



underthefigtree

# THE LORD'S RING

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

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The room hums with anticipation as guests listen to carefully chosen music drifting through the sanctuary. He shifts his weight nervously and looks toward the back of the church expectantly. Then, finally, the music no longer drifts but declares, the crowd rises and there she stands - his beautiful bride! By the exchange of vows, symbolized by rings, two lives are knit together to be as one. It's a picture of deepest love, most serious of commitment and profoundest of intimacy. Weddings are grand events for good reason; it is then that the most sacred of vows between two people are made.

It's not surprising then that weddings play an important part in the Biblical narrative. Jesus' ministry, in John 2, is inaugurated with his first miracle at a wedding

feast. Revelation 19 records the magnificent picture of all Heaven rejoicing at the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride the church. There is another equally important and profound wedding picture that many miss. Most have come to know and understand the 10 Commandments as God's Law. Our ancestors in the faith, on the other hand, would add that the Sinai event was also God's Love. Sinai, we learn, is the setting for the "wedding" of God and His Bride Israel. And, as with weddings, this one also involved vows symbolized by a ring; but this ring is the LORD'S ring!



## The Text

Before you watch this session's video together, read the following passages:

Exodus 31:12-18

Isaiah 58: 13-14

Isaiah 62:5

Jeremiah 31:31-34

## The Teaching

Watch the video, "The LORD'S Ring." If time allows review the background details before continuing with the talking points.

## Vocabulary

### **Kadosh**

holy, sacred, separate, distinct

### **Ketubbah**

covenant a groom gives his bride

### **Segullah**

treasured possession, jewel





## Background Information

Today's teaching takes place just after sunrise atop the highest peak in the Sinai Mountains, Mt. St. Catherine's. After making the climb the day before, our group had spent the night sleeping under the stars enjoying Bedouin hospitality. We had just witnessed a breath-taking Sinai sunrise and were contemplating what Moses experienced in his time with the LORD atop Sinai. Though the Bible speaks of Mt. Sinai as a particular mountain, Sinai is actually a mountain range. Church tradition points to a particular peak, Jebel Musa (Mountain of Moses), as the summit on which Moses received God's Law, however, there is no way of knowing that for sure. Nor, for our purposes, does the square inch matter. What did matter as we sat atop the 8,600' peak was hearing the Ten Commandments as we viewed the rugged terrain through which God brought his people – all to present them with his covenant of love.

For the group the rugged Sinai terrain was a metaphor for the Hebrew's journey out of Egypt. A journey that involved enduring Egyptian slavery and persecution for hundreds of years, witnessing the plagues, and being miraculously delivered from the vice grip of the Red Sea on one side and Pharaoh's crack troops on the other. They endured the intense heat of the bleak wilderness only to find bitter water, and experienced a consuming hunger to be satisfied with manna. To top it all off, they were then attacked by the aggressive Amalekites. Now they are camped at the base of one of the Sinai peaks. Through that rugged journey something developed in the heart of the Hebrews. In Exodus 19 the Lord instructs Moses, "Tell this to the people of Israel; 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my "segullah" - my treasured possession.'" This is love language. Although His love involves emotion, God's love is at its essence is best summed by the word: commitment. Moses relayed this to Israel to which they replied with similar love and commitment language, "We will be obedient and do everything the Lord said." The stage is set; Israel is betrothed.



God portrays His deep love and intense commitment in Scripture by picturing himself in ways that people would understand. Among these are metaphors of God as King or Shepherd; common images of the day. In today's lesson, atop the Sinai mountains we discover another familiar image, that of a wedding and learn that the groom is God and the bride is Israel. Though this may sound strange at first we learn through the prophet Isaiah in 62:5 "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you." and Jeremiah 2:2-3 we read: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert...' declares the LORD.

Abraham Joshua Heschel remarks that the only thing that God created that was holy is time; "The Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." One great Jewish sage described Sabbath: "On the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our souls belong to Someone Else." Sabbath, at its heart, is spending time with God and the story at Sinai is more than just a historical or geographical event. It's a time of unique union between God and His people. And just as we wear a wedding ring as an everlasting sign of our wedding vows, God gives us a sign too. The Sages teach that the LORD'S ring is Sabbath – spending an entire day with Him. In Exodus 31:16-17 God declares, "The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever."

# THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 Imagine this: It's time for the vows. The groom and the bride turn and look deep into each other's eyes. And then she pledges: "Tim, I expect nothing of you." The groom smiles gently and pledges in return: "Laura, neither do I expect anything of you." No promises made? No expectations spoken? Relationships, if they are to flourish, require trust. To guide and insure this trust commitment must be made. The more important commitments we make we tend to call: vows. Take a few moments and list some vows, oaths, covenants or commitments we make today. Rank their importance and discuss. How important are vows in a wedding?
- 2 It is common to think of the Ten Commandments as the "Ten Obligations". The list of "Thou shalt ...", things we have to do. But shift your perspective and see them instead as our wedding vows with God. We keep God's law in gratitude of His love for us. George gives a grim image during this teaching... a spouse slipping off their wedding ring. The relationship is about to be poisoned. If Sabbath is the Lord's Ring how important is it that we constantly wear it? What should Sabbath (spending time with God) look like? Are there ways that we have taken off the Lord's Ring? If so why would we do that?
- 3 Imagine you get a text message on a Saturday night from Jesus telling you He was coming to spend the next day with you, from Sunrise to Sunset. What's your response? How would you prepare? Would you prefer him to come just for supper and leave or are you so jealous of your time with him that you urge him to stay longer? How might this image help us to frame our Sabbath practice of spending time with God? What would you plan to do all day while He was there? Sleep? Watch Television? Clean your house? What are some ways we could be sure to give God our time on the Sabbath?
- 4 Read aloud Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 31:16-18; Leviticus 23:3; Leviticus 25:1-7; Isaiah 56:1-8; Isaiah 58:13-14. How important is Sabbath to God?

“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4



## The Task

- 1 “When we stop spending time with God, we will spend that time with someone else. Sabbath is spending time with God.”

Take God up on His promises and give Him something He wants in return: Time with you. Can you believe it? God of the universe wants to spend time with you. Give Him an entire Sabbath Day. He gave it to us to spend time with Him, so think of some ways we can welcome in this time with God and ways to spend the rest of the day with Him. Some examples might be spending some time in nature, memorizing a piece of scripture, or journaling some of the ways you’ve seen God’s hand on your life the past week. After a few tries at this, reflect on the effect this has had.

- 2 Our teacher George painted a picture of a spouse taking off the wedding ring before going to be with someone else. He called that a breaking of vows, a violation of trust, a breaking of relationship. God is faithful. He does not break His vows. He does not violate our trust. He does not break the relationship with us.

Throughout scripture God uses this type of language again and again. “You cheated on me” and “you ran out on me after other lovers.” Max Lucado writes, “God chose you to be his bride. Don’t settle for one-night stands in the arms of a stranger.”

Take a moment this week to renew your own vow that you are not going to cheat on God. Think of some ways to hold one another accountable to keeping the ring on instead of settling for strangers.

- 3 As the next Sabbath day approaches, ask yourself a question about the plans you are making. In light of the fact that God set this day apart and made it holy, kadosh, are the plans you have for the day in keeping with that distinction? Do they set the day apart to spend time with God, or do they cause you to “run out after others?”