



Wedding Bands **An Ornament or a Symbol**



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INTRODUCTION

The wedding band debate in Adventism reflects a tension between theological ideals and cultural realities. Rooted in a tradition of modesty and nonconformity, early Adventists rejected jewelries including wedding ring as incompatible with spiritual humility. This stance was shaped by Ellen G. White's counsel and the denomination's desire to remain distinct from worldly customs.



History

- The Millerites were almost universally ultra-conservative in their individual lifestyle.
- They frowned on wearing jewelry, gambling, card playing, dancing, cosmetics, etc.



Wedding bands

The wearing of the wedding band seems not to have been practiced by the earliest SDA founders and pioneers who for many years lived and labored exclusively in North America.



Yet as Adventism grew internationally, cultural norms challenged this rigidity. In societies where wedding bands signified marital commitment, their absence caused confusion or offense. Recognizing this, church leadership eventually allowed their use in culturally appropriate settings, signaling a shift from strict uniformity toward contextual adaptation while preserving core values.



A Brief History of Jewelry Use

- **The Ancient Uses of Jewelry as Amulets**

Jewelry, by definition, is an ornament designed to adorn the person and be worn for various reasons. Their fundamental and most compelling purpose in ancient Egypt was as amulets for the protection of the wearer from mysterious and hostile forces.



A Brief History of Jewelry Use

- **From Ancient Symbol to Sacred Tradition**

Wedding rings began as ancient symbols of eternity and love, first used by Egyptians and later adopted by Romans. The circular shape represented endless devotion, and the placement on the fourth finger was thought to connect directly to the heart. Though originally practical or legal in nature, these rings gradually evolved into romantic emblems of lifelong partnership.



A Brief History of Jewelry Use

- **Biblical Echoes of Covenant**

While the Bible doesn't mention wedding rings in marriage ceremonies, it uses rings to signify deep covenants and authority. In Genesis 41:42, Pharaoh gives Joseph a ring to mark trust and power, and in Esther 8:2, a ring seals royal favor. These moments reflect the spiritual weight of commitment—mirroring the enduring promise between spouses in marriage.



A Brief History of Jewelry Use

- **Christian Embrace of the Ring**

By the Middle Ages, Christian weddings embraced rings as symbols of divine union. Scriptures like Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6 emphasize the sacred bond of marriage, and the ring became a visible reminder of that spiritual joining. Though not biblically mandated, the wedding ring beautifully embodies the eternal love, unity, and covenant that Scripture celebrates.



Common excuses for wearing wedding ring



“I FEEL BAD BEING PREGNANT WITHOUT A RING ON MY FINGER SO THAT PEOPLE KNOW I AM MARRIED. WHEN I GO TO THE HOSPITAL FOR DELIVERY, I MIGHT BE SHUNNED.”

“THE RING STOPS PEOPLE FROM FLIRTING BECAUSE THEY ALWAYS KNOW YOU ARE MARRIED.”

“MY HUSBAND SAYS I MUST WEAR MY RING OR HE WILL LEAVE ME.”

“WHAT I DO IS MY OWN BUSINESS, I AM NOT BOTHERING ANYONE BUT MYSELF.” “DON’T JUDGE ME!”

Jewelry in the Old Testament

The Old Testament uses a variety of terms to designate different types for ornaments. There are references to ornaments in general (e.g. Prov 25:12), fibulas, earrings, rings, ornaments for the neck and breast of a woman (Exod 35:22), earpendants (Judges 6:26), anklets (Prov 7:22), bracelet (Gen 24:22), necklace (Ezek 16:1), and others.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Uses as Adornment

Personal adornment is the most obvious purpose of jewelry in the ancient Near East, as evidenced in part by the simple fact that in general it was beautifully crafted and, therefore, it served to enhance the appearance of the individual wearing it. One of the best examples of this function of jewelry in the OT is found in the dress of the High Priest which was decked with precious and semi-precious stones and gold.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Uses as Adornment

The negative side of this picture is recorded in Isa 3:16-23 where Israelite ladies put on their jewelry to beautify themselves attracting attention to their own proud persons.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Used as Currency

Before the invention of coin age or money, jewelry was used as a medium of exchange. According to the biblical record the servant gave Rebekah a gold ring weighing half shekel and a pair of bracelets weighing ten gold shekels (Gen 24:22). Two elements in the narrative suggest that this jewelry was given to her on account of services rendered.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Used as Currency

First, he gave her the pieces of jewelry only after she performed a valuable service for him and his animals. The gold given to her was her reward for a task well done. Second, it is important to notice that the narrative indicates the weight of the jewelry. This piece of information "is due to the fact that such items were cast according to fixed standards and used as media of exchange."



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Evidence of Wealth

Jewelry was used to indicate the economical or financial well-being of a person (cf. 2 Chr 32:27; 1 Kgs 10:2). Abraham was a wealthy individual not only because he had servants and many animals but also because he had silver and gold (Gen 24:35). These precious metals were preserved in the form of jewelry (vss. 10, 22).



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Symbol of Social Status

Jewelry functioned as an identifying mark of the individual's position in the social strata and his or her role within it. This is one of the most common uses of jewelry in the OT. The figure of the king is probably the most important one in this respect. Saul wore a crown (nezer) and an armlet ('e sa~da~h; 2 Sam 1:10) as his royal insignia. Jewelry was used by people belonging to the high strata of society, particularly those from the palace.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Symbol of Power/Authority

A high office in society is usually accompanied by power and authority. Jewelry could express both ideas. For instance the royal crown is a symbol of status and power to rule over others (2 Kings 11:12; Esther 8:15; Zech 6:11-13); removing the crown from the head of a king means to be humiliated, to lose power (2 Sam 12:30; Jer 13:18; Ezek 21:26 [31]).



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Religious Function

One of the basic purposes of jewelry was religious, consisting in the manifestation of the religious convictions and/or function of the person wearing it. Several examples from the OT illustrate this usage. The first one is the jewelry of the high priest. A golden plate was attached to the crown of the high priest with an engraved inscription on it: "Holy to the Lord" (Exod 28:36-38), which identified the nature of his work.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Magical/Apotropaic Function

Closely related to the religious use, and probably inseparable from it, was the use of jewelry to protect the individual from evil powers and dangers. This usage was well known throughout the ancient Near East but is not explicitly found in the OT.



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Magical/Apotropaic Function

term for jewelry in Isaiah that suggests a magical or apotropaic usage is the "amulets" (vs 20). The Hebrew term *lehas* contains the idea of "conjuring" and "charming" (Isa 3:3). It is generally recognized that the term designates an amulet that protected perhaps from snakes ("snake charms")



Jewelry in the Old Testament

Used as Offerings

Jewelry was used as offerings for the gods. In fact, in some cases a specific item of jewelry was made and given to the temple to be placed on the image of the god. Such a practice is foreign to the OT but we do find the idea of giving jewelry as an offering to the Lord. This was done specially after a census was taken (Num 31:50; cf. Exod 30:11-16) and was associated with the idea of atonement.



Jewelry in the New Testament

New Testament passages on jewelry are not as abundant as in the Old Testament but the few we find can be grouped according to the function and purpose of jewelry. Part of the problem is that the terminology for jewelry in the New Testament is almost limited to terms such as "gold," "silver" and "pearls." In some cases we are not certain whether those terms are being used to designate pieces of jewelry.



Jewelry in the New Testament

Used as Adornment

The use of jewelry as adornment was well known during the period of the New Testament. Peter and Paul refer to it and mention gold and pearls used by women to beautify themselves (1 Pet 3:3; 1 Tim 2:9). Clear reference to the use of jewelry as personal adornment is also found in the description of Babylon, the apocalyptic prostitute. She is depicted as a queen, "dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls" (Rev 17:4; cf. 18:16).



Jewelry in the New Testament

Used as Currency

By the time of the New Testament coins of gold and silver were used as money making it almost unnecessary to use jewelry as currency. The expression "silver and gold" was used in the same way we use the term "money" (Acts 3:6; 20:33).



Jewelry in the New Testament

Evidence of Wealth

Jewelry appears to be used in several passages as evidence of wealth. The great mystical city of Babylon is personified as a very wealthy woman richly adorned with precious stones and gold (Rev 18:16). James wrote to the rich people of society who oppressed the poor saying, "Your wealth has rotted. . . Your gold and silver are corroded" (5:3).



Jewelry in the New Testament

Symbol of Social Status

The same passage from James could be a good example of the use of jewelry as a symbol of social status. The man well-dressed and wearing a gold ring belongs to the high strata of society but we are not informed about his specific function (2:2).



Jewelry in the New Testament

Symbol of Social Status

Another case is found in John's description of Jesus at the moment of his second coming. At his return Jesus is wearing "a crown [Stephanos] of gold on his head" (14:14). The Greek term Stephanos usually designates a wealth of laurel given to the winners in the Olympic games, a crown of victory; but it can also refer to a metal crown"as a sign of royal sovereignty.



Jewelry in the New Testament

Symbol of Power/Authority

The best example of this particular usage of jewelry is found in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:22. When the father sees his son returning home, he orders that he be dressed and that a ring (daktulios) be put on his finger. This was a signet ring, "not simply an ornament, but a symbol of authority,"



Jewelry in the New Testament

Used as Offerings

There is no explicit use of jewelry as offerings in the New Testament. A possible indirect reference or a similar case maybe found in the incident of the Magi. If the gifts of gold they gave Jesus included gold in the form of jewelry, this would be their offering to Jesus as king (Matt 2:11).



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Jewelry in the Old and New Testament

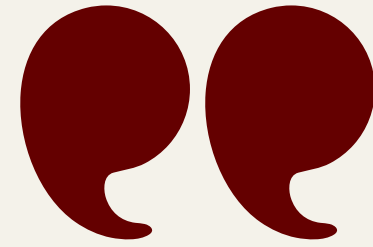
The Old and New Testaments made a distinction between functional and ornamental jewelry. This is because ornamental jewelry can cause one to become prideful and exemplify self. Paul also added the idea of a more important inward ornament that speaks to the character of a human being and not to what they wear. Thus, the question is whether wedding rings fall into the ornamental or functional category.



Cultural Implication

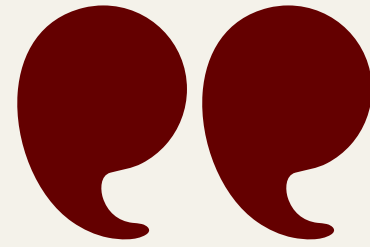
Ellen White recognized that in her day the custom of wearing a wedding band was considered de rigueur throughout the British Empire, Europe, and in many other parts of the world—a cultural imperative—and she accepted the status quo as applicable to SDAs in such places.





In countries where the custom is imperative, we have no burden to condemn those who have their marriage ring; let them wear it if they can do so conscientiously”

Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers , 180-181.



“In some countries and cultures the custom of wearing the wedding ring is considered imperative, having become, in the minds of the people, a criterion of virtue, and hence it is not regarded as an ornament. Under such circumstances we do not condemn the practice.

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

A Brief History of Jewelry Use

- **Christian Embrace of the Ring**

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Oct. 2, 1972

The General Conference Officers voted a Statement of "Counsel Regarding the Wedding Band in North America," recommending that the practice need not constitute a bar to baptism/membership of conscientious Christians who felt that they must continue to wear it.



Oct. 2, 1972

But even in opening the door of accommodation ever so slightly, the leaders were concerned that the church not "lower its standard, blur its identity, or muffle its witness."



1986 NAD policy

The 1986 NAD policy reaffirmed the recommendation ("counsel") voted by the GC Officers and North American Union Conference Presidents in 1972, that in North America "we discourage the use of the wedding band" in SDA churches; and that "discouragement" is still the official policy of the church in North America.



Principled Modesty Over Ornamentation

Ellen G. White emphasized simplicity and modesty in Christian living, cautioning against unnecessary adornment. While she did not explicitly forbid the use of wedding rings, she discouraged wearing them merely to conform to social customs.



Principled Modesty Over Ornamentation

Her writings suggest that true Christian character should shine through one's actions and faith, not through outward symbols. In Testimonies to Ministers, she advised missionaries in Australia to rely on the “golden link” of connection to Christ rather than jewelry to establish credibility or virtue.



Cultural Sensitivity and Personal Conscience

At the same time, Ellen White acknowledged cultural differences. In societies where the wedding ring was seen as a symbol of marital fidelity, she allowed its use if worn without vanity. Her approach was not rigid but guided by conscience and context.



Cultural Sensitivity and Personal Conscience

She urged believers to avoid judgment and coercion, focusing instead on inner transformation and spiritual integrity. The wedding ring, in her view, could be acceptable, so long as it did not distract from the deeper values of humility, love, and devotion to God.



Conclusion

The wearing of wedding ring to Seventh-day Adventists in the Philippines is not a moral but an etiquette issue. The wearing and non-wearing is not a matter whether it is sinful or not. And due to the growing diversities of cultures in the Philippines let the local culture be the determinant of the etiquette of wearing wedding. This is in line with the counsel of Ellen G. White.



Conclusion

But the possibility remains that a ring specifically for a purpose may transcend its functional use by its make. In this case the wedding ring becomes an adornment. Thus, simplicity, modesty, an economy (1 Tim 2:9, 10) should be the criteria in the choice of a wedding ring when one is required to wear.



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