Bridegroom, Friend of the. In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist refers to himself as the ‘friend of the bridegroom’ (John 3.29), what today we might call ‘the best man’. In NT times, marriage was an arrangement entered into by two families involving a formal betrothal with the wedding following at least a year later. In these arrangements the friend of the bridegroom had a major role.

When negotiating a marriage, the two fathers did not deal directly with each other but through deputies, including the bridegroom’s friend, probably to avoid any loss of honor if the negotiations broke down. The two deputies negotiated the bride’s dowry, which the bridegroom would pay and which would revert to the wife in case of divorce. When consent was reached, then the deputies and the fathers drank together as a sign of agreement. The betrothal was a very formal and binding agreement that could only be broken by divorce or death. The deputies drew up the marriage contract which was signed by the two fathers and then given to the bridegroom’s friend. Because the bridegroom’s friend played such a critical role in the negotiations there were ancient laws preventing the ‘friend’ ever marrying the intended bride even if the proposal was turned down.

The procession of the young woman from her father’s house to the home of the bridegroom, usually arrived late in the day for the wedding ceremony, which was always in the evening. Sometimes the groom would lead the bride, and sometimes his ‘friend.’ The most solemn moment came when the bride entered into the home of the bridegroom.

Often the bridegroom would travel in his own procession, arriving some hours later in the evening. The bridegroom’s friend then led him into the bridal chamber and it seems that he awaited the call of the bridegroom to fetch the nuptial sheet to testify to the virginity of the bride.

In the creation story in Gen. 2, God is considered to have had the role of the friend of the bridegroom when, following the creation of Eve, God brings her to Adam. In the NT, some of these customs lie behind the parable of the ten maidens (Matt. 25.1-13). In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ role as the bridegroom is implied in the Wedding at Cana when the head steward goes to the bridegroom to congratulate him on producing good wine late in the festivities (John 2.9-10). This would indicate that the bridegroom has the task of providing wine, and, in this case, it is Jesus who has provided the good wine.

See also John, Gospel of; Bride [MLC]