on the mourning garment of sackcloth (II Samuel 3:31; 21:10). As to what this garment was there are different opinions:

Some (Kamphausen and others) think it was very much like a corn-sack, open at both ends; others think that it was originally nothing more than a loin cloth... in fact the only article of clothing worn by Israel's ancestors.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Mourning and Mourning Customs," The New Standard Bible Dictionary, p. 596.

In later times it was worn only as a religious duty, i.e., on extraordinary occasions, on mourning festivals, processions, et cetera. Even the late book The Ascension of Isaiah (2:10) speaks of the loin cloth as a mourning garment. The prophets chose the "saq" as a piece of clothing. As the civilization developed, the size and dimension of the "saq" were enlarged.

Dust or ashes on the head. This act on their part was considered as the sign of grief, by sprinkling ashes on the head, as the Arabs do today (II Samuel 1:2; Micah 1:10). It is probable that originally the ashes were those of the articles burned with the body (II Chronicles 16:14; 21:19) or dust from the grave.

Cuttings in the flesh. This custom was one sign of mourning with a religious significance and bearing. The practise of making cuttings in the flesh is supposed to be common (Jeremiah 16:6; Deuteronomy 14:1; Leviticus 19:27). This custom was prohibited, this being not due to the proving that it involved a disfigurement of the body which was created by God, but to the conviction that it was a cults-usage irreconcilable with the religion of the Jews (I Kings 18:28). Evidently the purpose was to propitiate the spirits of the dead by means of blood, and to persuade them into fellowship to a certain degree with the living.

Shaving the head and beard. This custom of shaving the head and beard was prohibited (Leviticus 19:27; Deuteronomy 14:1), which dealt with an old cults-usage dating from a time when the worship of the dead was common in Israel. It was, in reality, an offering of hair brought to the dead. This practise was found among the Egyptians, Arabs, Greeks and other peoples. The original meaning of the custom was that thereby the offerer confessed himself to be dedicated to the deity.

The covering of the head in times of grief (II Samuel 15:30; Jeremiah 14:3; Esther 6:12). Schwalli compares with Elijah's reverent covering of his head when God appeared to him (I Kings 19:13).<sup>33</sup>

This custom of covering the head signifies the feeling of awe and reverence in the presence of the dead, as was probably the custom of removing the sandals (cf. Exodus 3:5 with Isaiah 20:2; II Samuel 15:30). Probably it may be thought that the covering of the beard (Ezekiel 24:17; Jeremiah 14:3; II Samuel 15:30) is to be understood to a weakening of the earlier custom of cutting off the beard.

Thus having considered the above mentioned customs based on the Scripture references, we might sum up the customs of mourning as follows:

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<sup>33</sup> loc. cit.

Upon news of the death it was customary to rent the clothes (II Samuel 1:11) and gird one's self with the mourning garment (II Samuel 3:31), which originally was a loin cloth. Among the Arabians the custom was to go about naked, thus expressing their mourning over the deceased or dead. This custom was doubtful in Israel (Isaiah 20:2), but it was customary to go bareheaded and barefoot (Ezekiel 24:17; II Samuel 15:30), to sprinkle dust and ashed on the head (Joshua 7:6; II Samuel 1:2), to cover the head or at least the beard (Ezekiel 24:17; Jeremiah 14:3; II Samuel 15:30; or to lay or place the hand on the head (II Samuel 13:18) and to sit in dust and ashes (Jeremiah 6:26; Job 2:8). Also, they had various disfigurements. For instance, the head was shaved (Jeremiah 16:6; 47:5), the beard was cut off or at least clipped (Jeremiah 41:5; 48:37; Isaiah 15:2; Leviticus 19:27), gashes (scars and signs) were made on the whole body, or at least on the hand (Jeremiah 16:6; 41:5). Also they used to observe the funeral past ceremonies (Hosea 9:4; II Samuel 3:35; Jeremiah 16:7; Ezekiel 24:17,22). There were separate offerings of food and drink which were placed upon the grave (Deuteronomy 26:14). On this sad occasion women of the house and community weep. Very often they invite professional female mourners, who chant and sing peculiar rhythmic lamentations beginning



with "ekh" or "ekhah." Thus in this manner lamentation was considered as a religious usage regulated by nearness of relationship.

Having considered a few details regarding the funeral ceremonies conducted mostly as based on the Bible, we shall not take up more specifically our first topic as stated under section II, being stated as follows:

## II. BURIAL OUTLINE

In this section the following subjects will be treated:

1. Immediate burial considered urgent
2. The burial of Jesus
3. The usual time
4. Duties of next of kin.

Immediate burial considered urgent. Immediately after the death has occurred, in most of the cases they arrange the removal of the corpse as early as possible. The reasons are: The burial in the East seems indecent haste to the Westerner.

Dr. Post says that burial among the people of Syria today seldom takes place later than ten hours after death; often earlier. But he adds, "the rapidity of decomposition, the excessive violence of grief, the reluctance of Orientals to allow the dead to remain

long in the houses of the living, explain what seems to us the indecency of haste.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of Abraham on the death of Sarah, to bury their dead out of their sight (Genesis 23:1-4); and it in part explains the quickness with which the bodies of Nadab and Abihu were carried out of the campe (Leviticus 10:4), and of Ananias and Sapphira who were hastened off to burial (Acts 5:1-11). Thus, to avoid decomposition and defilement of the body, and the judgment that might come upon a house for harboring the body of one dying under a Divine judgment, further help us to understand such urgency and haste.

The burial of Jesus. The burial of Jesus was in strict accordance with such customs and the provision of the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13), and in accordance with true humanity. Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus for burial on the very day of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:39).

The usual time. They would prefer burial usually within two or three hours after death. Among Oriental Jews burial takes place, if possible, within twenty four hours after death, and frequently on the day of death.

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<sup>34</sup> The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume I, p. 529.

Likewise Mohammedans bury their dead on the day of death, if death takes place in the morning; but if it takes place in the afternoon or at night, they do not bury until the following day.

Duties of next of kin. As soon as the breath is gone the eldest son, or failing him, the nearest of kin present, closes the eyes of the dead (Genesis 46:4). Another thing to be mentioned—that the mouth too is closed and the jaws are bound up (John 11:14—"and his face was bound about with a napkin."). The death is announced, as it was of old, by a loud tumult of lamentation preceded by a shrill cry, and the weeping and wailing of professional mourners (Mark 5:38).

The customs found in other Oriental countries. We shall attempt to state the different customs and rules in other Oriental countries, under the heads of: (1) Immediate burial considered urgent, (2) The usual time, and (3) Duties of next of kin.

Customs found in India: Among Hindus: They stress the question of immediate burial very much. As we know, they have cremation instead of burial. No sooner is the breath gone than they make all the necessary preparation for the cremation. This matter we will take up at length in the next chapter at its proper place. It is very queer

to note that during the last few moments when it is certain that the man is really dying and there is no hope of his living any longer, the first thing they do, which is such a disgraceful act, is to take the dying man from the bed or the cot and lay (or throw) him on a carpet spread on the floor. The quick arrangements for the cremation are heartbreaking, and in the midst of it all there is mourning and lamentation. Women are not allowed to go to the cemetery.

The usual time is considered according to the hour when the person died. Generally they keep the body for a few hours till all the relations arrive from distances. Thus hardly a day they keep the body, with the fear that it might decompose and become offensive.

Speaking about the duties of the next of kin, the same custom of attending to the dying person by his closest relation is observed. In the case of a father his eldest son has to put either water or ghee (butter) into the mouth with a spoon. This is his last duty towards his father showing his love and obligation. The eldest son also puts his hands both upon the eyes and mouth to shut them, while in the funeral procession the eldest son leads the procession with an earthen pot containing fire to burn the body. The sight of his walking in the front of the procession is

very sad and hearbreaking as he pours out his heart in mourning and lamentation. The rest of the kins and kiths get together to mourn over the dead--maybe for several days--according to different customs.

Among Moslems. The same rules and customs are practised in the funeral customs of Moslems, which are mentioned for Hindus in the matters. Immediate burial is considered urgent, and the usual time and duties of the next of kin. The only way they differ from the Hindus is in the mode of disposing of the dead. Moslems bury their dead like Christians.

Among Parsees. These are the people who worship Zoroaster, and their mode of worship is that of fire. Similar to Hindus, they also prefer immediate funeral ceremonies. One strange thing about them is that they neither bury nor burn their dead. Instead they lay the body into a hollow of the wall of the well, where they bring in all the dead bodies of that town. The burial place of the Parsees is called Tower of Silence. The duties of the next of kin is to attend the dying person and put the last drop of either water or ghee in his mouth.

These principles are more or less common in China, Burma, Japan, and the rest of the Oriental countries. Hence we shall not take space to repeat these things already mentioned.

The customs found in the Occidental countries. As we are aware, most of the people dwelling in the Occidental countries follow the Christian religion. As such, we like Moslems, bury our dead. Generally we also believe in immediate burial, and the time question is considered according to the convenience of relations. One thing is true about the time. It is as soon as possible. The same fear of the body becoming decomposed is the main reason to remove it soon, but in recent years as it is the custom in Egypt, they embalm the body and preserve it for two or three days and in some cases they keep it even for a week. The duties of the next of kin are always the same in nature as that of other countries.

A comparative study of the Oriental and Occidental countries on the subject discussed. The custom of the disposal or burial of Hebrews is good as regards to the time question and duties of next of kin. The custom of burying the body in the ground is somewhat strange compared with that of Hindus and Parsees, who burn and lay the body in a hollow of a well. Respectively the Hebrew custom is generally adopted by the Christians in the Western countries. Burying the dead is better than any other way of disposing of the body. The duties of relations

are just the same in nature, as the mourning and lamenting is emphasized very much. The death of Jesus is a good example, and the mourning, especially for our day.

The one thing which is strange to the people of Oriental countries is the delay in the disposal of the body. There are two reasons for keeping the body longer. First, the climate being cold, the body does not decompose soon, as it does in hot sections of Oriental countries. Second, the recent works of science provide all kinds of spices, balms, and incense to preserve the body for a longer period.

The idea of immediate disposal of the body is commendable. It may be kept for a day or two but not for a longer period because the body is slightly affected in spite of all precautions and soon begins to decompose and to smell. Another reason is that it has a bad effect upon the minds of the family mourners. They continue to sit around the body and weep and mourn and lament. Also, the custom of burying the dead is good provided the body is put quite deep in the earth and covered well with stones to protect it from dogs and foxes. It is thus possible to build a permanent grave or monument as a sign of remembrance.

### III. PREPARATIONS FOR BURIAL

Hebrew customs. The preparations were often hasty

and informal, with very little ceremony.

Canon Tristram says: "As interments take place at the latest on the evening of the day of death and frequently at night, there can be no elaborate preparations. The corpse, dressed in such clothes as were worn in life, is stretched on the bier with a cloth thrown over it until carried forth for burial."<sup>35</sup>

In Acts (5:6) we read of Ananias: "The young men . . . wrapped him round, and they carried him out and buried him."

"What they did," Dr. Nicol says, "was likely this: they unfastened his girdle and, taking the loose undergarment and the wide cloak which was worn above it, used them as a winding sheet to cover the corpse from head to foot."<sup>36</sup>

Usually, however, there is more ceremony. It is stated and verified even today by missionaries and natives in Syria that the ceremonies are usually long. The corpse is washed (Acts 9:37), the hands and feet swathed in grave bands usually of linen (John 11:44a), and the face covered or bound about with a piece of cloth, a napkin or handkerchief (John 11:44b). It is the custom to put aromatic spices and other preparations in the wrappings to prevent the body from decomposition.

The burial of Lazarus at Bethany illustrates this preparation. The account of the burial of Jesus states

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<sup>35</sup> "Eastern Customs," The New Standard Bible Dictionary, p. 529.

<sup>36</sup> Loc. cit.



that Nicodemus brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds," and that they "took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths, with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury;" and Mary Magdalene and two other women brought spices for the same purpose. (John 19:39-40; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1.)

This was a very old custom, as it is stated in II Chronicles 16:14. Asa, the king, was laid in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art. It was customary among the Greeks for someone to perform the rites of burial. The following instance is told concerning the death of Orestes and the placing of his ashes in the sepulchral urn:

Woe is me! These loving hands have not washed or decked thy corpse nor taken, as was meet, their sudden burden from the flaming pyre. At the hands of strangers, hopeless one, thou hast had those rites and so art come to us, a little dust in a narrow urn.<sup>37</sup>

There is a marked contrast between Israel and other peoples in regard to burial customs. With the Greeks it was customary to cremate the dead. Tacitus says, in noting the contrast between Jewish and Roman practice, that it was a matter of pity with the Jews to bury rather than to burn dead bodies.

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<sup>37</sup> "Burial," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 530.

The burning of the bodies of Saul and his sons by the men of Jabesh-Gilead (I Samuel 31:11-13) is an exceptional contrast and emergency. Later the charred bones were buried by the same men at Jabesh, and by David's order again removed and laid to rest in the sepulcher of Kish (II Samuel 21:12-14). According to the Mosaic Law, burning was specially reserved or ordered for those who died under a curse. The death under curse is well illustrated in Achan and his family, who were stoned to death and burned with all of their belongings. (Joshua 7:25.)

The Greek custom did not affect so much, so there was no Jewish law or custom. The embalming of Israel was unknown to Israel. When Jacob died, it was Joseph, the Egyptian official, who commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father (Genesis 50:2). When Joseph himself died, his body was embalmed and "put in a coffin in Egypt" (Genesis 50:26).

The customs of closing the eye (Genesis 46:4) and of kissing the dead (Genesis 50:1) were probably exceptional. The body was washed (Acts 9:37) and anointed (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 12:7; 19:4). It was wrapped in a linen sheet (Mark 15:46) and the hands and feet were bound (John 19:40). In the grave the hands and face were found tied or bound with a napkin (John 11:44). None can say how ancient these customs were.

The customs in various Oriental countries

Babylonia. The earliest civilized nations seem to have originated in Babylonia. In Babylon inhumation was the rule, and cremation was practically unknown. The bodies were often placed on the ground or near the surface and a mound was raised over them. Sometimes they rested on a wooden board and were placed on the side or back or doubled up in a sitting posture. The custom then arose of placing the body in an earthen dish or in two jars fastened together at the mouth by bitumen.

Phoenicia. The body was not fully embalmed but was anointed and enveloped in linen bandages with substances to retard decomposition. Bodies were placed in natural grottes, artificial chambers, or else laid in the bare earth, though they were put in coffins in imitation of Egypt. Around the dead were objects of daily use and ornaments. Also the monument or chapel idea was introduced. The Hebrew custom is shown by Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpeleh, and their occasional case of embalming in the cave of the kings is proved by II Chronicles 16:14.

Mohammedans in Persia. When the man dies, his family mourns for him. The women wear black and darken their eyes, while the men leave their breasts uncovered. If the dead

man was prominent and wealthy, his servants send around to bring some ladies who can recite poetry and sing songs of lamentation, in which all the relations join in mourning. The mode of singing is very appealing; and the hearts of all are moved as things about the dead, especially his kind associations, are related in the songs. Often the lamentations are enhanced by music, and its awful funeral tunes increase their sorrow beyond measure. While the women are still weeping, the body is removed to the temple or mosque. Here the body is washed or bathed and ornamented by painting the eyes and eyebrows, blacking the feet and reddening the hands. It is then placed in the coffin. It is the general belief that the body is ornamented in order that the deceased may appear beautiful and clean before God.

Primitive tribes. No sooner does life become extinct than the preparation of the body begins. For the sake of economy, most primitive tribes double the corpse into the smallest compass, the chin resting on the knees. Even among advanced ancient Peruvians this custom of packing the body prevailed, a strong rope being used to draw the limbs into place and bind them fast. Economy of space in the grave or tomb has much to do with the custom.

Embalming the dead was at first a natural process. There are regions, as in Peru, Egypt, and Arabia, where the

hot, arid climate hastens decomposition of the flesh of the dead. The Polynesians had an elaborate ceremony of embalming their dead priests. The brains and intestines were removed, and all moisture was carefully wiped from the body, which was anointed with fragrant oils and dried in the sun. It was then clothed and seated in a little house erected for the purpose, where a table was set for food, fruits and flowers. Here also belong such ceremonies as calling the dead, anointing, closing the eyes and lips, bathing, kissing, placing a coin in the mouth, all of which have symbolical meaning with reference to the future wellbeing of the dead and immediate relations of the ghost with the living. They clothe and wrap the dead. Scarcely any people takes its dead to the last resting place naked. Special kinds of wrappers, such as white sheets, are used to cover the body. Among the very lowest people, the corpse may be put away naked; but that takes place among those tribes that wear no clothing.

The order of the development of ceremonies seems to have been as follows. The disposal of the body occurs in several ways: burying naked; dressing the corpse as in life in order to take up the new life in the spirit world at once; dressing in best clothing to make a good impression on the ghosts among whom it goes; wrapping in cloth for sentimental reasons.

Among the Egyptians the corpse was wrapped with narrow strips of linen. In Turkastan the similar practise is seen. In Kembondo leather is used. In Mashonaland the toes and fingers are tied up each in a separate piece of cloth.<sup>38</sup>

Among the ancient Aleuts the corpse was doubled up and fully clothed. It was then crated, hung on the wall of a cave, or set on a safe place on the floor. The Eskimo employs tough walrus hide as a case for the dead. The Pacific Coast tribes, wherever that giant cedar grows, make boxes or hellow logs for the corpse. The plains Indians crated the bodies of the dead and all their belongings before placing them on the platforms, and the old cave people of Utah packed them in baskets. The southern Indians made hurdles of cane and rolled them about the corpse. Farther south no coffin was needed, for the bodies were exposed in dead houses until the flesh was gone, after which the bones were taken and buried either in the earth or in jars. Some of the ancient mound-builders made stone for a coffin in the grave for bones. A common motive among primitive tribes in using the coffin was to hold the bones together for burial. Custom demanded it, and the ever-watchful and jealous ghost required it. The coffin or tomb was regarded as the house of the dead. There is another

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<sup>38</sup> "Funeral," The International Encyclopedia, Volume XIII, p. 40.

custom of watching the corpse among some of the primitives. The dead are not hurried to burial, but the ceremonies of mourning begin around the corpse. The Polynesians placed the body of the dead on a bier-like frame covered with white tape, which was decorated with flowers, or upon a bed of fragrant leaves. Relatives sat around lamenting and cutting themselves with sharks' teeth. Salt is placed on the breast of the dead, and a candle burns night and day at the head of the coffin.

Hindus. Most of the preparations for burial are much like that of other primitive tribes and Oriental countries. Yet there are some things quite distinct and strange among them. The Hindus are divided into sects and subsects; and naturally the customs in all things may vary, even in the matter of funeral preparations. Here we shall see the common practises among the average Hindus. When the breath of life or soul is gone, the body is removed from the bed and laid on the floor on a spread carpet. The nearest household people make hasty preparations for the cremation. While the mourning and lamentation is started, the responsible man of the house secures the required articles as follows: a long piece of white cloth for wrapping or covering the body; bamboo for making a bier or bed to lay the body on; strings or

rope to tie and hold the body together; spices, flowers, colour, cocoanuts, etc. After having bathed the body and applying all the perfumes and spices, and hanging a few cocoanuts around the body on the bier, the community people, without taking much time, proceed to the cemetery for cremation. The new and strange thing for the Westerner is to note the excessive lamentations. The women assemble together in a circle and weep loudly. The closest relations pour their feeling of mourning over the dead by uttering and singing words. Very often the words are a stimulus to other people, thus causing more feeling among the assembled. Sometimes one lady leads in singing the funeral songs, and all sing after her. While doing this they beat their breasts and thus torment their bodies. They all dress in black saris; and, if the dead happened to be a man, his widow would be required to abandon all her former good clothes and ornaments and adopt a simple black sari as a sign of mourning. As we have already mentioned, her condition becomes miserable, especially if she is young, because the customs require her not to marry again. The ceremony of breaking the glass hand-bracelets is heartbreaking. On this sad occasion all men of the community come to pay respect both to the dead and to the bereaved family. After the cremation they come to the home of the deceased and either



sprinkle water on their clothes or gargle with water; and then, as an expression of mourning, they shave their beards, particularly their mustaches, and sometimes their heads also. The relations, in the case of men, keep a white piece of cloth on the head as a sign of mourning for several days. The customs among the Parsees, Buddhists, Jains, Shiks, and others in India are very much the same, the differences and change in customs depending upon current superstitions and beliefs.

Comparative study of the Eastern with the Western countries. Most of the Western countries are Christian countries and, as such, follow the same common custom in the matter of preparations for burial. The Catholics and the Protestants do not differ very much in this custom. In fact, Christians all over the world have the same customs. No sooner does the person show signs of dying than the closest relation, either the father or son, or wife, puts hands on the mouth and eyes. The relatives and mourners assemble around the body. The priest or the minister comes, and first of all is the prayer. When it is time for the funeral, as approved and decided by the family, they bathe or wash the body and put on his best clothes. The corpse is put in a wooden case or coffin, very often quite expensive. The flowers and spices and incense are brought and placed.

After that, the priest comes and leads in the devotional meeting, reading the appropriate Scriptures and asking the congregation to sing songs pertaining to the sad occasion. Then the procession to the graveyard begins, in which men and often the women go. Compared with some of the Oriental customs, the customs in the Western countries are quite expensive. As it is done, it is very appropriate and decent, giving the full honour to the dead. There is not the wailing and lamenting as in Oriental countries. The Christians weep but observe quietness in their sadness and mourning. The Bible teaches both the Eastern and the Western world to adopt the most simple modes and preparations for burial.

#### IV. ON THE WAY TO THE GRAVE

"Therefore the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus: Wailing shall be in all the streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas!" (Amos 5:16).

#### Prevalent customs among the Hebrews

Coffins unknown. The corpse was carried to the grave on a bier or litter. Coffins were unknown in ancient Israel as they are among the Jews of the East to this day. Moslems, like eastern Jews, never use coffins.

Professional mourners. The funeral procession of mourners is largely made of relatives and friends of the deceased, but there are professional mourning women, who enhance the lamentations, as related in Ecclesiastes 12:5; Jeremiah 9:17; and Amos 5:16. The latter passage tells of the mourning over the desolations of Israel. The true picture of the call for mourning is given by Jeremiah. His lamentation for the sins of the people is pictured in chapter nine.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider ye and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come: And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. (Jeremiah 9:17-18.)

In general, the corpse is taken to the graveyard on the very day of death, as at present in the Orient. The Israelite knew as little as the ancient Arabs about coffins (II Samuel 3:31; Luke 7:14). Mourners followed, chanting lamentations in both prose and poetry.

#### Prevalent customs among Oriental countries

Persia. Before the corpse is taken to the grave, it is first taken in a procession to either the Mosque or temple. During this procession the lamentations are sometimes accompanied by music. After the necessary preparations are

made, the coffin is placed on a ladder; and four men carry it upon their shoulders. It is the general belief that all men should carry the body. This moral obligation on the part of every man makes them hurry, walking fast and at times even running, to get an opportunity to give a lifting hand to the coffin. Some, by rushing, are merely able to touch the coffin. The people carrying the body keep exchanging hands every minute. The people follow the priest who leads the procession by reading from the Koran (Scriptures), singing and chanting or reciting poetry descriptive of the funeral.

Primitive tribes. The funeral proper is one of the most solemn of rites the world over. Among many tribes the corpse must be taken out by the roof or by some roundabout way in order that the ghost may get bewildered and not return. The procession to the grave, among savages, has changed much in the course of the centuries.

Hindus. There are several common things in the prevailing customs of the Orientals; yet there are a few new and queer things about Hindus. After having attended to all of the preliminaries by way of preparations of the body, the people leave the house in a procession. As a rule, the women remain in the house or veranda of the house while the

men sit or stand in front of the house where the body is laid on a bier made of bamboos, all bound, decorated with flowers, spices, cocoanuts, etc. They do not have much of prayer form except a few practices having some religious significance. Of course the priest is there but not as conspicuous as among Christians. The eldest son or the nearest kin puts a cloth cover upon his mouth and, with little clothing on his body, takes the fire pot and a vessel containing curd or grains and leads the procession. He cries loudly, uttering the name or relationship of the dead; and someone in the procession leads very loudly in saying or singing the words Ram Ko Bhai Ram, asking everyone to remember on this sad occasion the name of Ram, one of the gods. They are supposed to continue chanting every minute until they reach the cemetery, just as the Christian priest leads in meditation while going in a procession to the graveyard.

When they leave the house for the cemetery, there is a tremendous crying and wailing at home. The excessive lamentations are usually done by women, and they cry loudly beating their breasts and even their heads. This custom of excessive lamentations is slowly disappearing from the advanced groups.

Coffins are not used at all by the Hindus; all that they require is a simple set of things to hold the body.

Thus they do not need the expensive coffins as the Christians require by custom. They also have professional mourners, but they are not very common. As the people generally live in a colony or community, there are always enough people to carry on the ceremony. Of course, the Hindus spend much money in their post-funeral ceremonies such as feasts for the dead on the twelfth day, when the bereaved family is supposed to feed all the village or community so that the wandering spirit of the dead might be blessed.

#### Customs among Western people

Generally, after having attended to all the preparations, the priest or minister fixes the time for the graveyard service, according to the convenience of the bereaved family. Before the procession leaves, the priest conducts the devotions, mainly with the object of praying for the soul of the dead and for the bereaved family, so that they get real consolation and peace of mind. After that, they leave the house, the priest leading the people in a procession. The body is usually carried by four or more people, who exchange hands every few minutes. Sometimes a hearse is used for a long distance, but they do carry in a procession in the graveyard. The priest leads in reading meditative Bible verses, fitting to the sad occasion, and there is

often singing. There is not much wailing and lamenting, but in general quietness is observed.

Comparative study. Thus having seen all the details of both Eastern and Western countries, it may be concluded that the present-day customs among the Christian countries are mostly based on the teachings of the Bible. Christ's concern was to teach people their dependence upon God, their Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. Especially it may be noted at this point that the people in procession should observe silence and in all quietness look to Him for more comfort, consolation, and peace, both in heart and mind. Thus one can see that there is a great message in the Church for all those Eastern countries which are victimized always by superstitions and false religious beliefs.

#### V. AT THE GRAVE

"The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife" (Genesis 25:10).

The grave dug in earth. When the body is laid into the ground, the bier is, of course, set aside; and, at first, only a heap of stones is piled over the shallow grave to preserve the dead body from jackals or thieves.

The family tomb. They used to have a custom of having a family tomb. Usually every family will prefer to have the family tomb on their own land or property. The tomb can be either a natural cave, prepared with stone shelves to receive the bodies, or else hewn out of rock in the hillside. Each tomb, or sepulcher, has several niches, in each of which a body could be placed (Genesis 25:10; 49:31; 50:13; 35:19; Joshua 24:32).

Thus, according to the custom of keeping a family tomb, so often possessed in their own land, they were entitled to use the tomb for many generations. Many such family tombs can be cited, but one chief example is that of Machpelah (Genesis 23). It is interesting to make a comparative study on the basis of the Bible and to note various burials, Joshua was buried in his inheritance at Tinnathserah (Joshua 24:30); Samuel in his house at Ramah (I Samuel 25:1); Jacob in his house in the wilderness (II Kings 21:18); Josiah in the same tomb as his father and grandfathers (II Kings 23:30); and Asa, illustrated for special mention (II Chronicles 16:14).

The idea of household graves is given in Genesis 15:15; 25:8; 35:29, etc. In the ancient times the household graves were located upon land belonging to the family (Genesis 23; I Samuel 25:1). The tombs of the kings down



to Ahas were located in the garden of Uzza (Ezekiel 43:7). Such graves were located under shade trees which were sacred (Genesis 35:8; I Samuel 31:13) or in gardens (II Kings 21:18,26). Gradually the practice arose of placing them in uninhabited districts, clefts, and caves, in which the country abounded. Often the graves were excavated in rocky places, hillsides and slopes, and very often on heights (Isaiah 22:16; II Kings 23:16); and to protect them from wild beasts their openings were closed with heavy stones. The sepulcher was considered as family property and, as such, no stranger could be laid there. Later, older views were relaxed and changed, and strangers were buried therein (II Chronicles 24:16; Matthew 27:60). There were burying places for the destitute (II Kings 23:6; Jeremiah 26:23) and for pilgrims (Matthew 27:7). There were common, that is, public, cemeteries where criminals also were entered. (Jeremiah 26:23; Isaiah 53:9; I Kings 13:22.)

According to custom, the Jew was not to sell his burying place. Today in the Orient it is quite different. Burial places of Moslems, Jews, and Christians, while distinct and different from each other, are recognized as community, rather than as family, burying places.

The tomb as a cave. When the tomb was a cave, the

entrance was closed with a large circular stone to make it secure. It is furthermore secured by a steep or by sealing. Pilate directs that the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in which the body of Jesus was laid, should be carefully sealed and made as secure as the official could make it. "So they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them" (Matthew 27:66).

Mourning at the tomb. In Syria, as elsewhere in the East, it is a prevailing custom to go to the graveyard on certain set days. The common observance was on the third, seventh, and fortieth days, and again on the anniversary of the burial. The relatives and friends go to the tomb and are either silent or, moving in a circle around or near the tomb, break out into weird, dirge-like singing, wailing and crying.

Annual celebration of mourning. This custom was very prevalent. For example, it is said of the celebration which takes place annually to commemorate the death of the grandson of Mohammed:

I have seen the most violent of them, as they vociferated Ya Hoseini, walk the streets with their bodies streaming with blood by the voluntary cuts they had given themselves.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Joseph Khanishu, About Persia and Its People, 1899.

Such cutting of the flesh in mourning for the dead was specifically forbidden by the Mosaic law (Leviticus 19:28; 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1), but excessive mourning for the dead is often alluded to in Scripture (II Samuel 1:11-12; Psalm 6:6; 116:36; Lamentations 1:16; 3:48; Jeremiah 9:1).

The use of mourning songs. The custom of dirge songs seems to be allowed according to the narrative of the healing of the ruler's daughter (Matthew 9:23; Mark 5:38). "Jesus came into the ruler's house; and saw the flute players, and the crowd making tumult."

A typical Oriental funeral procession and burial is vividly pictured in the narrative of the burial of Jacob (Genesis 50:6-13). Mourning was accompanied by low cries of sorrow. The relatives cried, "Ho, Ho," and with low lamentations preceded the body to the grave, often accompanied by professional female mourners (Jeremiah 9:16; Amos 5:16), and by musicians and flute players (Matthew 9:23).

#### Customs observed at the grave in other Oriental countries

Customs in Babylonia. The dead were buried in their garments with staff, ornaments, weapons, and utensils. The

priests were called in to burn incense and sprinkle water, and thus drive out the evil spirits. There were also professional mourners who, lamenting and singing dirges, followed the bier to the grave. Thus it may be seen that some of the customs of the Hebrews discussed under six subheads are found in Babylon too.

Customs in Egypt. The earliest Egyptians, like the Babylonians, buried their dead in earthen jars. The religion at a very early date passed a law for the preservation of the body by embalming it and building the tomb of a considerable size. According to their belief, the body of man is composed or constituted of four elements: the body, the double or ka, the soul or hi, and the spiritual flame or khu. Each element had to be provided for in the burial arrangements. The belief is that preserving the body helps to continue the existence of the other three elements. The "double" lived always with the mummy and communed the offerings periodically brought to its reception chamber or compartment. The soul and the spirit return from the other world to renew the contact or relationship with the body. It was customary to put the portraits of the deceased in the tomb so that each element may recognize the others. The conception of after-life was much developed by the Egyptians, which was a mere germ in Babylonia. Immediately after death,

the priest comes with his assistants and takes complete charge of the dead body. He closes the eyes of the deceased, arranges for embalming, and engages mourners. In embalming, the viscera and heart were removed, stuffed with unguents, and placed in four jars; the brain was set aside to dry; and the body placed to soak for seventy days in a chemical liquid.

Customs in Persia among the Mohammedans. The corpse is laid in a brick vault after the due ceremony. After the burial ceremony, all of the people except the Maulvi (priest) return home. All alone in the graveyard with no one seeing or hearing him, the priest speaks to the dead man by his mother's name. The Maulvi speaks to the dead that he must give a good account of himself at the last judgment. The other points involved in the ceremonies at the grave seem to be common among all Mohammedans of the world. They dig a tomb and also do mourning and lamentation in excess.

Customs among the Hindus. Most of the Hindus burn their dead instead of burying except in cases of children (babies). Hence they do not require tombs and graves as such. They do have the items of mourning and lamentations as do others, but their custom of cremation deserves notice.

When the funeral procession, led by the eldest son, arrives at the cemetery, the relatives and others make a heap of fuel (large logs of wood) after which with little ceremony they lay the body on the top to be burned and consumed to ashes. The son lights the fire, and all the people remain there until the completion of the burning. The tragic part comes when the son is required to take a stick and hit the skull to break it, which act has the superstitious belief that the spirit is let loose completely.

The custom of becoming Sati, or the widow burning herself after her husband in the same funeral pile, has been stopped completely now, but it is of importance to note the custom at the grave as follows:

According to the ancient Vedic rite of cremation, there is no authentic reference or appearance of Sati, or the sacrifice of the living wife. Either the wife or the concubine will willingly burn herself on the same burning pyre, with a view and hope that her spirit may too accompany the spirit of her master, or husband for the same married kinship and relationship.<sup>40</sup>

The female was no longer an unwilling victim to become a sati. She willingly ascended the burning pyre as the chariot of fire which was to carry her away to the arms of her bridegroom in the realms of bliss.

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<sup>40</sup> J. Taly Wheeler, The History of India, Hindu, Buddhist, and Brahmanical. (London: Rubur and Company, Ltd.), p. 49.

Funerals for the Maharajas (kings). The corpse is reverently put on the funeral pile, with boiled rice, oil, ghee (butter), and flowers. The fire is lit which was consumed amidst the cries of women and the lamentations of the vast multitude. At this ceremony of burning, libations of water are poured out to refresh the soul of the departed, and the mourners return to the gloomy city.

Comparison with that of Oriental countries. The customs at the grave both in the Hebrew land and the different Oriental countries are worth noting for their variety and novelty. There could be much more information with details on the question of the customs at the grave about other countries. As Oriental customs are observed minutely, it is seen that they are mostly connected with false religious beliefs and superstitions. The modes and methods of disposing of the corpse signify some false idea or superstition connected with the ceremony. The Hebrews, too, had certain beliefs about the methods and mournings; but, as time went on, gradually there was more light and hope given after the ascension of Christ.

We Christians do not mourn and lament so much like non-Christians. For us, a great hope is given in Christ:

Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Like as a father pitieth his children, so

the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come and save you. For the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him and His righteousness unto children's children.<sup>41</sup>

## VI. FAILURE TO RECEIVE BURIAL

At that time, saith the Lord, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of his princes, and the bones of his priests, and the bones of his prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves (Jeremiah 8:1).

Any lack of proper burial is still regarded in the East, as it was in ancient times, as a great curse or indignity or a judgment from God.

For a corpse to remain unburied and become food for beasts of prey was the climax of indignity or judgment (II Samuel 21:10-11; I Kings 13:22; 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; II Kings 9:37; Jeremiah 7:33; 8:1; Ezekiel 29:5; Psalm 79:3; Revelation 11:9) and uncovered blood carried for vengeance (Ezekiel 24:6; 39:11-16). There is an illustration in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 of a dead man found by the way on the tree, and it is advised in the verse to bury his body. Another reference (II Samuel 21:12-14) states that David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son

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<sup>41</sup> "The Ritual," The Methodist Hymnal. (New York: The Methodist Publishing House, 1939), p. 554.



from . . . the bones of them that were hanged and buried them.

Among the Hindus. Similar to Hebrew custom, if any corpse remained unburied it was considered as a curse or judgment. Generally, all people will so adjust to live together that the bodies may not remain unburied or burnt. Such rare cases of refusal of burial ceremonies are found once in a while in towns and cities. Here the poor people live all of their years and yet do not keep affiliation with their respective community, and so they die as poor people and even as paupers. Such unclaimed bodies are taken care of for disposal by the local municipality or government. This kind of funeral is always unwelcomed in good society, as it is counted as a curse or God's judgment.

Sometimes the community people and leaders refuse burials with due rites to those persons who do not observe the community rules. They are considered as excommunicated people. Such a method is good for the discipline of the society.

Among the Parsees. Generally, they as a community take care of all that die. But in exceptional cases of extremely bad people, they are not responsible for funeral rites. Hence it is a curse and punishment to them.

Among the Mohammedans in Persia. The same principle of curse and indignity and judgment is implied if the funeral rites are refused to anyone. There is a very peculiar custom prevalent among the Moslems of Persia and of the whole world. If the deceased man was not able, during his life, to make a pilgrimage to any holy place, his sons or other near relatives should carry his body to the city of Karbella. If they cannot afford to go, then they should hire capable men to go at least with the bones of the deceased to rest the bones in the holy city of Karbella.

They dig up the body and separate the bones from the flesh and dry the bones and pack them in a box and take them to Karbella. It is an honour to the deceased man to have his bones rest in the same place as those of the great prophets, Hassen and Hussein,<sup>42</sup> the grandsons of Mohammed, in the holy city of Karbella.

Such is the custom of all those that follow a false religion. It curses its people and burdens them with rites that are unsatisfactory to the human soul. It gives no peace of mind and heart for which the human soul yearns.

#### Comparison of the Hebrew and Oriental customs.

Having seen and proved the fact that failure to receive a burial is counted as a disgrace and curse both in the Hebrew land and in the other Oriental countries, we may boldly say

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<sup>42</sup> Knenishm, op. cit.

that this custom is prevalent in all nations. It has a disciplinary teaching aspect. It requires every one to live a good life to be recognized both by God and the people among whom he lives. Certainly it is a disgrace and a curse for not getting recognition on an occasion of death which is so sad. The Christians, by virtue of their good faith and living, are required to live a good, Christian, and exemplary life. Thus, they are always to be loved and regarded, even at the time of death.

#### VII. PLACES OF BURIAL: HOW MARKED

And the passengers that pass through the land, when any seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog (Ezekiel 39:15).

Originally, graves were marked by the heaping of crude and rough stones, but hewn stones and sometimes costly pillars were set up as memorials of the dead (Ezekiel 39:15; II Kings 23:17).

Jacob set a pillar over Rachel's grave (Genesis 35:20) and her tomb is marked by a monument to this day. Absalom's grave in the wood of Ephraim had a heap of stones rolled over it (II Samuel 18:17); but, in this case, as in the case of Achan, it was not for honor but for dishonor.

In New Testament times the place of burial was unfortunately outside the cities and villages (Luke 7:12;

John 11:20). Public provision was made for the burial of strangers (Matthew 27:7), as in the closing days of monarchy there was a public burying ground at Jerusalem (Jeremiah 26:23). To this day between the city wall and the Kidron Valley thousands of Jewish graves on the sloping sides of the Valley of Jehoshaphat bear witness to the belief that the Messiah will come. He will descend upon the Mount of Olives and will pass through these resting places of the dead as He enters the Holy City in glory.

To sum up the Hebrew custom, some more facts based on the Scriptures may be given. "And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day" (Genesis 35:20). Some of the burial places were noted for sacredness, as were the shrines or burial places for heroes (Genesis 25:9; 49:31). The bones of Joseph at Shechem (Joshua 24:32) and the death of Miriam at Kadesh (Numbers 20:1) are other striking illustrations of importance. The tomb of Deborah was under a sacred tree near Bethel (Genesis 35:8). Later, sepulchers were regarded, as a whole, as unclean because they were associated with worship of the spirits of the departed ones, contrary to the worship of Jehovah. Later, whitewashing the stones which covered the graves was practiced in order to render them distinguishable from afar and to keep passers-by from ceremonial pollution (Matthew 23:27).

Among the Mohammedans. They, like Christians, erect a tomb or a monument. Sometimes they inscribe the life history in a couple of sentences and some good thought from the holy Koran. A well-known illustration of a tomb is that of Mumtaz Begum, wife of Shahjahan. This tomb, called Taj Mahal, known all over the world, took twenty-four years to build and is located in Agra, India.

Among the Hindus. They usually burn the dead, and hence they have a common spot or place in the cemetery where they bring in all the dead to be burned and consumed with fire. This is the main reason that they do not require any land or ground for erection of any tomb or monument. Of course, the remnant of the ashes of the dead are collected in an earthen pot and scattered in the holy River Ganges and at other places. For instance, when the great man of India, Mahatma Gandhi, died, his ashes were scattered over different holy rivers. In the case of rich and public people and kings, memorials or tombs are erected on the same spots where they were burned or cremated; but in such cases they use their own land and not the public cemetery. There are many instances of monuments and tombs.

Among the Egyptians. The Egyptians have the well-known custom of building pyramids of different sizes and

shapes. They always have religious significance, and there are written or inscribed things about the person who is dead or verses from the Scriptures. These are the tombs in memory ever remembered.

The customs compared with the other Oriental countries.  
The presentation of the subject shows that among almost all peoples, those who bury do keep a memorial by way of building a tomb. It is a regular custom among the Christians to build tombs and inscribe the little life story and some meditative Scripture verses. The graves are kept in good shape with grass and flower pots around, which remind of Christ's promises of hope and resurrection of the dead. There is always a religious thought and meaning attached to the graves of Christians with regard to tombs and written epitaphs and inscriptions.

#### VIII. BELIEFS OF LEADING FAITHS IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

Hindus. Rishis believed in the existence of the soul after death. The soul would be either rewarded or punished according to its "merits and demerits." They formed a dim conception of a deity named Yama, who was clothed with the attributes of a judge of the dead. Yama resided in the infernal regions. The visit of Yama in any home was not

welcome, as it always involved the death of some person of the family.

Kshatriyas, on the other hand, had exalted in a belief in a material heaven, a heaven of all the Vedic gods with Indra and Indrani as supreme rulers like Zeus and Hera. They believed in a hell or purgatory. Their ideas of the existence of the soul in the place of purgatory may best be gathered from a description of their funeral ceremonies. The body was burnt, and the place of burning was some gloomy locality on the bank of a river, which was supposed to be haunted by evil spirits and ghosts. Some substances like rice and meat, as well as butter and oil, were placed upon the pile. After the burning, the mourners sprinkled water and presented cakes for the refreshment of the dead men. On certain appointed days the ghost of the deceased was expected to come; hence the food was presented, and specially sprinkling of water, and rice and butter in an earthen pot with a burning lamp at the outskirt of the village. Special feasts in honour of the dead were termed Shradhas and are still celebrated throughout India in honour of Pitris or ancestors. This custom is true even today in almost all the different sects of Hinduism, and they differ little in form or method.

Persians. The ritual forbade the consigning of the body to the earth, water, or fire, as these elements would thereby be polluted. The less strict Persians coated the body with a thick layer of wax and then buried it. The orthodox and stricter devotees exposed it in the open to the birds and beasts of prey, and the more thoroughly it was consumed by them the better the omen. The bones then were put in a rock-cut tomb above the ground level. The soul, after dwelling near the body for three days, departed on the morning of the fourth day for the place of judgment. If the soul had been sinful, it was accompanied over tainted plains by an evil wind and preceded by a hideous female emblem of its evil deeds; and, after being condemned in the eternal judgment, hell was cast over a bridge into the abyss. The righteous soul, preceded by a beautiful maiden typifying its good deeds, passed safely, at the end of its luminous journey, into paradise.

Early Christians. The early Christians abolished cremation. They believed in the resurrection of the body as did the Pharisees. They did not use embalming, but they did use spices to retard decay. Several of the Roman burial customs survived in certain regions until the Middle Ages such as placing a small coin in the mouth and the use of charms.



Egyptians. The very architecture of the pyramids had its creed. The builders hoped to live forever. The lotus flower opening with the early sun, and the phoenix rising from its ashes, teach more beautifully than any formal dogma the resurrection of the body. They had a belief that the soul of the dead person was destined to re-animate them; therefore the dead bodies are embalmed and wrapped in spices. They consider their houses in which they dwell as less important, but the tombs they call eternal dwelling places.

It gave a belief in the doctrine of life beyond death, as certain of our own poets have written:

To die is to begin to live; it is to end  
 An old, stale, weary work and commence  
 A newer and better; it's to leave  
 Deceitful knaves for the society of gods and  
 goodness.<sup>43</sup>

The prayer for the dead was part of the Egyptian ritual and supposed to have been given by divine revelation. On many tombs are found scales of judgment, a human heart in one side, a feather in the other, while the god Anubis stands by watching. The judgment day is for everyone.

It was not lawful to bury the dead until sentence had been passed upon their character by a board of forty-two

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<sup>43</sup> David James Burrell, The Religions of the World, p. 48.

assessors, who must prove them free from sins or guilt. If not, their mummies were placed on the margin of the lake, thus their ghosts waiting and wandering along the shores for a hundred years. The Ka is a curious feature of the Egyptian religious doctrine. A man was regarded as having a double personality. His after ego, or spiritual double, was called Ka. By this he swore. On the monuments of Egypt the royal Ka is represented close beside the king himself.

About Heaven it is said, The life of the blessed is thus described: He has the use of all his limbs; he eats and drinks and satisfies every one of his physical wants exactly as in his former life.

About Hell: Should the ka or soul of an Egyptian fail to secure a favourable verdict at the Court of Osiris, it wanders forth into Tuat, the other world, to encounter and be overcome by one thousand calamities.

Assimilation with the gods: The doctrine of immortality, as held by the priests, was to this effect, that when a man dies and becomes justified, by safely passing the ordeal judgment, he is identified or assimilated in some mysterious way with Deity itself.<sup>44</sup>

Comparison. The extensive study on the question of life after death becomes the object of our thinking. The living religions of the world are more concerned to refer to this great subject in their teachings. It has already been

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<sup>44</sup> Loc. cit.

observed that the idea of death is closely interwoven with the ceremonial part of the funeral and the future hope. The Bible has a great teaching of hope, light, and salvation on the subject. A Mohammedan, with his prayers five times a day, his alms, and his pilgrimages, fails to find peace. All of the purifications, offerings, and sacrifices of the Jew, under his theocratic influence, does not help much. All the numerous gods and goddesses of the Hindus of India cannot satisfy the longings of man's soul, even though he sacrifices his children.

In this way, all the religions of the world have been tested. All ungodly infidels have been heard, and one after another have fallen and perished. All have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. So shall the false religions of the present-day world perish in the years to come. It is only the structure of our religion with Christ as the cornerstone that has been able to stand against all the assaults of her enemies from within and without and shall continue to stand until time shall be no more. Many who are now the enemies of Christ's Church shall come to take refuge under the shadow of her wings; she shall go on from victory to victory until she overcomes at last, because her king is the King of Kings. In Christ there is a great hope. In the words of Macleod:

We picture death as coming to destroy; let us rather picture Christ as coming to save. We think of death as ending; let us think of life as beginning, and that more abundantly. We think of losing; let us think of gaining. We think of parting; let us think of meeting. We think of going away; let us think of arriving. And as the voice of death whispers, "You must go from earth," let us hear the voice of Christ saying, "You are but coming to Me."<sup>45</sup>

The death of man is always compared, according to our Lord's teaching, with the seed which dies, springing into a new life.

"He gave His life for the life of the sheep" (John 10:15) and also "gave His soul as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). It was Christ's entire life, body, and spirit which entered into vicarious suffering on the cross. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit (Luke 23:46). "And having bowed His head, He gave up the spirit" (John 19:30). "Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25,26).

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<sup>45</sup> Tryon Edwards, The New Dictionary of Thoughts. (New York: Standard Book Co., 1951), p. 116.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The detailed study of funeral ceremonies under the following subheads--burial ceremony in general, burial outline, preparations for burial, on the way to the grave, at the grave, failure to receive a burial ceremony, places of burial; how marked, and the ideas of after life in Oriental countries--has thrown great light on the subject of funeral ceremonies.

An earnest attempt has been made, wherever possible, to show how the Oriental countries can influence the Occidental countries in interpreting the Bible. The extensive study and discussion in all the chapters, under the subheads, help us to understand the general idea of funeral ceremonies. As it has been mentioned, there are three important occasions in man's life: birth, marriage, and death. It is this third aspect, death, which leads one to think about funeral ceremonies. There could be no funeral without death. All that are born are liable to die. Death is universal. There is not a single hut, house, or palace where death has not visited. Some die on account of sickness or dreadful diseases, some by accidents, and some by reaching ripened age. Very often people are accustomed to say at the time of death that it was God's desire and wish.

Death is one of the three great occasions in man's life. It is a sad occasion and a day of mourning and lamentation. The next thing to be noticed is the funeral ceremony, as it has been seen at length in the body of the thesis that every country has some ceremony for wishing "goodbye" and paying respect to the departed soul. Every thoughtful and considerate man wishes to participate in the rites of a funeral of either his relative or his neighbor. It is his moral obligation and duty to pay last respects to the dead. It should be noticed that among almost all people the dead body is respected by removing the cap or hat. Some have different ways to pay respect, but the underlying idea is just the same.

It is the general belief that even the enemy of the deceased, forgetting his differences and grudge and enmity, will try to attend the funeral ceremony. Often it has been observed and experienced that jealousy and enmity have been caused to disappear by someone's funeral ceremony. It is a fact that on account of some great man's death even war has observed silence and peace.

While the world was in trouble, turmoil, confusion, and darkness, and in the midst of wars, sins, and even death, Jesus gave his life for the whole world. His vicarious sufferings and death have meant much to the whole world. Truly

the death of Christ has won the attraction and affection of the entire world. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.)

Both in the Oriental and Occidental countries, it is customary to consider the burial ceremony as an important item. Regardless of the country or the family status, it is an accepted fact that the funeral ceremony is sacred. In our study of Oriental funerals, we could see the variety of customs and numerous beliefs and superstitions. Anyway, according to the place, situation, and custom, the funeral ceremony is always given much thought and attention.

From most of the leading Oriental countries, such as Egypt, India, Phoenicia, Babylon, Japan, China, and other islands, we learn that in one form or another the idea of life after death was stressed, or the question what happens to the soul? As a result of this great belief, the customs of building pyramids in Egypt and of putting "Shradhs" (food) at the graves among the Hindus are practiced. Hinduism taught the theories of "Karma" (deeds) and "Avatars" (transmigration), i. e., according to one's deeds he is rewarded in the next life. If his deeds are bad, he will be punished; and his soul will be incarnated and reborn in an animal a little lower than man.

The non-Christian funeral customs in Oriental countries did not give very much hope and enlightenment on the question of life after death. The false beliefs and superstitions caused them great fears and thus gave them strange ideas and notions. As a result, there are found the acts of excessive wailing and lamentations. But the Bible teaches the great truth and offers great hope to the whole world. The Hebrew history illustrates well the belief and faith of the Old Testament books. The Hebrews belong to the Oriental continent and, as such, it will be correct to state that the Hebrews have given both to the rest of the Far Eastern countries and to the Western world much light and hope in the matter of funeral ceremonies. The teaching in the Bible is constant, from the Old Testament down to the New Testament writings. The following references explain thus:

"down into the grave mourning" (Genesis 37:35); "and thou mourn at the last" (Proverbs 5:11); "to comfort all that mourn" (Isaiah 61:2); "blessed are they that mourn" (Matthew 5:4); "then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn" (Matthew 24:30); "woe to you that laugh" (Luke 6:25); "Be afflicted and mourn and weep" (James 4:9).

Among Hindus there is a custom of beating the breasts while mourning and lamenting. Often it is noticed that many women simply pretend to be beating their breast hard, and thus make a mere show. It is an outward sign,



both shedding tears and beating the breasts, which is the required custom and may not mean the true lamentation. The professional women mourners are always of this category. Thus it is written in the Bible:

Speak unto all the people of the land and to the priests saying, when ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? (Zechariah 7:5).

Often the true mourning and sincerity is questioned in the mourning and in the process of funeral ceremonies, and the Bible draws the attention of the readers to this great fact.

Christ's teaching about the hope of life after death reached its climax when he was resurrected from the tomb. His resurrection and ascension to Heaven are facts of great consolation and great hope both for us and for the whole world.

Thus, the main subject, "Orientalisms in the Bible" or, in other words, "Oriental customs in relation to the Bible as related with special reference to weddings and funerals," has contributed much light to one's reading and interpreting of the Bible. The main purpose of the thesis was to study Oriental customs of marriage and funeral customs and to relate them to customs in the Bible. In other words, it may be stated thus: What more can an Oriental get from the Bible than the Occidental? Upon the subjects

of marriage and the funeral, an earnest and sincere attempt has been made in their extensive study and comparison of both the Eastern and Western countries. The approach has been very interesting, and every important phase of each subject has been discussed and explained. The study has been very appealing and beneficial to the writer, who trusts that it will equally appeal to the readers.

In the matter of marriage ceremony, one may learn that the Hebrew customs, which are Oriental customs, explain clearly the relationship between man and woman. Marriage is God-ordained. Both the Old and New Testament books are witnesses to the great fact of ideal and happy marriages. There should be three parties to every marriage bond: the man, the woman, and Christ. Thus one's marriage should be built around Christ. He should be the head of the home, the unseen guest on all occasions, the guide in all personal relationships. If there is to be a real "Christian Home Movement" in its strict sense, each country and the whole world should so read the Bible and interpret it accordingly, and thus consider the marriage order as sacred and God-ordained. Hence the marriage ceremonies should be simple and sacred. The result will be a new world for the happiness of mankind and to the

In the matter of funeral ceremonies, the comparative study of Oriental and Occidental customs has much to contribute to the readers. The extensive study gives the different and varied forms of customs and sometimes of superstitious beliefs. But the teaching of the Hebrew beliefs and customs has the message for the entire world. The idea of immortality of the soul and of life after death is well taught in the teachings of Christ and in His resurrection. Summing up the subject of funeral ceremonies, it may be stated that one dies a death to begin to live another life. If one trusts in the Lord and believes in Him, he will have everlasting life.

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