

CHAPTER 3: MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND WIVES IN ISRAEL BY ALFRED EDERSHEIM

Note From Brother Mike Sutherland: What follows is the entire Chapter 9 of Alfred Edersheim's book "**Sketches of Jewish Social Life**". The title of this chapter is: "Mothers, Daughters, and Wives In Israel". It is taken from pages 129-147 of the updated printed edition.

IN order accurately to understand the position of woman in Israel, it is only necessary carefully to peruse the New Testament. The picture of social life there presented gives a full view of the place which she held in private and in public life. Here we do not find that separation, so common among Orientals at all times, but woman mingles freely with others both at home and abroad. So far from suffering under social inferiority, she takes influential and often leading part in all movements, specially those of a religious character. Above all, we are wholly spared those sickening details of private and public immorality with which contemporary classical literature abounds. Among Israel woman was pure, the home happy, and the family hallowed by a religion which consisted not only in public services, but entered into daily life, and embraced in its observances every member of the household. It was so not only in New Testament times but always in Israel. St. Peter's reference to "the holy women" "in the old time" (1 Peter 3:5) is thoroughly in accordance with Talmudical views. Indeed, his quotation of Genesis 18:12, and its application: "Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord," occur in precisely the same manner in Rabbinical writings (*Tanch.* 28, 6), where her respect and obedience are likewise set forth as a pattern to her daughters.¹

Some further details may illustrate the matter better than arguments. The creation of woman from the rib of Adam is thus commented on: "It is as if Adam had exchanged a pot of earth for a precious jewel." This, although Jewish wit caustically had it: "God has cursed woman, yet all the world runs after her; He has cursed the ground, yet all the world lives of it." In what reverence "the four mothers," as the Rabbis designate Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, were held, and what influence they exercised in patriarchal history, no attentive reader of Scripture can fail to notice. And as we follow on the sacred story, Miriam, who had originally saved Moses, leads the song of deliverance on the other side of the flood, and her influence, though not always for good, continued till her death (compare Micah 6:4). Then "the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom" contribute to the rearing of the Tabernacle;² Deborah works deliverance, and judgeth in Israel; and

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The following illustration also occurs: A certain wise woman said to her daughter before her marriage: "My child, stand before thy husband and minister to him. If thou wilt act as his maiden he will be thy slave, and honor thee as his mistress; but if thou exalt thyself against him, he will be thy master, and thou shalt become vile in his eyes, like one of the maidservants."

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There is a Jewish tradition that the women had contributed of their substance to the Tabernacle, but refused to do so for making the golden calf, which is deduced from the account in Exodus 32:2 compared with verse 3.

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the piety of Manoah’s wife is at least as conspicuous, and more intelligent, than her husband’s (Judges 13:23). So also is that of the mother of Samuel. In the times of the kings the praises of Israel’s maidens stir the jealousy of Saul; Abigail knows how to avert the danger of her husband’s folly; the wise woman of Tekoah is sent for to induce the king to fetch his banished home; and the conduct of a woman “in her wisdom” puts an end to the rebellion of Sheba. Later on, the constant mention of queen mothers, and their frequent interference in the government, shows their position. Such names as that of Huldah the prophetess, and the idyllic narrative of the Shunammite, will readily occur to the memory. The story of a woman’s devotion forms the subject of the Book of Ruth; that of her pure and faithful love, the theme or the imagery of the Song of Songs; that of her courage and devotion the groundwork of the Book of Esther: while her worth and virtues are enumerated in the closing chapter of the Book of Proverbs. Again, in the language of the prophets the people of God are called “the daughter,” “the virgin daughter of Zion,” “the daughter of Jerusalem,” “the daughter of Judah,” etc.; and their relationship to God is constantly compared to that of the married state. The very terms by which woman is named in the Old Testament are significant. If the man is *Ish*, his wife is *Ishah*, simply his equal; if the husband is *Gever*, the ruler, the woman is, in her own domain, *Gevirah* and *Gevereth*, the mistress (as frequently in the history of Sarah and in other passages), or else *the dweller at home* (*Nevath bayith*, Psalm 68:12).³ Nor is it otherwise in New Testament times. The ministry of woman to our blessed Lord, and in the Church, has almost become proverbial. Her position there marks really not a progress upon, but the full carrying out of, the Old Testament idea; or, to put the matter in another light, we ask no better than that any one who is acquainted with classical antiquity should compare what he reads of a Dorcas, of the mother of Mark, of Lydia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Lois, or Eunice, with what he knows of the noble women of Greece and Rome at that period.

Of course, against all this may be seen the permission of *polygamy*, which undoubtedly was in force at the time of our Lord, and the ease with which *divorce* might be obtained. In reference to both these, however, it must be remembered that they were temporary concessions to “the hardness” of the people’s heart. For, not only must the circumstances of the times and the moral state of the Jewish and of neighboring nations be taken into account, but there were progressive stages of spiritual development. If these had not been taken into account, the religion of the Old Testament would have been unnatural and an impossibility. Suffice it, that “from the beginning it was not so,” nor yet intended to be so in the end — the intermediate period thus marking the gradual progress from the perfectness of the idea to the perfectness of its realization. Moreover, it is impossible to

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Similar expressions are *Sarah* and *Shiddah*, both from roots meaning *to rule*. Nor is this inconsistent with the use of the word *Baal*, to marry, and *Beulah*, the married one, from *Baal*, a lord — even as Sarah “called Abraham lord” (1 Peter 3:6, the expression used of her to Abimelech, Genesis 20:3, being *Beulah*). Of course it is not meant that these are the only words for females. But the others, such as *Bath* and *Naarah*, are either simply feminine terminations, or else, as *Bethulah*, *Levush*, *Nekevah*, *Almah*, *Rachem*, descriptive of their physical state.

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read the Old, and still more the New Testament without gathering from it the conviction, that polygamy was not the rule but the rare exception, so far as the people generally were concerned. Although the practice in reference to divorce was certainly more lax, even the Rabbis surrounded it with so many safeguards that, in point of fact, it must in many cases have been difficult of accomplishment. In general, the whole tendency of the Mosaic legislation, and even more explicitly that of later Rabbinical ordinances, was in the direction of recognizing the rights of woman, with a scrupulousness which reached down even to the Jewish slave, and a delicacy that guarded her most sensitive feelings. Indeed, we feel warranted in saying, that in cases of dispute the law generally leant to her side. Of *divorce* we shall have to speak in the sequel. But what the religious views and feelings both about it and monogamy were at the time of Malachi, appears from the pathetic description of the altar of God as covered with the tears of “the wife of youth,” “the wife of thy covenant,” “thy companion,” who had been “put away” or “treacherously dealt” with (Malachi 2:13 to end). The whole is so beautifully paraphrased by the Rabbis that we subjoin it:⁴

*“If death hath snatched from thee the wife of youth,
It is as if the sacred city were,
And e’en the Temple, in thy pilgrim days,
Defiled, laid low, and levelled with the dust.
The man who harshly sends from him
His first-woo’d wife, the loving wife of youth,
For him the very altar of the Lord
Sheds forth its tears of bitter agony.”*

Where the social intercourse between the sexes was nearly as unrestricted as among ourselves, so far as consistent with Eastern manners, it would, of course, be natural for a young man to make personal choice of his bride. Of this Scripture affords abundant evidence. But, at any rate, the woman had, in case of betrothal or marriage, to give her own free and expressed consent, without which a union was invalid. *Minors* — in the case of girls up to twelve years and one day — might be betrothed or given away by their father. In that case, however, they had afterwards the right of insisting upon divorce. Of course, it is not intended to convey that woman attained her full position till under the New Testament. But this is only to repeat what may be said of almost every social state and relationship. Yet it is most marked how deeply the spirit of the Old Testament, which is essentially that of the New also, had in this respect also penetrated the life of Israel. St. Paul’s warning (2 Corinthians 6:14) against being “unequally yoked together,” which is an allegorical application of Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:10, finds to some extent a counterpart in mystical

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After the elegant poetical version of Dr. Sachs (*Stimmen vom Jordan u. Euphrat*, p. 347). We select this one poetic description of Jewish wedded love and respect for woman from among many that might be given

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Rabbinical writings,⁵ where the last-mentioned passage is expressly applied to spiritually unequal marriages. The admonition of 1 Corinthians 7:39 to marry “only in the Lord,” recalls many similar Rabbinical warnings, from which we select the most striking. Men, we are told,⁶ are wont to marry for one of four reasons — for passion, wealth, honor, or the glory of God. As for the first-named class of marriages, their issue must be expected to be “stubborn and rebellious” sons, as we may gather from the section referring to such following upon that in Deuteronomy 21:11. In regard to marriages for wealth, we are to learn a lesson from the sons of Eli, who sought to enrich themselves in such manner, but of whose posterity it was said (1 Samuel 2:36) that they should “crouch for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread.” Of marriages for the sake of connection, honor, and influence, King Jehoram offered a warning, who became King Ahab’s son-in-law, because that monarch had seventy sons, whereas upon his death his widow Athaliah “arose and destroyed all the seed royal” (2 Kings 11:1). But far otherwise is it in case of marriage “in the name of heaven.” The issue of such will be children who “preserve Israel.” In fact, the Rabbinical references to marrying “in the name of heaven,” or “for the name of God,” — in God and for God — are so frequent and so emphatic, that the expressions used by St. Paul must have come familiarly to him. Again, much that is said in 1 Corinthians 7 about the married estate, finds striking parallels in Talmudical writings. One may here be mentioned, as explaining the expression (ver. 14): “Else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” Precisely the same distinction was made by the Rabbis in regard to proselytes, whose children, if begotten before their conversion to Judaism, were said to be “unclean;” if after that event to have been born “in holiness,” only that, among the Jews, *both* parents required to profess Judaism, while St. Paul argues in the contrary direction, and concerning a far different holiness than that which could be obtained through any mere outward ceremony.

Some further details, gathered almost at random, will give glimpses of Jewish home life and of current views. It was by a not uncommon, though irreverent, mode of witticism, that two forms of the same verb, sounding almost alike, were made to express opposite experiences of marriage. It was common to ask a newly-married husband: “*Maza or Mose?*” — “findeth” or “found;” the first expression occurring in Proverbs 18:22, the second in Ecclesiastes 7:26. A different sentiment is the following from the Talmud (*Yeb. 62 b; Sanh. 76 b*), the similarity of which to Ephesians 5:28 will be immediately recognized: “He that loveth his wife as his own body, honoreth her more than his own body, brings up his children in the right way, and leads them in it to full age — of him the Scripture saith: *Ó Thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace*” (Job 5:24) Of all qualities those most desired in woman were meekness, modesty, and shamefacedness. Indeed, brawling, gossip in the streets, and immodest behavior in public were sufficient grounds for divorce. Of course, Jewish women would never have attempted “teaching” in the synagogue, where they occupied a

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The somewhat similar reference to Leviticus 19:19 in *Philo. de Creat. Princ.* (ed Francof.) pp. 730, 731, mentioned in Wetstein, *Nov. Test.* ii. p. 193, does not seem sufficiently parallel for quotation.

⁶Yalkut on Deuteronomy 21:15.

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place separate from the men — for Rabbinical study, however valued for the male sex, was disapproved of in the case of women. Yet this direction of St. Paul (1 Timothy 2:12): “I suffer not a woman to usurp authority over the man” findeth some kind of parallel in the Rabbinical saying: “Whoever allows himself to be ruled by his wife, shall call out, and no one will make answer to him.”

It is on similar grounds that the Rabbis argue, that man must seek after woman, and not a woman after a man; only the reason which they assign for it sounds strange. Man, they say, was formed from the ground — woman from man’s rib; hence, in trying to find a wife man only looks after what he had lost! This formation of man from soft clay, and of woman from a hard bone, also illustrated why man was so much more easily reconcilable than woman. Similarly, it was observed, that God had not formed woman out of the head, lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye, lest she should lust; nor out of the ear, lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth, lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart, lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand; lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot, lest she be a busybody; but out of the rib, which was always covered. Modesty was, therefore, a prime quality. It was no doubt chiefly in jealous regard for this, that women were interdicted engaging in Rabbinical studies; and a story is related to show how even the wisest of women, Beruria, was thereby brought to the brink of extreme danger. It is not so easy to explain why women were dispensed from all positive obligations (commands, but not prohibitions) that were not general in their bearing (*Kidd.* 1. 7, 8), but fixed to certain periods of time (such as wearing the phylacteries, etc.), and from that of certain prayers, unless it be that woman was considered not her own mistress but subject to others, or else that husband and wife were regarded as one, so that his merits and prayers applied to her as well. Indeed, this view, at least so far as the meritorious nature of a man’s engagement with the law is concerned, is expressly brought forward, and women are accordingly admonished to encourage their husbands in all such studies.

We can understand how, before the coming of the Messiah, marriage should have been looked upon as of religious obligation. Many passages of Scripture were at least *quoted* in support of this idea. Ordinarily, a young man was expected to enter the wedded state (according to Maimonides) at the age of sixteen or seventeen, while the age of twenty may be regarded as the utmost limit conceded, unless study so absorbed time and attention as to leave no leisure for the duties of married life. Still it was thought better even to neglect study than to remain single. Yet money cares on account of wife and children were dreaded. The same comparison is used in reference to them, which our Lord applies to quite a different “offense,” that against the “little ones” (Luke 17:2). Such cares are called by the Rabbis, “a millstone round the neck” (*Kidd.* 29 *b*). In fact, the expression seems to have become proverbial, like so many others which are employed in the New Testament.

We read in the Gospel that, when the Virgin-mother “was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily” (Matthew 1:18, 19). The narrative implies a distinction between *betrothal* and *marriage* — Joseph being at the time betrothed, but not actually married to the Virgin mother. Even in the Old Testament a distinction is made between *betrothal* and *marriage*. The former was marked by a bridal present (or

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Mohar, Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:17; 1 Samuel 18:25), with which the father, however, would in certain circumstances dispense. From the moment of her betrothal a woman was treated as if she were actually married. The union could not be dissolved, except by regular divorce; breach of faithfulness was regarded as adultery; and the property of the woman became virtually that of her betrothed, unless he had expressly renounced it (*Kidd.* 9. 1). But even in that case he was her natural heir. It is impossible here to enter into the various legal details, as, for example, about property or money which might come to a woman after betrothal or marriage. The law adjudicated this to the husband, yet with many restrictions, and with infinite delicacy towards the woman, as if reluctant to put in force the rights of the stronger (*Kidd.* 8. 1, etc.). From the Mishnah (*Bab. B.* 10. 4) we also learn that there were regular *Shitre Erusin*, or writings of betrothal, drawn up by the authorities (the costs being paid by the bridegroom). These stipulated the mutual obligations, the dowry, and all other points on which the parties had agreed. The *Shitre Erusin* were different from the regular *Chethubah* (literally, *writing*), or marriage contract, without which the Rabbis regarded a marriage as merely legalized concubinage (*Cheth.* 5. 1). The *Chethubah* provided a settlement of at least two hundred denars for a maiden, and one hundred denars for a widow, while the priestly council at Jerusalem fixed four hundred denars for a priest's daughter. Of course these sums indicate only the legal *minimum*, and might be increased indefinitely at pleasure, though opinions differ whether any larger sums might be legally exacted, if matters did not go beyond betrothal. The form at present in use among the Jews sets forth, that the bridegroom weds his bride “according to the law of Moses and of Israel;” that he promises “to please, to honor, to nourish, and to care for her, as is the manner of the men of Israel,” adding thereto the woman's consent, the document being signed by two witnesses. In all probability this was substantially the form in olden times. In Jerusalem and in Galilee — where it was said that men in their choice had regard to “a fair degree,” while in the rest of Judaea they looked a good deal after money — widows had the right of residence in their husband's house secured to them.

On the other hand, a father was bound to provide a dowry (*nedan, nedanjah*) for his daughter conformable to her station in life; and a second daughter could claim a portion equal to that of her elder sister, or else one tenth of all immovable property. In case of the father's death, the sons, who, according to Jewish law, were his sole heirs, were bound to maintain their sisters, even though this would have thrown them upon public charity, and to endow each with a tenth part of what had been left. The dowry, whether in money, property, or jewelry, was entered into the marriage contract, and really belonged to the wife, the husband being obliged to add to it one-half more, if it consisted of money or money's value; and if of jewelry, etc., to assign to her four-fifths of its value. In case of separation (not divorce) he was bound to allow her a proper aliment, and to re-admit her to his table and house on the Sabbath-eve. A wife was entitled to one-tenth of her dowry for pin-money. If a father gave away his daughter without any distinct statement about her dowry, he was bound to allow her at least fifty *sus*; and if it had been expressly stipulated that she was to have no dowry at all, it was delicately enjoined that the bridegroom should, *before marriage*, give her sufficient for the necessary outfit. An orphan was to receive a dowry of at least fifty *sus* from the parochial authorities. A husband could not oblige his wife to leave the Holy Land nor the city of Jerusalem, nor yet to

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change a town for a country residence, or *vice versa*, nor a good for a bad house. These are only a few of the provisions which show how carefully the law protected the interests of women. To enter into farther details would lead beyond our present object. All this was substantially settled at the betrothal, which, in Judaea at least, seems to have been celebrated by a feast. Only a *bona fide* breach of these arrangements, or willful fraud, was deemed valid ground for dissolving the bond once formed. Otherwise, as already noted, a regular divorce was necessary.

According to Rabbinical law certain formalities were requisite to make a betrothal legally valid. These consisted either in handing to a woman, directly or through messengers, a piece of money, however small, or else a letter,⁷ provided it were in each case expressly stated before witnesses, that the man thereby intended to espouse the woman as his wife. The marriage followed after a longer or shorter interval, the limits of which, however, were fixed by law. The ceremony itself consisted in leading the bride into the house of the bridegroom, with certain formalities, mostly dating from very ancient times. Marriage with a maiden was commonly celebrated on a Wednesday afternoon, which allowed the first days of the week for preparation, and enabled the husband, if he had a charge to prefer against the previous chastity of his bride, to make immediate complaint before the local Sanhedrim, which sat every Thursday. On the other hand, the marriage of a widow was celebrated on Thursday afternoon, which left three days of the week for “rejoicing with her.” This circumstance enables us, with some certainty, to arrange the date of the events which preceded the marriage in Cana. Inferring from the accompanying festivities that it was the marriage of a maiden, and therefore took place on a Wednesday, we have the following succession of events: — On *Thursday* (beginning as every Jewish day with the previous evening), testimony of the Baptist to the Sanhedrim-deputation from Jerusalem. On *Friday* (John 1:29), “John seeth Jesus coming unto him,” and significantly preacheth the first sermon about “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” On *Saturday* (ver. 35), John’s second sermon on the same text; the consequent conversion of St. John and St. Andrew, and the calling of St. Peter. On *Sunday* (ver. 43), our Lord Himself preacheth His first Messianic sermon, and calls Philip and Nathanael. On “the third day” after it, that is, on *Wednesday*, was the marriage in Cana of Galilee. The significance of these dates, when compared with those in the week of our Lord’s Passion, will be sufficiently evident.

But this is not all that may be learned from the account of the marriage in Cana. Of course, there was a “marriage-feast,” as on all these occasions. For this reason, marriages were not celebrated either on the Sabbath, or on the day before or after it, lest the Sabbath-rest should be endangered. Nor was it lawful to wed on any of the three annual festivals, in order, as the Rabbis put it, “not to mingle one joy (that of the marriage) with another (that of the festival).” As it was deemed a religious duty to give pleasure to the newly-married couple, the merriment at times became greater than the more strict Rabbis approved. Accordingly, it is said of one, that to produce gravity he broke a vase worth about £25; of another, that at his son’s wedding he broke a costly glass; and of a third, that being

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There was also a third mode of espousal — simply by cohabitation, but this was very strongly disapproved by the Rabbis.

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asked to sing, he exclaimed, Woe to us, for we must all die! For, as it is added (*Ber.* 31 *a*): “It is forbidden to man, that his mouth be filled with laughter in this world (dispensation), as it is written, ‘Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.’ When is that to be? At the time when ‘they shall sing among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.’”

It deserves notice, that at the marriage in Cana there is no mention of “the friends of the bridegroom,” or, as we would call them, the groomsmen. This was in strict accordance with Jewish custom, for groomsmen were customary in *Judaea*, but not in Galilee (*Cheth.* 25 *a*). This also casts light upon the locality where John 3:29 was spoken, in which “the friend of the bridegroom” is mentioned. But this expression is quite different from that of “children of the bridechamber,” which occurs in Matthew 9:15, where the scene is once more laid in Galilee. The term “children of the bridechamber” is simply a translation of the Rabbinical “*bene Chuppah*,” and means the guests invited to the bridal. In *Judaea* there were at every marriage *two* groomsmen or “friends of the bridegroom” — one for the bridegroom, the other for his bride. Before marriage, they acted as a kind of intermediaries between the couple; at the wedding they offered gifts, waited upon the bride and bridegroom, and attended them to the bridal chamber, being also, as it were, the guarantors of the bride’s virgin chastity. Hence, when St. Paul tells the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:2): “I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; or I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ,” he speaks, as it were, in the character of groomsmen or “bridegroom’s friend,” who had acted as such at the spiritual union of Christ with the Corinthian Church. And we know that it was specially the duty of the “friend of the bridegroom” so to present to him his bride. Similarly it was his also, after marriage, to maintain proper terms between the couple, and more particularly to defend the good fame of the bride against all imputations. It may interest some to know that this custom also was traced up to highest authority. Thus, in the spiritual union of Israel with their God, Moses is spoken of as “the friend of the bridegroom” who leads out the bride (Exodus 19:17); while Jehovah, as the bridegroom, meets His Church at Sinai (Psalm 68:7; *Pirke di R. El.* 41). Nay, in some mystic writings God is described as acting “the friend of the bridegroom,” when our first parents met in Eden. There is a touch of poetry in the application of Ezekiel 28:13 to that scene, when angels led the choir, and decked and watched the bridal-bed (*Ab. de R. Nathan* 4. and 12.). According to another ancient Rabbinical commentary (*Ber. R.* 8.), God Almighty Himself took the cup of blessing and spoke the benediction, while Michael and Gabriel acted the “bridegroom’s friends” to our first parents when they wedded in Paradise.

With such a “benediction,” preceded by a brief formula, with which the bride was handed over to her husband (Tobit 7:13), the wedding festivities commenced.⁸ And so the pair were led towards the bridal chamber (*Cheder*) and the bridal bed (*Chuppah*).⁹ The bride went with her hair unloosed. Ordinarily, it was most strictly enjoined upon women to have their head and hair carefully

⁸It is, to say the least, doubtful whether the Rabbinical form of this benediction and of that at betrothal dates from earliest times. However beautiful, seems far too elaborate for that.

⁹The distinction is marked in Joel 2:16; the *Chuppah* is also mentioned in Psalm 19:5.

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covered. This may throw some light upon the difficult passage, 1 Corinthians 11:1-10. We must bear in mind that the apostle there argues with Jews, and that on *their own ground*, convincing them by a reference to their own views, customs, and legends of the propriety of the practice which he enjoins. From that point of view the propriety of a woman having her head "covered" could not be called in question. The opposite would, to a Jew, have indicated immodesty. Indeed, it was the custom in the case of a woman accused of adultery to have her hair "shorn or shaven," at the same time using this formula: "Because thou hast departed from the manner of the daughters of Israel, who go with their head covered;... therefore that has befallen thee which thou hast chosen." This so far explains verses 5 and 6. The expression "power," as applied in verse 10 to the head of woman, seems to refer to this covering, indicating, as it did, that she was under the power of her husband, while the very difficult addition, "because of the angels," may either allude to the presence of the angels and to the well-known Jewish view (based, no doubt, on truth) that those angels may be grieved or offended by our conduct, and bear the sad tidings before the throne of God, or it may possibly refer to the very ancient Jewish belief, that the evil spirits gained power over a woman who went with her head bare.

The custom of a bridal veil — either for the bride alone, or spread over the couple — was of ancient date. It was interdicted for a time by the Rabbis after the destruction of Jerusalem. Still more ancient was the wearing of crowns (Cant. 3:11; Isaiah 61:10; Ezekiel 16:12), which was also prohibited after the last Jewish war. Palm and myrtle branches were borne before the couple, grain or money was thrown about, and music preceded the procession, in which all who met it were, as a religious duty, expected to join.¹⁰ The Parable of the Ten Virgins, who, with their lamps, were in expectancy of the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1), is founded on Jewish custom. For, according to Rabbinical authority, such lamps carried on the top of staves were frequently used, while *ten* is the number always mentioned in connection with public solemnities.¹¹ The marriage festivities generally lasted a week, but the bridal days extended over a full month.¹²

Having entered thus fully on the subject of marriage, a few further particulars may be of interest. The bars to marriage mentioned in the Bible are sufficiently known. To these the Rabbis added others, which have been arranged under two heads — as farther extending the laws of kindred (to their *secondary* degrees), and as intended to guard morality. The former were extended over the whole line of forbidden kindred, where that line was direct, and to one link farther where the line became indirect — as, for example, to the wife of a maternal uncle, or to the step-mother of a wife. In the category of guards to morality we include such prohibitions as that a divorced woman might

¹⁰See my article on "Marriage" in Cassell's *Bible Educator*, vol. iv. pp. 267-270.

¹¹According to R. Simon {on *Chel.* ii. 8) it was an Eastern custom that, when the bride was led to her future home, "they carried before the party about ten" such lamps.

¹²The practice of calling a wife a bride during the first year of her marriage is probably based on Deuteronomy 24:5.

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not marry her seducer, nor a man the woman to whom he had brought her letter of divorce, or in whose case he had borne testimony; or of marriage with those not in their right senses, or in a state of drunkenness; or of the marriage of minors, or under fraud, etc. A widower had to wait over three festivals, a widow three months, before remarrying, or if she was with child or gave suck, for two years. A woman might not be married a third time; no marriage could take place within thirty days of the death of a near relative, nor yet on the Sabbath, nor on a feast-day, etc. Of the marriage to a deceased husband's brother (or the next of kin), in case of childlessness, it is unnecessary here to speak, since although the Mishnah devotes a whole tractate to it (*Yebamoth*), and it was evidently customary at the time of Christ (Mark 12:19, etc.), the practice was considered as connected with the territorial possession of Palestine, and ceased with the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth (*Bechar.* 1. 7). A priest was to inquire into the legal descent of his wife (up to four degrees if the daughter of a priest, otherwise up to five degrees), except where the bride's father was a priest in actual service, or a member of the Sanhedrim. The high-priest's bride was to be a maid not older than six months beyond her puberty.

The fatal ease with which divorce could be obtained, and its frequency, appear from the question addressed to Christ by the Pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” (Matthew 19:3), and still more from the astonishment with which the disciples had listened to the reply of the Savior (ver. 10). That answer was much wider in its range than our Lord's initial teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:32).¹³ To the latter no Jew could have had any objection, even though its morality would have seemed elevated beyond their highest standard, represented in this case by the school of Shammai, while that of Hillel, and still more Rabbi Akiba, presented the lowest opposite extreme. But in reply to the Pharisees, our Lord placed the whole question on grounds which even the strictest Shammaite would have refused to adopt. For the farthest limit to which he would have gone would have been to restrict the cause of divorce to “a matter of uncleanness” (Deuteronomy 24:1), by which he would probably have understood not only a breach of the marriage vow, but of the laws and customs of the land. In fact, we know that it included every kind of impropriety, such as going about with loose hair, spinning in the street, familiarly talking with men, ill-treating her husband's parents in his presence, brawling, that is, “speaking to her husband so loudly that the neighbors could hear her in the adjoining house” (*Chethub.* 7. 6), a general bad reputation, or the discovery of fraud before marriage. On the other hand, the wife could insist on being divorced if her husband were a leper, or affected with polypus, or engaged in a disagreeable or dirty trade, such as that of a tanner or coppersmith. One of the cases in which divorce was obligatory was, if either party had become heretical, or ceased to profess Judaism. But even so, there were at least checks to the danger of general lawlessness, such as the obligation of paying to a wife her portion, and a number of minute ordinances about formal *letters*

¹³Rabbinical ordinances so limited the Mosaic law in regard to an adulteress, that the trial and punishment could only have been of the very rarest occurrence. Into these laws and distinctions we cannot, however, at present enter.

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of divorce, without which no divorce was legal¹⁴ and which had to be couched in explicit terms, handed to the woman herself, and that in presence of two witnesses, etc.

According to Jewish law there were four obligations incumbent on a wife towards her husband, and ten by which he was bound. Of the latter, three are referred to in Exodus 21:9, 10; the other seven include her settlement, medical treatment in case of sickness, redemption from captivity, a respectable funeral, provision in his house so long as she remained a widow and had not been paid her dowry, the support of her daughters till they were married, and a provision that her sons should, besides receiving their portion of the father's inheritance, also share in what had been settled upon her. The obligations upon the wife were, that all her gains should belong to her husband, as also what came to her after marriage by inheritance; that the husband should have the usufruct of her dowry, and of any gains by it, provided he had the administration of it, in which case, however, he was also responsible for any loss; and that he should be considered her heir-at-law.¹⁵

What the family life among the godly in Israel must have been, how elevated its tone, how loving its converse, or how earnestly devoted its mothers and daughters, appears sufficiently from the gospel story, from that in the book of Acts, and from notices in the apostolic letters. Women, such as the Virgin-mother, or Elisabeth, or Anna, or those who enjoyed the privilege of ministering to the Lord, or who, after His death, tended and watched for His sacred body, could not have been quite solitary in Palestine; we find their sisters in a Dorcas, a Lydia, a Phoebe, and those women of whom St. Paul speaks in Philippians 4:3, and whose lives he sketches in his Epistles to Timothy and Titus. Wives such as Priscilla, mothers such as that of Zebedee's children, or of Mark, or like St. John's "elect lady," or as Lois and Eunice, must have kept the moral atmosphere pure and sweet, and shed precious light on their homes and on society, corrupt to the core as it was under the sway of heathenism. What and how they taught their households, and that even under the most disadvantageous outward circumstances, we learn from the history of Timothy. And although they were undoubtedly in that respect without many of the opportunities which we enjoy, there was one sweet practice of family religion, going beyond the prescribed prayers, which enabled them to teach their children from tenderest years to intertwine the Word of God with their daily devotion and daily life. For it was the custom to teach a child some verse of Holy Scripture beginning or ending with precisely the same letters as its Hebrew name, and this birthday text or guardian-promise the child was day by day to insert in its prayers.¹⁶ Such guardian words, familiar to the mind from earliest years, endeared to the heart by tenderest recollections, would remain with the youth in life's temptations, and come back amid the din of manhood's battle. Assuredly, of Jewish children so reared, so trained, so taught, it might be rightly said: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little

¹⁴The Jews have it that a woman "is loosed from the law of her husband" by only one of two things: death or a letter of divorce; hence Romans 7:2, 3.

¹⁵This is not the place to enter into the legal details, fully discussed by the Rabbis.

¹⁶*Koll Kore*, by R. El. Soloweycyk, p. 184. Compare *Taan*. 9, a.

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ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.”