

The Truth about Wedding Bands



There appears to be much dissension among the Pentecostal/Apostolic ranks concerning wedding bands. Some see the wedding band as a non-ornamental symbol, therefore not being true jewelry, while others disagree. Some think wedding bands are of Catholic/Pagan origin, while disregarding the historical origin of something like holidays. Others see the issue as nit-picking. While souls are dying all around without the Gospel the Church is bickering, even to the point of dis-fellowshipping, over wedding bands and watches.

Much of the dispute lies in a lack of historical research, but, scripturally, Jesus did not condemn a ring. In fact, He spoke of a ring in the parable of the prodigal son in a good sense (St. Luke 15:22). When the prodigal son repented and came home he was not stripped of ornaments. Instead, he was given a RING to wear, the best robe, new shoes, and a dinner with his friends!

Wedding rings have a history of their own separate from jewelry in general. We can study their history in Roman history, Greek history, Egyptian history, but the history of wedding bands in JEWISH history is totally ignored. The Jews, like the Romans, also used wedding rings.¹ For the Romans as well as Jews, the ring was intended as "earnest money," symbolizing the groom's promise that he had the means to support his bride-to-be.

The idea that developed into the wedding band actually goes back to BEFORE Paganism and before written history when primitive people believed that a rope tied around various parts of the body could keep the soul from escaping, so when a man chose his mate, he brought her spirit under his control by tying cords made of braided grass around her wrists, ankles, and waist. Later, just the wrists were tied. Ultimately, the finger became the only part of the body to be encircled with grass or a lock of hair to symbolize the union of two lives. The first rings were formed out of rush, a hollow-stemmed grass.

The first known exchange of rings as objects of love took place in Egypt around 2800 B.C.² The Pharoahs of Egypt are credited with being the first to use a ring in circular form to

¹ "Wedding Bands", by Osnat Gad, p21

² "Wedding Bands", by Osnat Gad, pp 18, 19

symbolize a union and eternity. The Egyptians were romantic, loving couples and believed that life, happiness and love should have no beginning and no end, and the circle represented this to the Egyptians. They believed that a vein in the fourth finger of the left hand led straight to the heart. Beliefs such as these, and those regarding the afterlife, are referred to as *FOLKLORE*—not Paganism.

The Romans were not romantic like the Egyptians, but they adapted the wedding ring to their own culture and made the ring out of iron to symbolize “ownership” of the bride.

Sometimes jewelry AND clothing was worn in association with idol worship, but I find no evidence that the wedding ring was worn in honor of a pagan god. In the Roman wedding other aspects honored deities, but the ceremony took place in the home of the bride’s father and not in an idol’s temple. Many of the Roman customs resemble today’s. The bride wore a white tunic, a veil, and was accompanied by a bridesmaid. The guests ate a cake, dedicated to Jupiter, and nuts were thrown on the couple like rice is today. The girl had a knot tied in the back of her dress, called the “Knot of Hercules”.³ Roman marriage was more a matter of mutual agreement, public acknowledgement, and the fact that the couple lived together in the husband’s house. As documentary evidence of a marriage was often needed for legal reasons when dealing with property, marriage contracts might be drawn up, but they were not compulsory, and their presence or absence had no bearing on the validity of the marriage. A celebration in front of witnesses helped to provide the public acknowledgement and proof of mutual agreement, so weddings could be celebrated in style, including torch-lit processions, feasts and a specially decorated bridal chamber by those with money.⁴ The Egyptian wedding also was more of a public, legal contract than it was an idolatrous religious ceremony.

The first mention in Roman literature of a ring as a pledge of love is by Plautus (254-184 B.C.). Marriage rings given at the time of betrothal, or what we now call the engagement, began in Rome in the second century B.C. According to Pliny (237-79? B.C.), a Roman writer and the foremost authority in ancient Europe, the bridegroom gave the bride first a gold ring to wear during the ceremony and at special events and later on an iron ring to wear indoors. In the Christian era the Church “Fathers” approved of the wedding band, and Tertullian spoke of them in his day. St. Clement of Alexandria declared that the ring was not bestowed AS AN ORNAMENT.⁵

In Jewish history jewelry to symbolize wedlock goes back to Rebekah and Isaac’s betrothal. Rebekah’s gifts of jewelry (bracelets and earring, Gen. 24:22) were the BRIDE’S PRICE. Abraham, who sent her the jewelry, did NOT worship idols! (Gen. 26:4, 5 “*Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.*” James 2:23 “...*Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*”) The gifts given by the groom to the bride was called the *mattan*; the price paid by the father of the groom to the father of the bride was called *mohar*. The servant gave *mattan* to Rebekah, and *mohar* to her brother and mother (v53). Shekhem, desiring to marry Dinah, Jacob’s daughter (Gen. 34:12) says, “Ask me never so much DOWRY [*mohar*] and GIFT [*mattan*], and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife.”

³ “Roman Weddings” <http://www.unrv.com/culture/roman-weddings.php>

⁴ “Roman Clothing and Fashion,” by Alexandra Croom; p132

⁵ “Wedding Bands”, by Osnat Gad; p20

THROUGHOUT JEWISH HISTORY the *mohar* institution never did pass out of existence but was reformed intermittently.⁶ According to Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p138, the DOWRY could consist of money, property, or jewelry and was entered into the marriage contract.

All brides in Israel were adorned with (*literal*) jewelry. Song of Solomon 4:9 "*Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse:...with one chain of thy neck.*" Isaiah 49:18 "*As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.*" Isaiah 69:10 "*...he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*" Jeremiah 2:32 "*Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?...*" God typified His love of Israel to a literal man's love of his own wife in Ezekiel 16:11-13. He adorned His symbolical wife, Israel, with a number of pieces of jewelry. "*I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands and chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears...*"

There are three Hebrew words translated "earring". The first *nezem*⁷ was Rebekah's gift; *lahash*⁸ was TALISMANIC or AMULET jewelry, worn in worship of idols and found in Jacob's household (Gen. 35:1-4); the earrings taken in the spoils by Gideon's men (Judges 8:24); also Isaiah 3:20. But, there is another word, *agil*,⁹ which is found in Ezekiel 16:12. These earrings denoted wedlock of the Lord to His symbolical wife, Israel, and this word emphasizes the idea of roundness in its definition as found in *Strong's* and *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*. The earrings in Ezekiel 16:12 were round like a wedding band.

The Jewish wedding band evolved from a custom that arose during the Babylonian captivity and the time of the *Talmud* when a Jewish groom would offer something of value, such as a gold coin, to a bride, which she would have to accept in order to consecrate the marriage. The messages behind the circularity of the coin have been translated into the giving of a perfectly circular ring.¹⁰ Before placing the ring on his bride's finger a groom will recite, "Behold, thou art consecrated to me with this ring, according to the law of Moses and Israel."¹¹

From a recent work entitled, *The Wedding-Day in All Ages and Countries*, by Edward J. Wood, we learn that no reference to rings was made by the Talmudists, and there is an opinion that they were not used in the Mosaic days but came in at a later period as an economical substitute for dowry-money.

ALL CULTURES have adapted the symbolism of the wedding band. In our culture the wedding band symbolizes love, commitment, fidelity, eternity and honour. Wedding rings are gifts from God to couples who want them to be such. They are the tangible form of their verbal vows. They are NOT symbols of idol worship from ancient civilizations.

⁶ "Ancient Jewish Marriage-My Jewish Learning", by Hayyim Schauss, Jewish Teachers Seminary, New York, College of Jewish Studies and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles

⁷ "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words", #5141

⁸ "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words", #3908

⁹ "Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words", #5694

¹⁰ "Jewish Wedding Rings" <http://www.jewishgiftplace.com/Jewish-Wedding-rings.html>

¹¹ "What are Jewish Wedding Rings?", by Jayme Richards http://www.ehow.com/info_7908401_jewish-wedding-rings.html

Conclusion

No one today, in our culture, worships the original pagan gods of the Roman Empire, and it is impossible to wear jewelry to honor deities that no longer exist. With the acceptance of the "Christian" religion by the Roman Empire, Rome destroyed her old pagan religions. The Pagan era ended, and the "Christian" era began. Images and temples are ancient ruins. Early "Christians" adopted many pagan rites and metamorphosed deities into saints, so idolatry entered into a "MYSTERY" form, hidden in MYSTERY BABYLON, symbolical of the Roman Catholic Church (Rev. 17:5).

Wedding rings are not a violation of 1 Tim. 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3-6. Please read the article on these two scripture passages as understood in light of ancient history.