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MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Americans and Europeans are shocked to learn that in many parts of the East, marriages are still being arranged by parents, just as they have been for centuries past. But in spite of the seeming lack of freedom of choice involved in the system, there is a notable lack of divorce, and the children resulting from these unions do not become juvenile delinquents. Let us examine some of these customs as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, for the Bible abounds with parables and figures of speech relating to them.

First, there is the matter of selecting the bride. Careful parents give much thought to this. They avoid selecting a girl such as described in Isaiah 3:16: *“Moreover the Lord saith, “Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched forth neck and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet...”*

The *“stretched forth neck”* is a sign of pride and arrogance which the parents watch for. You may remember that Paul instructed the women of the early church to *“adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness”* (I Timothy 2:9). I do not like that word *“shamefacedness”* which the King James translators use in this verse. A better word might be *“Humility”*; this is a quality parents look for in a prospective bride for their son.

The *“tinkling of the feet”* refers to the many jewels which Oriental women wear about their ankles. The modest girl will not jingle as she walks; but the haughty ones will make a noise with them.

Another factor which is considered is whether the prospective bride had wrinkles upon her brow. Oriental women of whatever age they may be, pride themselves on their calm, composed demeanors, since they believe that a worried-looking face betrays a lack of faith in God. This makes more significant Paul’s remark, *“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:27). That is, your faith will have been so great that you will have no wrinkle on your face from worry or lack of trust in God. Job says to his *“miserable comforters”*: *And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face”* (Job 16:8).

If the parents of the prospective groom notice lines of worry on the girl’s face, they say to themselves, *“Look how she has worried herself already; she will worry our son to death if she is married to him!”* And this candidate will be rejected.

The bride having finally been chosen, the two families are now ready to conduct the betrothal ceremony. This is a solemn occasion. The two families may eat a supper together, and then they will go out into the garden. In many parts of Persia, Arabia, Syria and India gardens have sacred plants, and one of these is the *kitchilika* (kit-chi-li-ka) tree, an exotic and fragrant species of orange which bears fruits as large as grapefruit. It is a beautiful tree, and its sweet scent can be detected at the distance during the time the fruit is ripe. A carpet is spread, and the girl’s mother leads her out of the house to be seated opposite the prospective groom. She is, of course, veiled, since it is considered improper for the groom to look upon the face of the bride before the wedding ceremony has been performed. Easterners who observe this custom believe that the veil is a woman’s God-given protection. Even a thief will not attack a woman with a veil because he

believes that in so doing, he attacks God himself. You may remember that Rebekah *“Lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel, for she had said unto the servant, “What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant answered and said, it is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself”.* (Genesis 24:64-65)

The young couple is now seated facing each other on the carpet, and the prospective bride cups her hands and holds them, pressed together toward the young man, and he drops into her hands the ten pieces of silver. These coins have been handed down and kept in the family for the purpose. On one side there is the coat of arms of the young man’s family; on the other side is imprinted the year in which they were made. These Oriental girls are taught, “He who places the ten pieces of silver in your hand is he who will love you.” They believe that God kindles love in the heart of the girl at that moment these ten pieces of silver are dropped into her hands. This, then, is the beginning of love, under the sacred *kitchilika* tree.

The fifth verse of the eighth chapter of the Song of Solomon reads: *“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree; there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee.”* (Unfortunately, the translators never saw or heard of a sacred *kitchilika* tree, so they did the best they could by putting in the word “apple”. Apples are botanical latecomers to the earth and were not in existence until a few hundred years ago.)

By receiving the ten pieces of silver, the bride is considered to have now been purchased, just as Christ died for us on the tree and purchased us as the bride is purchased. “Ye were bought for a price.” Christ paid the price for us.

The bride also receives gifts of other jewels at the betrothal ceremony, but none of the others will have the significance which the pieces of silver have for the bride. Although they would have a value of only about fourteen cents each if they were melted and sold for the metal, still there is a terrific symbolical importance to them. She will wear them hooked with little hooks into her hair at the wedding ceremony, and she must guard them with her life thereafter.

Recall the parable which Jesus told about the woman who lost one of her ten pieces of silver (Luke 15:8). How this parable has been misunderstood by the Western world, which does not appreciate the importance of this Oriental belief! Scholars have tried to say that this woman was poor and needed the money and so she swept the house, and, upon finding the coin, called in the neighbors to rejoice, and so forth, because she needed the money.

According to Eastern thinking, if a woman loses one of her ten pieces of silver, God has withdrawn favor from the household, and the blessings which they formerly had have been lost. If she cannot find the coin, she will have to be put out in the street, an outcast; put out to die! No wonder the poor woman desperately swept the house until the coin was found, and called in the neighbors to rejoice with her, for she had just been saved from extinction. And, Jesus said, their rejoicing is like the rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents.

The marriage ceremony lasts for 10 days since it is considered a sacrament, all the neighborhood joins in its observance. Any programs and prayers and fasting which have been in progress, are suspended for the ten days, since they believe that God’s presence is there at the marriage ceremony. (“Fasting” can mean going without food; it also means doing the will of God.) If any man has a quarrel with another at this time, he

must go and ask forgiveness so that he may present himself blameless before the Lord. This situation is described in Matthew 9:15:

And Jesus said unto them, "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? but the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast".

("Children" in this verse means "people". The children of Israel were grown-up people; we maybe older, but still we are still the children of God. This way of referring to people has caused much confusion to bible scholars.)

This verse is referring, then, to the custom of suspending prayers and fasting during the marriage ceremony period, but when this is completed, they may then resume any prayers or fasting they had in progress.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, another interesting Eastern custom is described; it refers the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-12):

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bride-groom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

In many parts of the East today, the custom of the ten bridesmaids going out to meet the bridegroom's party is still practiced. You see, many of the towns are surrounded by walls, and at the gates of the town, there is an inn for travelers. In this inn there is also a special apartment for bridesmaids to use while waiting at the gates for the bridegroom's party.

The torches which they carry (not lamps!) are very special ones, made especially for the purpose and carefully handed down in the family from one generation to the next.

So here are these ten bridesmaids waiting at the inn by the gate for the Bridegroom and his party to arrive. Tradition says they must arrive just at midnight, and this is exactly what the scripture reports. One of the groomsmen goes on ahead a little to announce their coming by blowing a horn at the gates of the town. The foolish virgins now wake up and realize that they have no oil for their lamps. They even make up a good excuse to tell the other virgins: "Our lamps have gone out," they said, even though it says a few verses before this that they brought no oil with them at all!

We must realize that Jesus is telling a parable when he says five of the virgins were foolish and failed to bring oil for their torches. (It is unthinkable to not have oil for your torch.) But Jesus tells the story in this way to illustrate that the oil represents the spirit and the light which we have within us when we accept

Christ as our personal Savior; we must have that spirit within us if we expect to be admitted into the Master's gates with the rest of the wedding party. If we have not experienced salvation then we shall be like the foolish virgins of the parable who were told by the Lord; *"Verily I say unto you, I know you not!"*

In addition to the special wedding torches there are special wedding robes which are worn by the guests. These are also handed down in the family and are decorated with certain laces and ornaments denoting the house and lineage of the wearer. A parable concerning these is recorded in Matthew 22:11-13.

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then saith the king to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Western scholars had had a terrible time trying to understand the full meaning of this parable. A professor at Drew Theological Seminary gave a challenge about this scripture. He said, "What kind of king would cast out this guest who has no garment? Perhaps he could not afford one. Could the king not have loaned the guest a garment? Or, if he forgot the garment, and left it at home, I would, if I were he, put him in my car and take him home so that he could get it. Wouldn't this be more Christ-like and forgiving?"

These are all good questions. Again the answer is very simple, once the Oriental custom is understood. In the parable (Matthew 22:2) it is said that this is the wedding of a king's son:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.

In this case the marriage of a king's son, you see, the wedding is not held at the bride's home as in the case of ordinary people, but is held at the palace. In addition, each guest receives a special wedding robe from the king to wear for the occasion; a robe with the royal seal which is sent to the home of the guest a day or two in advance of the wedding so that he may be properly attired. It would be an unpardonable breach of etiquette to appear in one's own wedding garment after having received the royal robe. Think how much worse it would be for the guest to appear, as in the parable, with no (wedding) garment at all!

How did the guest get into the wedding without the robe in the first place? This is a question which is sometimes asked. Well, when the guests arrive for the wedding, they come first to a sort of porch where there is a tub of water and a servant is in attendance so the guest may wash their feet after having walked in the dusty pathways. The guests fling off their sandals in the direction of this servant, and he is expected to catch them. He holds a very humble and lowly position in the household which he serves. A reference to the contempt with which this task is held is expressed in Psalm 108:9: *"Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe.."* (This should be *sandal*: shoes were not worn in those days.)

This lowly servant, the one who has sandals flung at him, then, would have no authority in the household to challenge a guest who might come without a robe. After washing the feet, the guests pass into a room of the house in which another servant awaits. The task of this servant is to sprinkle rose water on the head and body of the guests. He, like the first servant, has no authority to challenge a guest which might not be properly attired. It would not be until the guests had gone into another room to be greeted by the host with "an holy kiss" that the guest without a wedding robe would be discovered.

The Scripture says the guest was speechless, and well he might be, since he had been given every chance to be attired in the acceptable raiment for the wedding, but he deliberately refused to put on the royal robe. He was no foreigner; he knew the custom, therefore the king gave him no second change and had him cast out.

God, in like manner, sent us a Robe of Righteousness in his Son. If we accept the robe; if our heart puts on the robe, then we wear the garment of salvation. We must put on Christ in order to appear blameless before God. Many people today have been sent the robe of righteousness but refused to put it on. They are truly tied hand and foot, spiritually speaking, and have been cast into outer darkness. It seems that people in the Western world grope in even greater darkness than the people of the East. There are so many people in the East who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ; but surely there is a greater darkness for the people of the world to whom Christ *has* been preached, and they have refused Him.

As stated before, the marriage ceremonies in some cases last for ten days, and each of the ten virgins has a special day upon which she performs a certain function. The bride and groom come together for perhaps a half-hour each day and are seated on an especially decorated chair, to listen to instruction which the priest gives to them. They have heard these instructions before, but now they are rehearsed and called to their mind again upon this sacred and solemn occasion. Finally, on the tenth day, the vows are repeated.

The groom promises to love and cherish his wife forever; the bride promise to accept the husband in her life in place of God, to obey and serve just as she would the Lord himself. Whatever he does or decides for them is right whether anyone else thinks so or not!

Paul took note of this in his first letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 7:34):

There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

Now salt is brought and they each take a piece of it and put it on their tongues, saying, "In the name of the salt I agree to do all that I have promised, so help me God!"

There is no wedding ring as there is in the Western world; instead, a silver cord is placed around the girl's neck.

The groom may now lift the veil and view for the first time the wife whom he has married, having never known her before. He slowly raises the veil – with fear and trembling, I suppose – and places it upon his shoulder. This symbolizes that the girl's God-given protection is now on his shoulder. Her care and protection are now his responsibility and he is therefore as God to her. This is the meaning of the phrase in Isaiah 9:6: "*And the government shall be upon his shoulder.*" Christ bought us for a price and as our bridegroom, he has taken the responsibility for us on his shoulder.

The vows now having been repeated, the people go into the wedding feast. The young couple walks together into the hall where the feast is prepared, under a special canopy. This symbolizes the protection of God which is over them.

It was at a wedding feast in Cana that Jesus performed his first miracle, that of changing the water to wine (John 2:1-10)

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, they have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.

This last verse is a mistranslation; that is why it appears to make no sense in the context. It should be, *“Gracious Mother, What concern is it of yours and mine? My turn is not yet come.”* This refers to the custom of supplying the sacramental wine in order of age, the oldest persons there must first supply, and the younger ones later. Jesus being 30 year of age at the time, was placed farther down the line and it was not yet his turn to provide the wine to the guests in honor of the bride and bridegroom. As a matter of fact, fermented wine is never used in the parts of the East in which the marriage is considered a sacrament. This “wine” was doubtless grape juice, for in these marriages people never drink intoxicating beverages. One must judge according to the occasion described in the Bible as to whether it is speaking of wine or grape juice.

John apparently includes this account of Jesus’ first miracle in order to help establish the proof that Jesus was the Son of God, and his authority to turn water into grape juice. As we said, marriage is a sacrament in some parts of the East and therefore no intoxicating beverages would be used in them.

The wedding feast completed, the couple now goes on the honey moon. Unlike a Western couple, the Oriental couple does not immediately live together as man and wife. They wait for a certain date which has been set by the priest, who, after consulting the stars, fixes a date for them to come together. It is thought that the child will have the characteristics of this star. This explains the puzzling remark in Matthew 1:18: *“When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.”* Westerners have tried to say they were only engaged at this point. Not so, they were married all right; they had just not come together. In Matthew 1:20 the angel says to Joseph, *“Fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife....”*

The honeymoon lasts for twelve months. The couple lives one month with the bride’s parents first, and then the next month with the groom’s. They take all their meals together. In the East, if a man is invited to dinner within one year of his wedding day, he will replay, *“I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come”* (Luke 14:20). Europeans and Americans think that this is a flimsy excuse indeed. But this is not a flimsy excuse at all; to take a meal away from home and away from the wife during the first year would be unthinkable. It is simply not done.

At the end of the twelve month period, another ceremony is enacted. The couple has spent the last month in the home of the bride’s parents. The family and friends and many of the bridesmaids as can be located, are gathered together for this occasion. The husband approaches the wife and makes a formal statement to her in the presence of all those assembled.

He says, “Let now your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”

Doubtless these words are familiar to you. They are the words Jesus spoke to His disciples at the Last Supper (John 14:1-4).

The couple will now make their permanent residence in the home of the father of the husband. He must go and prepare an apartment in which they will make their quarters. They will eat with the rest of the family, but this apartment will be their private quarters. He is reassuring his bride that he is going to prepare their apartment, and that he will in due time return for her so that she may be there with him also.

The bride listens carefully to this solemn pronouncement and then she makes her response.

She says, "All that thou sayest I will do."

I wonder why many Christians of today are not able to believe Christ's promise to us as calmly and joyfully as the bride of the East responding to her husband. I think it is because we do not know Christ as the bride knows her husband. They have been together for a year; they have not even accepted an invitation apart.

If we who profess Christ would spend one year fully engrossed in the things of the Spirit, never taking a meal without prayer, and always thinking how we may please the Lord, we could believe His promises to us. We, too, could reply, "**All that thou sayest I will do.**"

THE COVENANT OF SALT

An Important thread in the fabric of life in the East, is the covenant of salt. We find this covenant mentioned in the Old Testament (Numbers 18:19):

All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee.

Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?

What is this covenant of salt? In the East, the taking of salt is a pledge, a promise of fidelity. If I come to your house and eat with you food which has been seasoned with salt, I can never betray you or do you harm. Even if you commit a crime and I am asked to testify, I cannot do it because I have eaten your salt. Perhaps I may come to you and try to persuade you to do the right thing, but I would die before I would break the covenant of salt. In fact the penalty for doing so, is death.

People have said, "What do we Christians want to do with this covenant of salt? It sounds like a pagan custom!" It is true that it is an Oriental custom, but not necessarily a pagan one, for we find New Testament references to it also.

In Matthew 5:13 we find Jesus saying, "*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and be trodden under the foot of men.*"

In the East we do not only have salt in the form that you have it in America, our salt also comes in large stone jars, 20 to 30 pounds at a time. This jar stands on the floor of the kitchen, and is like brown rock salt. The top of the jar is covered with a stone slab. Every morning the kitchen floor is washed with water, and in the course of time, the bottom of the stone jar becomes soaked with water so many times that the salt in the bottom of the jar actually loses its saltiness. By the time the salt is used down to the part from which the saltiness has been leached away, the remainder is simply thrown out into the street and it is trodden underfoot.

The person who falls away from the proper worship of God is like the salt in the bottom of the jar: pressed by the crush of materialism from the top and washed away at the bottom by the dampness of “churchianity” in places where the gospel is not preached. Let us, therefore, take care that we do not find ourselves at the bottom of the salt jar, lest we be cast into the street and be trodden underfoot. Christians who have lost their saltiness are truly trodden underfoot by the world, for there is no more criticized person than the one who professes Christianity and behaves otherwise.

In Mark 9:49-50 Jesus speaks again of the salt:

“For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good; but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”

And Paul writes (Colossians 4:6):

“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

A very interesting example of the making of a salt covenant in the Old Testament is found in Judges 4:17-21. Westerners not only fail to realize that a salt covenant was made on this occasion, but they also misinterpret the whole passage. This is the story of the battle which was fought between Sisera and Barak:

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. [In other words, Jael and her husband Heber were neutrals in the war.] And Jael went out to meet Sisera and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

This is the first of the covenants Jael made with him. Taking a guest into your home covering him with a mantle – this is like the stoles which American ladies wear – means the protection of the household is over him. In Genesis 19:7-8, when Lot had taken two angels into his house at Sodom, and when men of the city came and demanded that Lot should bring them out, Lot said:

“I pray you brethren, do not so wickedly, Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.”

What a terrible thing it is, to offer the two daughters instead of the guests, but this was the extent to which an Easterner was willing to guard the integrity of his word, that when guests were lodged under the shadow of his roof, they must be protected at all costs.

This was the nature of Jael's first covenant with Sisera (Judges 4:19),

And he said unto her, "Give me I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink and covered him."

In this translation, you see 17th century English phraseology in the "bottle of milk." The George Lamsa translation from the Peshitta manuscripts, (A.J. Holman Co.) renders this phrase, "And she untied the milkskin and gave him a drink," which is probably more accurate for the era.

This is the verse in which there is the hidden covenant of salt. You see, the milk which would have been kept in a milkskin in a tent would not have been sweet milk as we keep in our refrigerators in America. It would have to be buttermilk, prepared with salt to keep it from spoiling. You notice that Sisera only asks for water. Jael could have given him only water, but she instead gave him milk. Thus she made a salt covenant with him that she would not betray him. (Judges 4:20)

*Again he said unto her, "Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? That thou shalt say, **No.**"*

This is a fourth agreement between them, the promise that Jael will lie for him if anyone should come.

Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. (Judges 4:21)

This verse seems to turn the whole situation upside down. Western Bible scholars have been, understandably, aghast at Jael who did this thing. But let us look further (judges 4:19-22):

And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

The clue here is "her tent". You see, in the East, every living quarters has a private area for the women, which is separate from the main part of the house. This space is inviolate; not even the police may violate the privacy of the woman's quarters. Wars have been fought over this matter. Even when tenting out, as Jael and her husband were, a hanging would divide the tent so that there would be a private area for her. In the tent, then, it would be a simple matter for a fugitive to slip under this hanging and gain the extra security of the woman's part of the tent.

Sisera must have done just this, for it says that Barak came into *her* tent, she surely placed him in the men's area to seat him, cover him with the mantle, and give him salted milk. But later we find him in her tent with the nail in his temple. Really, he sealed his own doom in going into the woman's quarters, as the penalty for this is death. He must have thought over the three covenants with Jael and decided they were still not enough. He may have imagined that a mere woman standing in the doorway to lie for him would not be sufficient, since a strong man could have easily swept her aside and searched the tent – all but the woman's

private quarters. His unbelief in Jael's covenants caused him to commit this fatal error. And so, the penalty for breaking the salt covenant is death.

The nail in the temple also has significance in the Oriental thinking. If Jael merely wished to kill him, she could have chosen any number of ways to do it. Why the nail in the temple? Because she was attacking his unbelief, she drove the nail into his head where the unbelief resided. So he died. His unbelief killed him.

Like Sisera, we have received a covenant of salt; ours is from God. We have God's Word that He will never forsake us; that He will supply all our needs out of His riches in glory. If we cannot believe this, and remain in the security of God's Word; if we do not believe the covenants He has made with us, then we, like Sisera, will die the death of unbelief.

As a further proof that Jael's actions were justified, look in the next chapter (Judges 5:24-25):

*Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.
He asked water and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish...etc...*

This is a further indication that she even received praises for having killed him. Earlier in the fourth chapter, the Lord indicated that Sisera would be destroyed in the battle; Jael was merely the instrument in the hands of God to accomplish this purpose

Westerners are puzzled to read in the Bible that Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt when she disobeyed God and turned back to look at the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:26). Easterners, however, immediately understand that she became a monument of her disobedience.

The covenant of salt is still made in the East today. Supposing you are the owner of a flock of 500 sheep and a man comes to buy them from you. He pays you \$300.00 down and says he will pay the remaining \$800.00 in one month. If he tries to sign a paper for the \$800.00 you can never be sure that he will not try to twist out of the agreement somehow. But if he makes a covenant of salt with you, there can be no doubt that you will get your \$800.00. He will even make his eldest son promise that even if anything happens to him before the time comes to pay, the son will pay it.

Again, supposing that you were traveling in the Middle East and found yourself far from the city when night falls. You come upon a tent, and most likely the occupant is one who supports himself by highway robbery, since these people camp out away from other people. You may go to the tent and say to the man, "I am an American; I did not reach the city before nightfall and have lost my way, and I want to know if you will take me in for the night." He says, "But don't you know that I am a thief? Do you want to spend the night with a thief?" If you know this trick, you may now say to him, "Yes, but I will make with you a covenant of salt for my protection."

He bows low. "Come, thou blessed of the Lord," he says. He gives you a seat, probably on the floor of the tent and says, "How much money do you have?" You bring out your money and count it out to him. "One thousand dollars, he concludes, and puts the money in his pocket.

Now he calls for food which has been salted, such as olives or dried meat, and you take the covenant of salt together.

You may now go to sleep, in whatever bed the man can give you, but this thief will never sleep while you are there. He places himself in the doorway of the tent to stand watch, and also ranges around the outside of the tent with his gun in hand, watching and protecting you while you sleep. In the morning, he gives you what breakfast he can, counts out your money to you, and then guides you safely where you want to go. And he will not take any money for his service, because he counts it a service to God.

I often think that if a man who is a thief, uneducated and not even a Christian can be honorable by the taking of the covenant of salt, that we who are children of God should surely be all the more faithful and true to God. We should be the salt of the earth, the ones on whom God can depend. And our speech should also be salted, so others can know that we are truly living our faith. This is one of our problems today: people have trouble telling the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. We should be living such a witness that others may also be won for Christ.

Another Biblical example of the breaking of the salt covenant is the case of Judas' betrayal of our Lord (Mark 14:18-20):

And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, one of you which eateth with me shall betray me."

And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, "Is it I?" and another said, "Is it I?" And he answered and said unto them, "It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish."

Judas was eating food from the same dish as our blessed Lord, eating HIS salt; and at the same time, scoundrel that he was, planning to betray him. It is no surprise to Orientals when they read that Judas took his own life afterwards; for as we said, the penalty for breaking the covenant of salt is death and if Judas had not taken care of the matter himself, someone else would have been obliged to do it for him!

Every day we eat God's salt, because we work and eat by God's grace, but some of us dishonor Him by not keeping our word to Him. More often it seems that there are greater thieves and liars inside the church than outside of it; for those outside only lie to each other; but those within, lie to God. They even *sing* lies to God. Here is an example, I remember once in England, sitting next to a lady. When the offering plate was passed she said to her husband, "Give me sixpence, dear; I have nothing but big bills in my purse." At the same time she was singing,

"Take my silver take my gold, Not a mite would I withhold"

Not all who do this are liars, when they sing this and only put in a small coin. If they were salted they would put into the collection all the big bills in the purse, not the smallest coin. Everything is words, but no action. Be not deceived; God is not mocked. *"My spirit will not always strive with man,"* saith the Lord. It is only by God's grace that any of us are still alive, after all the lies we have told to Him!

In the first chapter (Marriage & Customs) we mentioned the bride and groom also take the salt covenant when they repeat their vows. This is the reason that there is little or no divorce among the high caste Hindus in India. Whenever the husband is tempted to mistreat his wife; or the wife thinks to nag her husband, they remember their covenant of salt, and adjust themselves accordingly.