

Are Believers Commanded to Wear Tefillin as Taught by Rabbinic Judaism?

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Does Scripture teach that the righteous must do everything just like the Jews, to keep the “oral torah,” use “HaShem” in place of the true name of the Creator, wear tefillin on their head and hand, and other such “traditions of men” in order to please Yahweh?

“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of Elohim.” (Romans 3:1-2)

Today we are at a magnificent crossroads in time. The evidence that Yahweh is about to break forth upon this world and establish His eternal kingdom is growing day by day. People are searching for answers from Scripture, from their minister, priest or rabbi. Some have been blessed to discover a movement for the restoration of all truths (the Hebrew Roots Movement, as it is sometimes called), have turned away from traditional Christianity and are searching the Scriptures themselves to find the answers to some difficult questions. Among that group there are those who teach that the restoration of truth not only means returning to Torah observance, but also returning to Judaism (or some other mixture of Judaism and Christianity). In what way do the Jews have the “oracles of Elohim”? Does this refer to the “oral torah” or something else? And if not the “oral torah”, then what are these “oracles” that were committed unto the Jews?

“Hear the word of Yahweh, ye children of Israel: for Yahweh hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of Elohim in the land. . . . My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to Me: seeing thou hast forgotten the Torah of thy Elohim, I will also forget thy children.” (Hosea 4:1-6)

This was written about the year 750 BCE (about 2800 years ago), which was about the time of the Diaspora of the tribes of Israel. Did the people Hosea was addressing have

the true “oracles of Elohim”? Did they have the Torah, Oral or otherwise? I think not! Yahweh declared that He had a conflict with His own children because truth, mercy and knowledge (of Him) were *now absent* from the land and forgotten by His people. Soon after this, the 10 northern tribes were scattered, and then a couple of centuries later the southern tribes were carried off to Babylon for 70 years. Their exile to Babylon was preceded by the same sorry conditions described by Hosea two centuries earlier. After their return from Babylonian exile, was there a change from their prior condition? Did they suddenly acquire “truth,” “mercy” or “knowledge”? Or did they admit that they had lost the knowledge of Yahweh as given in the Torah? Could the so-called “oral torah” have been continued during this time through this people, if it even ever existed? According to Nehemiah (dated to around 450 BCE), when they returned to the promised land and heard the law (Torah) they frankly admitted that they had lost their understanding of His Word!

“So they read in the book in the Torah of Elohim distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, ‘This day is holy unto Yahweh your Elohim; mourn not, nor weep.’ For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Torah. Then he said unto them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of Yahweh is your strength.’ So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, ‘Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.’ And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them. And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which Yahweh had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:” (Nehemiah 8:8-14)

But it gets even clearer in verse 17. From the time of Joshua until that day they had not properly celebrated the feast (and therefore lost the knowledge of the Torah).

“And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: **for since the days of Yeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.** And there was very great gladness.” (Nehemiah 8:17)

According to this text, the Jews had lost everything that Moses gave them—including (if there ever was such a thing) the ‘oral torah’. It is true that Yahweh had given the people judges and counselors to help them decide difficult cases, but this does not mean that an “oral Torah” was in place. Yahweh has given a portion of His spirit to His servants (priests, Levites, judges, etc.), and when there is a controversy concerning a matter He simply places His people under their authority to make a decision in certain matters.

The judge's decision (when he is truly being led by Yahweh's spirit) will not contradict the teaching of the Torah that was given at Mt. Sinai.

“If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which Yahweh thy Elohim shall choose; And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which Yahweh shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before Yahweh thy Elohim, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.” (Deuteronomy 17:8-12)

Often times in Scripture people were given an outpouring of Yahweh's spirit so as to render righteous judgment. While it is true that sometimes the Torah does not include specific details as to how certain directives are to be fulfilled, this in no way gives any group the authorization to create a second set of laws for the purpose of subordinating the written Torah. When Yahweh leads people with His spirit, they are quite capable of performing His will exactly as He directs them. By making use of an “oral torah” (or “tradition”), the Jews today may be opening themselves up to the leading of Satan. We also are in danger, for it is Satan's stated goal to “be like the Most High” and the most effective way for him to do that is to trick people into honoring him by following “vain traditions and doctrines of men” (as Messiah describes them). Scripture clearly teaches that we are not to “add to” or “take away” from the words of Yahweh:

“Every word of Elohim is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” (Proverbs 30:5-6)

“What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” (Deuteronomy 12:32)

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which Yahweh Elohim of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Yahweh your Elohim which I command you.” (Deuteronomy 4:1-2)

By making use of an “oral torah” many Jews today have violated the plain commandment of Yahweh as given here—the commandment **NOT** to add to the words of Yahweh. So, what then are the “Oracles”? The ‘Oracles of Elohim’ are simply His words which have been given to us through His servants the prophets. It is Scripture and it is the written Torah. Prior to their captivity, Judah had rebelled against Yahweh and the observance of His Law [Torah]. But now, upon their return to the land from captivity, they realized what they had done. They had lost the most basic and fundamental understanding of Yahweh’s will. This understanding was now being restored. Equipped with the rekindled understanding of the blessings of obedience to Yahweh’s Torah, combined with the realization that they would once again be expelled from the land if they rebelled, the Jews developed a new-found zeal to live and practice the will of Yahweh as revealed in His Torah. They began an earnest attempt to mend their backslidden ways by committing themselves to the learning of Torah and doing what it commands Yahweh’s children to do.

While I would never suggest that it is possible to go too far in complying with what Yahweh commands His people to do, it is nevertheless possible to go too far regarding the interpretation of how those commands are to be carried out. This is what I believe Judaism eventually did. Judaism went from rebellion prior to the captivity to overzealousness after their return. It is simply a part of our human nature that we often overcompensate for our shortcomings by going to extremes in other areas. History records that this is what happened to them, and the result today is rabbinic Judaism.

Give Glory to What Name?

“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: *Because I will publish the name of Yahweh: ascribe ye greatness unto our Elohim.*” (Deuteronomy 32:1-3, Introduction to the *Song of Moses*)

“And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, *to give glory unto my name*, saith Yahweh of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.” (Malachi 2:1-2)

After the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity, they at first repented of their sins and made a heartfelt return to Yahweh and obedience to Him. But over time they began to institute changes again in the faith of Israel, this time going in the other extreme. Notice what it says further:

“Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Yahweh of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same *my*

name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith Yahweh of hosts. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of Yahweh is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith Yahweh of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith Yahweh.” (Malachi 1:10-13)

Instead of going into open rebellion from Yahweh (as they had done centuries before) they began to corrupt the worship of Yahweh by adding to Yahweh’s commands. One of the things that they did was to command that the name of the creator (Yahweh) would be supplanted with a substitute title (like HaShem or Adonai). That is what this cryptic prophecy in Malachi is talking about. Here in Malachi Yahweh plainly tells the priests that they have failed Him, seeing that they did not place the command in their heart “to give glory” unto His name. As a result, He promised to curse their blessings.

“For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Torah at his mouth: for he is the messenger of Yahweh of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the Torah; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith Yahweh of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the Torah.” (Malachi 2:7-9)

Later, Malachi fills in more of the details of what the leaders of the people were doing:

*“Your words have been stout against me, saith Yahweh. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve Elohim: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of hosts? And now we call the proud righteous; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt Elohim are even delivered. Then they that feared Yahweh spake often one to another: and Yahweh hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Yahweh, and that *thought upon his name.*” (Malachi 3:13-16)*

Once they began the downward slide, there was nothing to stop them except possibly the Messiah Himself. Note what it says:

“Behold, I will send My messenger, and He shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of hosts.” (Malachi 3:1)

When Yahushua came in the first century CE He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their tendency to corrupt the true teachings of Torah, such as their extreme views on

how to keep Shabbat (without mercy to those who need help on that day), keeping the “doctrines and commandments of men,” and by concealing the name of Yahweh their Creator from the people. Some of that corruption is mentioned in Malachi. But there is more.

Orthodox rabbinic Judaism today is a continuation of the traditions of the Pharisees, where they have exalted the “oral law” (Talmud, Mishna, Rabbinic decisions, etc.) to a level above that of the teachings of Scripture. In doing this, they have fulfilled the predictions of Malachi and all the other prophets in which they have become “partial” to the Torah (keeping part of the Torah, but not all, and then adding to the Torah commands which are really not there). Surely we should keep Shabbat, eat only clean kosher meats, and follow all of the other mitzvot (commands) of Scripture. But the Pharisees took it to such extremes that they actually ended up breaking the Torah while making a show that they were keeping it!

After the return of the captives from Babylon the Israelites became very zealous to keep the Torah. This was likely out of fear of going back into captivity again. As a result, any word of the Torah which they even imagined as being a command they expanded upon so that they would not fail in observance of the mitzvot (commands). As a result, they added to the Torah commands which do not even exist. At first, it was done as tradition. Over a period of decades and centuries, tradition eventually turned into mitzvot. In regard to keeping Shabbat, for example, they came up with a list of 39 rules for Sabbath observance which were designed to create a hedge to protect them from breaking the Sabbath. Consequently, they became so strict in the observance of Shabbat that the Sabbath became a burden to them instead of a delight (as it should have been). When Messiah Yahushua began healing people on the Sabbath, they accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. The only problem is that when they forbade healing on the Sabbath they broke another mitzvah of the Torah which said that if your neighbor’s ox is fallen, you must rescue it and return it to him:

“If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.” (Exodus 23:4-5)

“Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost thing of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.” (Deuteronomy 22:1-4)

In their zeal to keep one commandment (Sabbath), they broke at least one, if not many other commandments (see Luke 13:15, 14:5). Is their strict regulation regarding Sabbath observance the only area in which the Pharisees deviated from Yahweh's requirements?

What About Wearing Tefillin?

At the time of Messiah the Pharisees were also practicing and beginning to teach that *Tefillin* should be worn in fulfillment of the (supposed) command of the Torah. *Tefillin* are prayer ornaments which are worn on the head and hand of rabbinic Jews even to this day. Rabbinic Judaism teaches that this mitzvah is very important. Yahushua told them in Matthew 23: “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries [*tefillin*], and enlarge the borders of their garments” (Matthew 23:5). I say the Pharisees were “beginning to teach” this custom because it was a relatively new practice at that time (about 100 years old), not required of the typical Jew, nor did the priests and Sadducees wear them.⁵ This is the only reference to *tefillin* in the Messianic Writings, and although we cannot draw any final conclusions from this text, the custom is mentioned in a negative light.

Having laid the foundation to prepare us for this part of the presentation, let us now take an in-depth look at this issue to see if there are any grounds to support the wearing of *tefillin*. The texts commonly used to support this teaching as a mitzvah are given below for your review:

“And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which Yahweh did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that Yahweh's Torah may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath Yahweh brought thee out of Egypt.” (Exodus 13:8-9)

“And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand Yahweh brought us forth out of Egypt.” (Exodus 13:16)

“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our Elohim is one Yahweh: And thou shalt love Yahweh thy Elohim with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

⁵The evidence to support this statement will be expounded upon throughout the rest of this presentation.

“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates:” (Deuteronomy 11:18-20)

Are these texts speaking of placing literal *tefillin* on our hands and on our forehead? That is the question which I will address in this study.

The Rabbinic Teaching on tefillin

Rabbinic Judaism today teaches that the *tefillin* of the head is to contain four passages of Scripture written on four separate miniature scrolls, each in its own separate compartment, each written in Hebrew, and each writing has to be perfect and must be authenticated by a rabbi for use. The hand *tefillin* is to contain the same four passages on one piece of parchment inside one compartment on the arm.¹ The texts are an expansion of the same ones mentioned earlier: Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4- 9; and 11:13-21. Each box must be precisely square, the box and straps painted black, and made from a kosher animal. The *tefillin* box for the head is printed with the letter *shin* (ש) on the right and left side of the box. The writing on the left is the regular *shin* (ש) written with three prongs, the one on the right has four prongs.² According to the Talmud, the *tefillin* are not to be worn at night, nor on the Sabbath, nor during the three yearly feast days.³

The hand *tefillin* is put on first and the strap is wound around the arm seven times.⁴ The head *tefillin* is placed next in the middle of the forehead and the remaining straps left hanging over the shoulders. A prayer in Hebrew is made at each stage of this process, and the *tefillin* are removed in the reverse order that they were put on.⁵ Generally, they are used at the time of morning prayer. Only rarely are they worn all day, at least in modern times.⁶

How important is the wearing of *tefillin* to the Jew? The statements below illustrate just how far they will go to give authority to such a practice:

“...They were revered as highly as the Scriptures...”⁷

“...It was said that Moses had received the law of their observance from God on Mount Sinai...”⁸

“...that the 'tephillin' were more sacred than the golden plate on the forehead of the high-priest, since its inscription embodied only once the sacred name...”⁹

“How far the profanity of the Rabbis in this respect would go, appears from the circumstance, that they supposed God Himself as wearing phylacteries (Ber. 6a)...”¹⁰

Brief History of the tefillin

Briefly, here is the history of tefillin: There is no evidence that they existed at the time of Abraham, nor during the time of Moses. The evidence that we have indicates that they came into existence some time *AFTER* the Babylonian captivity, *AFTER* the Persians granted the Jews permission to return to their land. This is what the evidence reveals and we can demonstrate this fact quite succinctly just by searching the etymology of the words *tefillin* and *totaphot*.

First, *tefillin* is an Aramaic word meaning “prayer-fillet” and therefore is always connected with prayer. The Hebrews did not start using Aramaic until *AFTER* the Babylonian captivity. Therefore, the word *tefillin* itself cannot be older than 2400 years (about 450 BCE).¹¹

Second, the actual Hebrew given in the original text of Scripture is *totaphot* (טוטפת). The best translation (really, *interpretation*) that we can offer for this word is ‘headbands’ (KJV—‘Frontlets’). Its etymological origin is uncertain, but recent studies have shown that it is probably an “Egyptian Loan Word” brought into the Hebrew language.¹² Whatever the exact origin of this word, it could not have been introduced until the time of the captivity of Israel in Egypt (not prior to 2000 BCE, i.e. 4000 years ago). Whether it was intended to be used as a literal prayer object, an amulet, or simply as a metaphor, is not clearly presented in the text. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who were living before this time) would not have known of them in their lifetimes—since the name itself is an Egyptian loan word (not of Hebrew origin) which had developed sometime during the time of Hebrew slavery.

Third, there is absolutely no physical evidence that *tefillin* of the kind worn by Jews today existed prior to the second temple period. The archeological evidence takes us back to some time after the expansion and world dominance of the Persian Empire. The earliest archeological evidence we have of *tefillin* is from the caves of Qumran.¹³ The following information from credible and respected sources, offers additional insight into the origin of *tefillin*:

“The custom of wearing phylacteries, which continue today, may have started as early as 250 B C, growing out of the command to take the words of God and 'bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an EMBLEM on your forehead' (Deut 6:8).”¹⁴

"Phylacteries consisted of two small hollow cubes made of the skin of clean animals. These boxes were attached to leather straps which were used to fasten them to the left hand and to the forehead during morning worship.

"The discovery of portions of phylacteries in the Dead Sea caves reveals they were not standardized before the time of Christ. Certainly not all the people wore them, but the Pharisees possibly wore them constantly during the time of Jesus.

"The word phylacteries occurs only once in the New Testament: 'They [the scribes and Pharisees] make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments' (Matt. 23:5). In this passage, Jesus criticized the display of some religious leaders who wanted to impress people with their piety."¹⁵

Please refer to this online list of reference quotations related to the wearing of tefillin: <http://www.yahsaves.org/learn/Booklets/phylacteries.htm>

The estimated date of these artifacts is from 200 BCE to about 100 CE.

"With the finding of one head piece at Qumran that still contained its parchments, these disputes, once thought to be medieval, were shown to date from at least the first century CE."¹⁶

"Taking into account these Aramaic linguistic details one can come to the conclusion that the Pharisaic custom of tefillin, which itself is an Aramaic word, was introduced when Aramaic had replaced Hebrew as the day to day spoken language of the Jews in Israel. As already mentioned the Samaritans do not accept the precept of tefillin, this suggests that prior to the Jewish-Samaritan schism the literal interpretation of the verses in question was not accepted. Bearing all of the above facts in mind, it therefore seems prudent to attribute the introduction of phylacteries to the period between the 2nd century BCE and 1st century CE."¹⁷

Even the Jews themselves reluctantly admit that while they believe the use of *tefillin* to be a very ancient teaching established by the patriarchs, they acknowledge that there is no evidence that can place their existence prior to the third or fourth century CE. Please notice what the *Encyclopedia Judaica* says in this regard:

"It is not known whether this command was carried out in the earliest time, and if so, in what manner. But from the relatively large number of regulations referring to the phylacteries—some of them connected with the names of the first tannaim—and also from the fact that among the fifty-five "Sinaitic commands" ("halakah le-Mosheh mi-Sinai") eight refer to the tefillin alone and seven to the tefillin and the Torah together, it follows that they were used as early as the time of the Soferim—the fourth, or at least the third, century B.C. The earliest explicit reference to them that has been preserved—namely, in the Letter of Aristeas (verse 159; see Kautzsch, "Apokryphen," ii. 18)—speaks of them as an old institution."¹⁸

Not only does the Jewish Encyclopedia admit *tefillin* may not have originated before the time of Moses, they also admit that the command may even have originally been understood as figurative:

“*Later* rabbinical exegesis regarded the *figurative* reference and simile in Deut. vi. 8 and xi. 18 as a command to be carried out literally. Comparison with Ex. xiii. 9, 16, where the same terminology is employed, suffices to demonstrate that in Deut. vi. 8, xi. 18 the writer expressed himself figuratively, with allusion, of course, to a popular and wide-spread custom. . . . In the phraseology of Deuteronomy, ‘these my words’ embrace the whole book, the Torah, and it would have been as impossible to write the whole book on one’s hand as it was to carry the sacrifice of the first-born (Ex. xiii.) as ‘a sign on one’s hand.’”¹⁹ [Emphasis Mine]

Over the past few decades there have been tremendous amounts of speculation regarding a discovery of artifacts in pre-colonial America (near Newark, Ohio). These artifacts (clearly Jewish *tefillin*) have been claimed by some to pre-date even the *tefillin* found in the caves of Qumran. However, that claim has been proven to be false. These *tefillin* are actually about 900 years old, they are of European origin (probably Spain), and (because of their unique style) could not have been made prior to the 11th century CE.²⁰ Obviously, these *tefillin* were brought over to here by early American settlers, not originating *from* America, nor from an ancient date.

The earliest written evidence of *tefillin* is from the *Letter of Aristeas*, which gives substance to the history of the development of the Greek Septuagint. The focus of that letter is to explain and/or advocate to the king of Egypt the translation of the Hebrew Torah (which eventually included the rest of the TaNaK) into the Greek language. The latest possible date for this letter is 60 BCE, the earliest date for it would be about 200 BCE. The prevailing view is that it was written about 130 BCE.²¹ While in the letter it is stated that the wearing of *tefillin* is an ancient custom, it basically says that for all of the Jewish customs (which historians know cannot be true). Therefore, his statement regarding the wearing of *tefillin* being an ‘ancient custom’ is invalidated.

“¹⁵⁹ ...And upon our hands, too, he expressly orders the symbol to be fastened, clearly showing that we ought to perform every act in righteousness, remembering (our own creation), and above all the ¹⁶⁰ fear of God.” (*Letter of Aristeas*, verses 159-160)²²

The comments of Aristeas show that *tefillin* were recognized within Judaism and being worn by some—but do not support an earlier dating of *tefillin*, certainly not prior to the return of Israel from Babylon. More significantly, the letter of Aristeas was written much later than the original creation of the Septuagint, and reveals that the author may have been ignorant of the Jewish Law, for he says the following in verses 15-16:

“¹⁵ ...They worship the same God—the Lord and Creator of the Universe, as all other men, as we ourselves, O king, though we call him by different names, such as Zeus or ¹⁶ Dis. This name was very appropriately

bestowed upon him by our first ancestors, in order to signify that He through whom all things are endowed with life and come into being, is necessarily the ruler and lord of the Universe. Set all mankind an example of magnanimity by releasing those who are held in bondage.”²³

While the Jews (by this date in history) had already begun to avoid using the actual name of Yahweh, a devout Jew would be unlikely to go so far as to compare Yahweh with Zeus (a pagan deity). Is it valid to say that the Greeks worship the same deity as the Hebrews—only by a different name? We might understand the logic that this author follows, using apologetics in an attempt to bridge the information gap between a pagan king and the devout Hebrew. This however, among many other statements, suggests that the letter of Aristeeus is an apologetic attempt to present Judaism in a favorable light—not to convince a heathen king to accept the recently translated Septuagint. The evidence suggests it was a forgery or at least a later invention. Based upon that conclusion it could suggest an even later possible date for that letter (about 60 BCE).

As an added note regarding the dating of the *tefillin*, please consider this statement which we will expand and elaborate upon later in this discussion:

“All available evidence suggests, however, that they [the *tefillin*] were a late innovation brought in by the Hasidim, the spiritual forefathers of the Pharisees, being intended as a counterblast to increasing Hellenistic influence.”²⁴

This reference plainly tells us that *tefillin* were instituted during the Hellenistic period (which would be about 100 BCE to 300 CE). This also fits in with the estimated date of the Aristeeus letter.

In-depth Study of the ‘tefillin’ Texts

As we proceed with our study, I would like to shift our focus from history and archeology to a more detailed examination of the verses used to promote the wearing of *tefillin*. I believe a careful review of the Hebrew text reveals the figurative understanding of the “binding” of these commandments, as intended by the Author. Here, then, is one of the four verses assailed by those who support the wearing of *tefillin*:

“And it shall be *for a sign* (la-oth) unto thee upon thine hand, and *for a memorial* (la-zikaron) between thine eyes, that Yahweh's Torah may be in thy mouth:” (Exodus 13:9)

The other 3 passages are practically identical, except that they use *totaphot* to replace *zikaron*. *Zikaron* means a memorial and does not refer to any specific object. *Totaphot* is plural and means “bands”, “frontlets”, or “headbands.” The etymology is uncertain, as I mentioned previously. Again, it does not appear to be pointing to any specific type or class of objects and the fact that it is plural strongly suggests that it is referring to something generic. (The preposition “la,” written ל in Hebrew, before each of these words is the *lamed preposition*, which we will discuss in detail later.)

The Interlinear Bible, translated by J. P. Green, shows the distinction clearly, so we will here reproduce it for you to see:

Exodus 13:9

“**And** it shall be **for** a sign (la-oth) unto thee upon thine hand, **and for** a memorial (la-zikaron) between thine eyes, that Yahweh's Torah may be in thy mouth:” (Exodus 13:9)

226	1961									
וְהָיָה	לְךָ	לְאוֹת	וְלִזְכוֹרוֹן	בֵּין	עֵינֶיךָ	לְמַעַן	תְּהִיָּה	תּוֹרַת	יְהוָה	בְּפִיךָ
sign a	for	to	it	And	so	that	so	may	be	in
you	be	shall	←							
6310	3068	8451	1961	4616	5869	996	2146	3027	5921	
עַל-יָדְךָ	וְלִזְכוֹרוֹן	בֵּין	עֵינֶיךָ	לְמַעַן	תְּהִיָּה	תּוֹרַת	יְהוָה	בְּפִיךָ		
your	on	←	your	so	may	be	in	your		
hand	hand		eyes	that	be	of	Yahweh	mouth		

Exodus 13:16

“**And** it shall be **for** a token upon thine hand, **and for** frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand Yahweh brought us forth out of Egypt.” (Exodus 13:16)

3027	5921	226	1961								
וְהָיָה	לְאוֹת	עַל-יָדְךָ	וְלִזְכוֹרוֹת	בֵּין	עֵינֶיךָ	כִּי	בְּחֹזֶק	יָד	הוּצִיאָנוּ	יְהוָה	מִמִּצְרַיִם
hand	sign a	hand	frontlets	between	eyes	for	by	of	brought	Yahweh	from
your	for	your	and	←	your	by	strength	hand	us	out	Egypt
3027	5921	226	1961								
וְלִזְכוֹרוֹת	בֵּין	עֵינֶיךָ	כִּי	בְּחֹזֶק	יָד	הוּצִיאָנוּ	יְהוָה	מִמִּצְרַיִם			
frontlets	between	eyes	for	by	of	brought	Yahweh	from			
and	←	your	by	strength	hand	us	out	Egypt			

“Note: The Hebrew letter “waw” (ו) preceding the “lamed” (ל) in the Hebrew word for “memorial” above is used as a conjunction meaning “and.” The “waw,” as with the “lamed,” is tacked on to the Hebrew word as a prefix.

Deuteronomy 6:8

“**And** thou shalt bind them **for** a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be **as** frontlets between thine eyes.” (Deuteronomy 6:8)

5869	996	2903	1961	3027	5921	226	7194	
עֵינֶיךָ	בֵּין	לְטֹטְפֹת	וְהֵיוּ	עַל-יָדְךָ	לְאוֹת	וְקִשְׂרָתָם		
.eyes your	between	frontlets for	they and be shall	;hand your on	sign a for	them bind shall And	←	

Deuteronomy 11:18

“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart **and** in your soul, and bind them **for** a sign upon your hand, that they may be **as** frontlets between your eyes.” (Deuteronomy 11:18)

5315	5921	3824	5921	428	1697	859	7760	
וְעַל-נַפְשְׁכֶם	וְעַל-לִבְבְּכֶם	וְעַל-לִבְבְּכֶם	וְעַל-לִבְבְּכֶם	אֵלֶּה	אֵת-דִּבְרֵי	וְשִׁמְתֶם		
,soul your	in and	heart your	in	these	words	up lay shall you And	←	
5869	996	2903	1961	3027	5921	226	859	7194
עֵינֶיכֶם	בֵּין	לְטֹטְפֹת	וְהֵיוּ	עַל-יָדְכֶם	לְאוֹת	אֵתְּם	וְקִשְׂרָתָם	
.eyes your	between	frontlets for	they and , be shall	hand your on	sign a for	them	bind shall and	←

In Deuteronomy 6 it is apparent that the commandments of Torah are to be put within our heart and taught to our sons (Deut. 6:6-7). In Deuteronomy 11 the same holds true. The commandments (His words) are to be put within our heart and then communicated to our sons (Deut. 11:18-19). It is very apparent from reading these four texts that obedience to the commandments fulfills the role of a sign upon the hand and headbands between the eyes. It says nothing about making *tefillin*. It says nothing about writing Scripture texts on small pieces of parchment and placing them inside a box to be strapped upon the hand and forehead. Any view such as this is clearly an addition to the words of Scripture, validating that these texts should be interpreted as metaphorical expressions. While it is true that the writing of “His Words” on our doorposts and gates (Deuteronomy 6:9 and 11:20) may be viewed as a literal command, the same cannot be said of the sign bound on the hand or between the eyes. While the “binding” of these commands might possibly be seen as literal, the binding of bands “between your eyes” clearly indicates it is to be understood **figuratively**.

According to Deuteronomy 11:18-19, the words of Yahweh are to be put in several places:

Upon your heart
 Upon your soul (life)
 As a sign on your hand,
 So that they may be as bands between your eyes
 And they were to teach them to their children.

Yahweh didn't say anything here about physically putting something on our children, except that we are to "speak of them" to the children. Is this literal? Yes, the command to the fathers is to literally speak to their children. But this is not a reference to an object which can be quantitatively defined. Are we to perform heart surgery? Do we lay something on our bodies? No. And we don't do anything to our children other than speak to them. So is the sign on the hand literal? And what of the forehead? The text plainly says that we cannot place anything on the forehead (literally, between the eyes) *UNTIL* the first three points are fulfilled. Once we lay it on our hearts, lay it on our souls, and start putting it into practice (as a sign on our hands) *THEN* it will become as frontlets between our eyes (it becomes a part of our natural thinking process). And when we have done all of these things, *THEN* we will be able to communicate with and teach our children what we have learned. We cannot teach something to someone that we have not learned ourselves.

As we review the many different translations of these texts, it becomes even more clear that it is not to be interpreted as a literal sign on the hand or literal bands on the forehead. Please notice and compare these translations:

<i>Exodus 13:9</i>
(Bible in Basic English) And this will be for a sign to you on your hand and for a mark on your brow, so that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth: for with a strong hand the Lord took you out of Egypt.
(Douay-Rheims Bible) And it shall be as a sign in thy hand, and as a memorial before thy eyes; and that the law of the Lord be always in thy mouth, for with a strong hand the Lord hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt.
(English Standard Version) And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.
(World English Bible) It shall be for a sign to you on your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes, that the law of Yahweh may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand Yahweh has brought you out of Egypt.
(Webster Bible) And it shall be for a sign to thee upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thy eyes; that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt.

(New English Translation Bible) And it²⁸ will be a sign²⁹ for you on your hand, and a memorial³⁰ between your eyes,³¹ so that the law of the Lord may be³² in your mouth,³³ for³⁴ with a mighty hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt.

13:10 So you must keep³⁵ this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.³⁶

Please notice also the footnotes to the *New English Translation of the Bible* (NET Bible)

²⁸tn I.e., this ceremony.

²⁹tn Heb “for a sign.”

³⁰tn Heb “for a memorial.”

³¹tn That these festivals and consecrations were to be signs and memorials is akin to the expressions used in the Book of Proverbs (Prov 3:3, “bind them around your neck...write them on your heart”). The people were to use the festivals as outward and visible tokens to remind them to obey what the Law required.

³²tn The purpose of using this ceremony as a sign and a memorial is that the Law might be in their mouth. The imperfect tense, then, receives the classification of final imperfect in the purpose clause.

³³tn “Mouth” is a metonymy of cause; the point is that they might be ever talking about the Law as their guide as they go about their duties (see Deut 6:7; 11:19; Josh 1:8).

³⁴tn This causal clause gives the reason for what has just been instructed. Because Yahweh delivered them from bondage, he has the strongest claims on their life.

³⁵tn The form is the perfect tense with the vav consecutive, functioning as the equivalent of an imperfect of instruction or injunction.

³⁶tn Or “every year,” or “year after year.”

The ‘Lamed’ Preposition (ל)

Evidence offering support to the figurative interpretation of these passages is the *lamed preposition* (ל) found in Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:8, and Deuteronomy 11:18. A *lamed* (ל), for those not familiar with Hebrew, is a single Hebrew character used to modify another word (usually a noun).

Whenever the letter “lamed” (ל) appears before a word by itself (not as part of another word), it acts as a preposition. The Lamed is always found just before the three critical words of this text as found in all four Scripture references to this issue: “remembrance” (zikaron), “sign” (oth), and “bands” (*totaphot*). According to the *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, by Davidson, it can mean “to” or “at”, but it also has many other meanings (depending on the context). [Example: “The dove came...*at the time of evening.*” (Genesis 3:8).] In these four texts quoted earlier it could very well mean “for”, “as”, “like” or even “as if”. [Example: “until it was fine *like* dust”. (Deuteronomy 9:21).]²⁵ Instead of proving that the Tephillin are literal (as some have contended), it appears to show that the opposite could just as easily be true. The text could be translated (based

on this information)—"And it shall be *like* a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and *like* a memorial between thine eyes".

One individual pointed out to me that the *lamed* (as a part of the paleo-Hebrew alphabet) means "to teach," and that is all that it means. But it is not limited to that meaning only, since it also means "to learn." In fact, though it is used in the Hebrew language as a preposition, it is one of the most diverse articles in Hebrew.

I had a discussion once with a man who believes we should wear the *tefillin*. In that discussion, among the various aspects that he raised was the issue of this 'lamed' preposition and its meaning in the ancient Hebrew texts. According to him, as he explained, the ancient Hebrew texts were believed to have been written in what is known as a "pictograph" system, where the letters are actually pictographic illustrations of a certain physical concept. Actually, when you examine this ancient Hebrew alphabet and compare it to Egyptian hieroglyphics, it becomes apparent that they, indeed, have much in common.

As our conversation ensued, I learned that my associate was advocating not only that we consult the ancient Hebrew "pictograph" language, but that we must disregard the various rules of Hebrew grammar and syntax. Because the letter "lamed" (in pictographic form) meant to "teach" or "to point", he was persuaded that it can only be legitimately translated "to" or "at" or "for" and may not be used to make comparisons with other objects (using "as," "as if," or "like"). To him, this evidence was significant and showed that the items being "pointed" to must also be literal. And in his thinking, the wearing of *tefillin* is indeed based upon clear Scriptural authority. As a result of this discussion, I became motivated to pursue an in-depth study of the *lamed*, as it relates to wearing *tefillin*.

During our discussion, my associate made the claim that there are several examples of where the *lamed* is used in various texts which show it should be translated "at" or "in," such as "LaMoed" ("at the appointed time"), and that this is the only way (according to him) it can be translated in Scripture. After a thorough review of the matter, I discovered that there are indeed texts which use the *lamed* to mean "in" or "at." But there are also texts in which the context clearly shows it must be translated "for" or even "as if." This is what I found:

"And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be **for signs**, and **for seasons**, and **for days**, and years:" (Genesis 1:14)

laoth, for signs לֹאֹחַ

lamoed, for seasons לְמוֹעֵד

layom, for days לַיּוֹם

It doesn't take a Hebrew scholar to realize that the *lamed* must be translated "for" in these texts. It cannot be translated "to" because "to" does not fit the context. Let's change the English translation of this verse so as to make the lamed preposition mean

"to" as suggested by my friend: "And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be **to signs**, and **to seasons**, and **to days**, and years." Yes, the basic meaning of the *lamed* shows that it is pointing to something—but "to" and "at" are not the only ways to translate the *lamed*, as clearly revealed by the context of this verse.

The *lamed*, as we have seen, is used as a preposition tacked on to the word it modifies. As I have demonstrated from Genesis 1:14, it often means "as" or "for." This can be understood either literally or figuratively. An example where this can be understood *literally* is in Genesis 9:13, where Yahweh shows Noah His bow in the heavens **for** the sign of an everlasting covenant between Himself and the earth. It is still a literal sign that we can see in the sky.

Here are some other references to check out. Each one of these verses contains at least one *lamed* being used as a preposition to another word, and most of them should be translated "for":

Genesis 2:9 ("good **for** food") (טובלמאבל)

Genesis 3:6 ("good tree **for** food") (טובהעץלמאבל)

Genesis 6:21 ("**for** food") (לאבלה)

Genesis 8:9 ("**for** soul of foot" or "**to** soul of foot") (לבפרגל)

Exodus 25:33 ("so **in** six") (כןלששה)

Isaiah 4:2 ("comely **for** them that are escaped") (תפארתלפליטת)

Isaiah 4:3 ("**in/among** the living") (לתי)

Isaiah 4:6 ("**for** a shadow") (לצל) / ("**for** a shelter") (למתסה) / ("**for** a refuge") (למסתור)

In Hebrew grammar there are many ways in which the Hebrew character *lamed* may be used. From *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, we learn: "This preposition, like the other monographic prepositions ל and כ, is used in a great many ways (cf. 10.4). A variety of its senses are often rendered by English 'to' in its diverse meanings."²⁶ Continuing with the same reference, it tells us that the *lamed* may be used as the *spatial lamed* to "mark location in or at a point." It also is *allative* with verbs to show a "motion towards" or *terminative* to show a "motion to" an object.²⁷ The *temporal preposition lamed* shows simple location "in, at, or during a period of time". Example: "The dove came...**at** the time of evening" (Genesis 8:11) (לעתערב). There is also the *lamed* which shows a relationship based on "connections *with regard to*." These classifications of *lamed* show possession, authorship (*lamed auctoris*), specification, manner, class, type, and even comparison. Here is an example of the *lamed* showing comparison:

“until it was fine **as** dust.” Or “until it was fine **like** dust” (Deuteronomy 9:21) (דקל עפר)²⁸ To say that the *lamed* cannot be used to make a comparison (as shown here) flies directly in the face of Scripture. The *lamed* showing goal is sometimes called the *dativus lamed*. There is the *lamed* of interest (*dativus commodi et incommodi*) to indicate the person to whom that particular action is directed. Example: “Do not weep *for* the dead” (Jeremiah 22:10). We can also note a special type of *lamed* of interest called the *dativus ethicus* or “ethical dative.” The *emphatic lamed* stands before a noun in a verbless clause. Finally, as pointed out in *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, there is the *lamed* of goal and purpose.

“The ‘indirect object’ *lamed* marks one sort of goal, while another sort of goal is marked by the *lamed* of purpose. The goals here include a thing made (with *śy, ntn, śym*, etc.; ##38-41) or used (#42), or a person altered in status or even form (#43-45, cf. #38).”²⁸

Examples of this last *lamed of purpose* are mentioned in our text from the above work:

“It shall be yours **as** food” (Genesis 1:29) (היה לאכלה).

“He shall go out **as** a free man” (Exodus 21:2) (יצא לתפשיתנם) [lit., “free without cost”].

“This Levite, **as** a priest, belongs to me” (Judges 17:13) (לוילבהן).

“You shall make them (**as**) princes” (Psalms 45:17)²⁹ (לשד).

Earlier, I offered an example of how the *lamed* preposition may be used to denote comparison (“fine *like* dust...”) Another case of *lamed of comparison* can be gleaned from a text in the book of Job. This example illustrates how the *lamed* may be used to compare and demonstrate a purpose. The *lamed* is used in such a way as to reveal that it should be translated “as if,” which demonstrates a figurative application. In Job 39:16 we read of how the ostrich treats her young roughly. It says, “She treats her young roughly, **as if not** (laloh, לא) hers.” The word for “as if” is the letter “*lamed*,” used as a preposition for the word “not.” We read here that the ostrich treats her young as though they aren’t even hers. Of course, this is only speaking figuratively, since they really *are* her babies! Is it possible that the *lamed* in Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:6-8 and 11:18 is the *lamed of comparison*? Yes it is. Passover, when it is observed, becomes *like* a sign on the hand (actions), and *like* a memorial between the eyes (thoughts), and other statements in these texts clearly point to a figurative meaning.

²⁸“fine” in Hebrew is “dawkak” (דק) and literally means “crush” or “crush small”, so “crush to dust” can be implied in the translation. However, the fact that a comparison *is* being made is clear from the context.

²⁹Many Bibles show this as Psalms 45:16.

Again, anyone who states that the rules of grammar should be suspended (or altered) because of a personal "theory" distorts the understanding clearly brought forth in Scripture—especially with regard to the *lamed*, one of the most versatile of all the Hebrew characters. I am not saying there cannot be a better translation of Scripture, but to say that we should throw out the rules of Hebrew grammar just to accommodate the supposed "better understanding" of the ancient Hebrew is simply without merit. It is certainly acceptable to study the ancient Hebrew with the purpose of finding the best understanding of Scripture, but this must be done in harmony with the most basic and fundamental rules of Hebrew grammar or we will become (to use a simple illustration) like a dingy floating in the midst of the ocean without power, without a sail, and without a rudder to guide us to shore. It simply does not work that way.

Let's Review the Evidence

Before we proceed with our study, let's examine the context of Exodus 13:9 and review the evidence I have thus far presented. The text of Exodus 13:9 says:

“And *it* shall be for a sign unto thee upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes, that Yahweh's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath Yahweh brought you out of Egypt.” (Exodus 13:9)

What is *“it”*? *“It”* refers to the celebration of Passover, and we are told that *“it”* shall be “for a sign” upon our hand and “for a memorial” between our eyes. How do we put the celebration of Passover on our hand or between our eyes? If it is metaphorical, then the answer is easy—we do so by learning about and keeping the Passover exactly the way Scripture teaches us. But if it is *literal*, then how do we do it? Here is another thought: How do you put a loaf of unleavened bread on your forehead or strap it to your hand? You might say this is a “*crumby* question,” but it also has a “*crumby* answer”! ☺ Obviously, the text does not imply a *literal* fulfillment. As we have seen from the text of Job, the *lamed* can even have the meaning of “as if” in certain cases.

Scripture offers us examples of instructions that require a literal application. One such example can be found regarding an item we are commanded to *literally* wear. This item is commonly known as the tassels (Hebrew *tzitzit*). According to Numbers 15:38-40, this item is to be literally attached to the four quarters of our garments:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your Elohim.” (Numbers 15:38-40)

There can be no question that the tassels mentioned in the above text are to be understood as *literal* objects affixed to a *literal* garment. Not only are the tassels to be

literally applied to our garments, but they are put there for a literal purpose—to be literally seen—as literal reminders to keep Yahweh’s commandments. For someone to regard the commandment pertaining to the tassels as metaphorical, there would not be any physical, visible reminders to keep Yahweh’s commandments. Thus, we are given specific instructions as to how to make the tassels (“with a ribband of blue”), where to wear them (“in the borders of their garments”), as well as the purpose for wearing them (“that ye may look upon it . . . That ye may remember, and do all my commandments”).

Such is not the case with the texts used to justify wearing *tefillin*. Exodus 13:9 is not a literal command: it does not teach us “how,” it does not tell us exactly “where,” nor does it explain “why” we should wear something on our forehead or hand. Moreover, the use of the *lamed* in all of these texts suggests that it is to be understood metaphorically.

Anytime the letter "*lamed*" appears before a word by itself (not as part of another word), it acts as a preposition which can mean "for," "as," "like" or even "as if."²⁹ (Yes, it is also translated “at” or “in” in various texts.) The *lamed* is always found just before the three words of Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:8 and Deuteronomy 11:18. Those three words are “remembrance” (*zikaron*), “sign” (*oth*), and “bands” (*totaphot*). Instead of proving that the *tephillin* are literal, we see that this can also indicate the opposite. Based upon Scriptural definitions it clearly indicates that it can be understood as a symbol. The text could properly be translated (based on this information)—“And it shall be *like* (or *as*) a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and *like* (or *as*) a memorial between thine eyes.”

The Hebrew word for “memorial” or “reminder” (*zikaron*) is only found in the first of the four texts (Exodus 13:9) and means “remembrance,” “memory” or “memorial.” In the other three texts this word is replaced with “bands” (*totaphot*). The memorial it is clearly referring to in Exodus 13:9 is the feast of Passover. While *totaphot* could be referring to a literal object, the fact that it is plural and paralleled by *zikaron* shows that the object is intended to be seen as generic, not specific—therefore implying a figurative meaning. It is plural because there are many commands involved in the Passover observance (and in the Torah), not just one. The fact that *zikaron* is used once and is replaced with *totaphot* in the other three texts demonstrates that none of them are necessarily referring to a literal object placed on the forehead. If “reminder” is not a literal object, it must be conceded that *totaphot* may not be literal either.

As we continue our investigation into the matter of wearing tefillin, let us turn to the Septuagint translation. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Torah (first five books of Moses) which was later expanded to include the entire TaNaK (so-called Old Testament). The Torah portion of that project (the first five books of Moses) was completed during the 3rd century BCE. If we consult the Septuagint, we will find that it translates “sign” and “reminder” just as the reading found in the Masoretic Text. But in the case of *totaphot* (bands), it uses the Greek word *asalutone*, and translates it, “And it shall be for a sign upon your hand and **immovable** before your eyes” (Ex. 13:16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18).³⁰ This is more evidence that the Hebrew scholars who translated the Septuagint believed it was speaking metaphorically, not literally, for they used the word

“immovable” (or “fixed”) to show that it is permanent and cannot be removed. Literal bands are, of course, removable.

Simply put, before about the year 250 BC there could not have been *tefillin* in use by the Jewish people. We know this because the Hebrew word *totaphot* was translated as *asalutone* in the Septuagint. If the Jews living before the time of the Septuagint were actually wearing or using literal *tefillin*, then we would have evidence of this in the Septuagint. Regardless of how one views the Septuagint, there should be something there to show us a change was in progress. The original Septuagint (or a later version of it) should have replaced the word *asalutone* with something that would suggest a movable as opposed to immovable object—if the practice of wearing *tefillin* were as widespread early on, as suggested by many Jews. As time progressed, there were many changes to the Septuagint, some of them not so good (such as taking out our heavenly Father’s name). Yet this is one particular change that never happened. Therefore, *tefillin* cannot possibly be traced back all the way to the time of Moses. It is likely to have begun (based on this and other conclusive evidence) sometime during the first century BCE.

As we further investigate this matter, let’s address some additional points:

1. *No Specific Instructions.* In Numbers 15:37-41 Yahweh gives a very clear command regarding the making of tassels. In Exodus 25 through 31 Yahweh (through Moses) gives detailed commands regarding the construction of the Tabernacle. For example, in Exodus 28 Yahweh gives specific instructions on how to make the clothing for Aaron. However, with regard to the supposed command to make and wear *tefillin*, there is not the slightest bit of instruction on how exactly to do it, nor even a hint that it is actually to be understood literally. We aren’t told what color it should be, what material it should consist of, what letters should be written on it, what document should be inside of it (unless you want to literally fulfill the mitzvah by placing the entire Torah inside of it, as the text clearly indicates). Someone could, because of this, make an argument that this proves that we must trust the rabbis and follow their belief in the Oral Torah (Talmud, Mishna, etc.), since this is the **only** place one can go to find instructions regarding the making and wearing of *tefillin*. Well, when you think about it, this is precisely where this teaching will eventually lead. Are you sure you want to go there? (Please read all of Matthew 23 *right now*!!)
2. *Consistent Literal Interpretations?* Some are persuaded that the teachings of Torah actually “demand a literal interpretation of the text” with regard to the *tefillin*. This is very puzzling to me. Does Scripture “demand” that we interpret “that the Torah of Yahweh shall be in your mouth,” as recorded in Exodus 13:9, as literal? Just how do we put the Torah literally in our mouth? How about Proverbs 1:8-9? Does Scripture “demand” that this text should be interpreted literally?

“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law [Torah/Teaching] of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.”

Is the teaching of our parents to be literal chains around our necks, or a literal ornament on our head? Does Proverbs 3:3 “demand” that truth and righteousness **must** be literally written upon our hearts? Does Proverbs 6:20-21 “demand” that the teachings of our mother and father **must** be hung around our necks, or that they **must** be surgically implanted around our hearts (or minds, however you wish to translate it)? What about Proverbs 7:2-3?

“Keep my commandments, and live; and my law [Torah] as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.”

Does this “demand” that we put the Torah in the center of our eye, to tie Yahweh’s commandments to our fingers and have a surgical operation to write them upon our hearts? And how do we interpret Jeremiah 31:33?

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith Yahweh, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their Elohim, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)

Does the reading of this text “demand” that this application be literal, to put Yahweh’s law in our intestines and write it inside our hearts (or minds)? If not, why does it have to be literal in the four texts we are discussing today?

Those who say that this should be literally fulfilled do not realize the source from which they have received this teaching. It comes from rabbinic Judaism and every detail of how to wear the *tefillin* comes directly from the traditions of the rabbis. They are looking at this issue through the lenses of the rabbis, and if you take away all the rabbinical teachings on this subject and go simply to the Scriptures, you will find that there is nothing left but an allegorical statement that has been changed by men into a literal commandment. Those who believe in wearing the *tefillin* start with the **presumption** that the *tefillin* are literal, then adopt the rabbinic methods of wearing those *tefillin* (possibly with modifications, but nevertheless similar methods), *all of which have no foundation in Scripture whatsoever*. Without the knowledge of the Talmud and the knowledge given to them through rabbinic Judaism, they could never have come to the point of seeing in Scripture a teaching regarding literal signs on the hand and forehead, and certainly would not have adopted similar methods of wearing them.

3. *Are Tefillin Magical Amulets?* Did the *tefillin* originate from the practice of making and wearing amulets, or magic charms?

Strangely enough, there are some Jewish scholars who actually admit the *tefillin* originated out of a desire to create magic charms to ward off evil. They believe that they “originated as amulets.”³¹

Matthew 23:5 mentions the Greek term “phylacteries” instead of *tefillin*. *Phylactery* is a term which clearly indicates an amulet. Such a use may not be accidental, nor the product of Greco-Roman revisionism. It is possible that this may have been the original term as suggested by Dr. Rochelle Altman in her online study entitled “First ... Recognize That It’s a Penny”:

“The word ‘phylactery’ is Greek and means ‘to guard against evil’: in other words, a protective ‘amulet.’ The term is never used in the Masoretic Text [MT] or Rabbinic discussions and is mentioned only once in the Old Greek [OG] in Matthew 25:3.”³²

Dr. Altman’s findings are validated by eminent 19th century Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim:

“It is now almost generally admitted, that the real meaning of phylacteries is equivalent to amulets or charms. And as such the Rabbinites really regarded and treated them, however much they might otherwise have disclaimed all connection with heathen views. . . Many instances of the magical ideas attaching to these ‘amulets’ might be quoted; but the following will suffice. . . . [it is] expressly stated in an ancient Jewish Targum 37 (that on Cant. 8:3), that the ‘tephillin’ prevented all hostile demons from doing injury to any Israelite.”³³

In addition, please notice portions of this very candid article by rabbi Geoffrey W. Dennis entitled *Amulet*:

“...The use of amulets and charms is virtually universal across human cultures and across time, and Jews are no exception. Jewish amulets have been used to ward off a variety of ills: disease, mishap, sorcery, and/or malevolent spirits. . . .

“Amulets take many forms throughout the different periods of Jewish history. The use of amulets to ward off evil spirits and/or disease was pervasive in the cultures that surrounded ancient Israel, and numerous examples of Canaanite, Phoenician, Assyrian, and Egyptian origin have been recovered. The use of amulets by Biblical Israelites is specifically criticized in Is. 3:18-20. . . .

“Evidence for the use of amulets grows dramatically post-Biblically. II Maccabees 12:40 reports disapprovingly of slain Jewish warriors found

wearing amulets with foreign gods inscribed on them. Again, it is unclear whether the author objects to talismans in general or to just these synchronistic examples. Of course, the tefillin worn by Jews on the head and arm to fulfill the commandment (Deut. 6:8) are regarded as having talismanic properties by some Jews, though that is not their authoritative function. The standard Greek translation for tefillin, "phylactery," highlights this perception. Likewise, in some circles the mezuzah is regarded as a charm against misfortune.

"The Sages are largely at ease with the use of amulets, discussing their use to protect people (particularly children), animals, and property. The Babylonian Talmud distinguishes between written amulets and folk amulets, We have a number of written metallic amulets, mostly in Aramaic. Features of these charms include: Biblical phrases, power names of God, and strings of nomina barbara, or nonsense words and phrases. "Atbash" (letter substitution) codes are sometimes used. Often foreign loan words appear and, on occasion, unpronounceable divine and angelic names. Diagrams, magical alphabets, and crude illustrations are common but not constant features. Many written amulets were rolled up and inserted in metal tubes, paralleling the way a mezuzah is protected and displayed. . . .

"More modern amulet makers will often use the same kind of animal skin parchment and ink that is used in making a Sefer Torah. These modern amulets feature either verses from Scripture with perceived apotropaic properties, or permutations of the names of God. Often these words and anagrams are arranged in magic circles, hexagrams, boxes, and other enclosed patterns (either to block out or trap the malevolent forces) to enhance their power. These also have mathematical associations, being grouped in threes, nines, or significant numbers.

"Popular images appearing on amulets include the protective hand or chamsa, menorahs, fish, and angels."³⁴

Notice the other article by the same author on *Tefillin*:

"The fact that some early post-Biblical literature call Tefillin *kamiaot* "amulets," points to the idea that many perceived them as objects of power.

"Tefillin is the one religious article most mentioned in rituals for mystical ascent and for summoning angels. Safed mystics thought that the wearing of tefillin was a pre-requisite for being possessed by an *ibbur*, a beneficent spirit. Beyond the general potential for tefillin to serve as amulets and talismans, tales of miraculous sets of tefillin also appear in Jewish literature."³⁵

Since official Jewish writings admit that tefillin have magical charm properties (as shown in the Targum on Canticles 8:3, for example) much like amulets, it is difficult to understand how they can also claim it to have divine properties and a Scriptural foundation.

Amazingly, the use of magical amulets traces back to ancient Egypt:

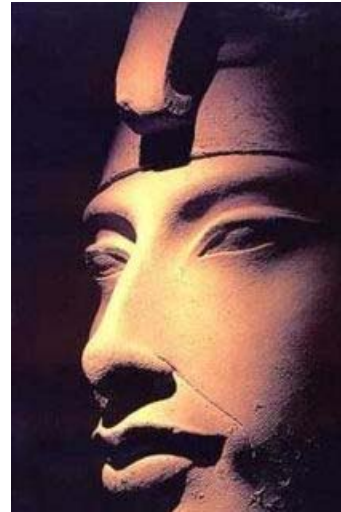
“In ancient Egypt, the practices of medicine and of magic were closely related. Healing often called for incantations, such as the spell for exorcising migraine. That incantation ends with:

“I will make for you the magic amulet of the gods, their names being pronounced on this day inscribed on fine linen and placed on the forehead of the man.’(10)

“10. In ancient Egypt, the worshipper, or patient, wore a pectoral or headband inscribed with the name of the god that was being invoked. (A.W. Shorter, *The Egyptian Gods* [London, 1937~, pp. 59, 74).”³⁶

When we consider the obvious fact that the ancient Hebrews who came out of Egypt knew of this practice (of wearing amulets) it becomes clear that the four statements from Moshe are more likely intended to remind them of it and yet simultaneously steer them away from that practice.

If the Jews of the second temple era attempted to imitate the practices of the Egyptians, this could certainly give us the answer as to why they now believe in wearing the *tefillin*. This could very well have been borrowed from the practice of the Egyptians **of wearing head amulets**. Lest we forget, many of the Egyptian kings themselves wore head amulets—as can clearly be seen in many of their paintings and sculptures. An amulet is something which is used like a “magical charm” and would, therefore, be unacceptable for the Hebrew people (since witchcraft and divination is explicitly condemned in Scripture). Nevertheless, some of these amulets appear to be very similar to the *tefillin* that are worn today by Orthodox Jews. Please notice the Egyptian statues below and see if there is a resemblance to the *tefillin*:



Now notice what Scripture says about imitating the ways of the Egyptians:

“And Yahweh spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am Yahweh your Elohim. **After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do:** and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am Yahweh your Elohim.” (Leviticus 18:1-4)

Yahweh specifically **commands** us not to do after the ways of the Egyptians, and yet the Jews appear to have adopted a practice of wearing *tefillin* in imitation of the Egyptian practice of wearing magical amulets. Does this practice honor Yahweh?

4. *Abraham Did Not Wear Totaphot!* The word *totaphot* is a Hebrew word that has been borrowed from some other language and its original source is unknown to most scholars. Some have tried to use the uncertain etymology of this word to find evidence of specific details of the command to wear the *tefillin*, such as suggesting it comes from two “different” languages [*African ‘tot’; (meaning “two”)* and *Coptic ‘fot’; (which also means “two”)*] to suggest four compartments in the *tefillin* (ha!).³⁷ *Clearly, such a view as this is completely ridiculous.* The most likely answer is that it was borrowed from Egyptian words during the time of the bondage of Israel in Egypt. Please take note of this explanation from a 1993 article on *The Etymology of Totaphot*:

“The T word is a coined word which had no prior existence before it appeared in Exodus. It is a dual-formed word known to grammarians as a reduplication—where the sound of the first syllable is duplicated in the corresponding syllable of the added word. An example in English would be ‘hocus-pocus.’ The T word is Hebrew but the background is Egyptian. It would have been recognized at, or about, the time of the Exodus by anyone familiar with both languages and with the religion and gods of Lower Egypt. The two elements of the T word are Thoth and Ptah, the names of the primary gods in the Memphis cosmogony. Thoth was sounded without change, whether written in Hebrew or in Egyptian.

“In the last line and elsewhere in the Hieroglyphic section of the Rosetta Stone (in the British Museum), one can observe a square, a semi-circle, and a twisted rope—a combination which expresses the name of a god whose name appears in Greek letters having the sound of Phot, in the Greek section of the text.”³⁸

First, there is no uniform agreement as to the actual etymology of the word. Some authorities believe it points to an actual amulet that is worn on the head. Some suggest it is from the Akkadian language. Still others even suggest (as the quote above shows) that it is a composite reference to the two gods of the Egyptians (Thoth and Phot).³⁹ Why the Hebrew Scriptures would use a word derived from such a source is difficult to understand. However, it could be that the use of this word was with the purpose (as stated earlier) of giving a comparison or example. In other words, “‘like’ the Egyptians who wore these amulets with the names of their deities on them, you are to meditate on and place in your mind the teachings I am giving to you.” Obviously, since Scripture condemns the use of divination, He would not have commanded them to wear anything like an amulet or magic charm.

As we have mentioned earlier, the “*lamed*” preceding the word “totaphot” indicates that “totaphot” could be used for the purpose of *comparison*. The children of Israel, who had just left Egyptian bondage, would have been quite familiar with the Egyptians’ head ornaments and would have understood exactly what Moses was telling them. He was simply using these as “examples” and “metaphors,” and did not intend for them to literally make them and put them on their bodies—since He obviously commanded them (in Leviticus 18:1-4) **not** to do as the Egyptians.

Finally, we need to address the dating of the word *totaphot*. If indeed it is an “Egyptian loan word” (as some believe, based on their extensive research) and that word was picked up in Egypt just prior to the Exodus, then this is *prima fascia* evidence that the wearing of *totaphot* (whatever that may have been) could not possibly have existed in the time of Abraham. If it were true, then the Jews would not have needed to create a word from the Egyptian language to describe something which is uniquely Hebrew. And yet, Scripture tells us that Abraham kept the Torah even before it was put into written form:

“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws [Torot].” (Genesis 26:4-5)

If Abraham kept the Torah and all the commandments associated with it **before** the word *totaphot* even came into existence, then this *totaphot* (whatever its etymological origin is) could not be a reference to a mitzvah which Abraham was required to keep. And Yahweh does not change His requirements from one generation to the next, as it is written:

“For I am Yahweh, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” (Malachi 3:6)

Whatever *totaphot* refers to, it doesn’t substantially affect the outcome of this discussion. The reason it does not is because the “*lamed*” which precedes this word is clearly pointing to a literal object to be used as an “example”: “like frontlets,” or “as if it were frontlets,” is the preferred translation. Whatever the “totaphot” is, it is an example of how we are to place the Torah into practice (with our hands) and then in our mind and heart (between our eyes).

5. *The Lamed (ל) Shows Metaphorical Language.* As I mentioned earlier, the Hebrew character *lamed* is found preceding each of these three Hebrew words. This should be (in these texts at least) translated “as a sign”, “for a sign”, or “like a sign”. And yes, it could also be translated as “at” or “in” in many places, but context should be the determining factor in any translation. This is more proof that it is metaphorical language, not literal.

6. *Tefillin Is Not In Scripture.* The word *tefillin* is not seen in any of these four passages. It is from an Aramaic word meaning prayer, and it is clearly a rabbinic term. In addition, because it is an Aramaic as apposed to a Hebrew term, it is also *prima fascia* evidence that the wearing of *tefillin* could not have originated at the time of Moses, but later—after the Babylonian captivity (when Hebrew began to be replaced with Aramaic in everyday use). It is a term that is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, nor the Messianic Writings.
7. *Samaritans Did Not Wear Tefillin, Yet Messiah Looked Like a Samaritan to the Pharisees.* The Samaritans began to be prominent about the year 720 BCE. According to the *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, the Samaritans were at one time part of the Jewish nation and sought to imitate them and their faith in every way possible. Even after the final division between the two groups over the setting up of worship on mount Gerizim, they still maintained close ties to the Jews and a strong faith in the Elohim of Israel. And yet, not only did the Samaritans not use *tefillin*, they did not (prior to the Babylonian captivity) even know what they were. If they did, they would have mentioned them and if Judaism required it at that time, they would have probably incorporated that practice into their religious traditions. If they did not agree that they should be worn, they would have said so early on. But they did not use them or even know of them, which is strange since they knew about and/or imitated every other Jewish practice that they could. The following information (which gives a brief history of the Samaritans) is taken from the *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*:

“Sargon replaced the deported Israelites with foreign colonists (2 Kin. 17:24). These newcomers married the Israelites who remained in Samaria. Later their numbers were increased when Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (the biblical Osnapper; Ezra 4:10) sent more Assyrian colonists to the district of Samaria. These people took the name Samaritans from the territory and attempted to settle the land. ...the Samaritans worshipped the God of Israel. But they also continued their idolatry, worshiping the pagan gods imported from foreign lands (2 King. 17:29).

“So the Samaritans were a ‘mixed race’ contaminated by foreign blood and false worship.

“The final break between the two groups occurred when the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, claiming Shechem rather than Zion (Jerusalem) as the true ‘Beth-el’ (house of God), the site traditionally chosen and blessed by the Lord.”⁴⁰

Osher Sassoni, in his article “the Samaritan Tradition,” adds the following commentary:

“Unlike our Brothers, the Jews, the sons of Kingdom of Judea, the Samaritans do not use *tefillin*, nor tie it on their hand and arms. The Samaritans interpret the verses of the commandment as a spiritual meaning not in the material sense of the verses, as in using or tying the *tefillin*.”⁴¹

The Samaritans did not wear *tefillin*, and in the earliest stages of their existence they did not even know of them. And yet, Messiah speaks favorably of them in his parable:

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?” (Luke 10:33-36)

Moreover, of the 10 lepers that were healed, only one of them returned to thank Him (a Samaritan):

“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified Elohim, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Yahushua answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” (Luke 17:15-17)

Finally, we need to address the fact that the Pharisees even made an accusation against the Messiah in one instance that has a bearing on this matter. Remember, the Pharisees wore the *tephillin* and the Samaritans clearly (as our evidence has shown) did not wear them:

“And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of Elohim heareth Elohim’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of Elohim. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?” (John 8:45-48)

Of course, the accusation against Yahushua that He had a devil and was a Samaritan was a lie. But would the Pharisees (who were at least cunning and intelligent) bring an accusation against the Messiah which was contradicted by His general appearance? If He wore the *tefillin*, He would have appeared more like a Pharisee (who generally wore them all day). But if He did not wear the *tefillin*, He could have passed as a Samaritan (or an average Jew who also did

not wear *tefillin*). Did the Messiah's appearance suggest that He was more likely a Pharisee or a Samaritan? If He did not (as we believe) wear the *tefillin*, then He would have looked more like a Samaritan—isn't that correct? Remember, the Pharisees themselves accused Him of being a Samaritan. Therefore, based upon this inference, He would not have been wearing the *tefillin*.

8. *Lack of Agreement on How to Wear Tefillin*. In the time of Aristeas (when the Pharisees were gaining control of Jerusalem) they were not in agreement concerning how the *tefillin* were to be worn. On page 11 of this presentation, we presented the statement from Aristeas, who clearly presents the wearing of *tefillin* only on the arm and hand. "¹⁵⁹ ...And upon our hands, too, he expressly orders the symbol to be fastened..." (*Letter of Aristeas*, verse 159)⁴² We find that Josephus in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, clearly states in contrast to both the Septuagint and the *Letter of Aristeas* that the commandment is to be understood in a literal sense and to be worn on both the head and hand: "13. Let every one commemorate before God the benefits which he bestowed upon them at their deliverance out of the land of Egypt, and this twice every day, both when the day begins and when the hour of sleep comes on, gratitude being in its own nature a just thing, and serving not only by way of return for past, but also by way of invitation of future favors. They are also to inscribe the principle blessings they have received from God upon their doors, and show the same remembrance of them upon their arms; as also they are to bear on their forehead and their arm those wonders which declare the power of God, and his good-will towards them, that God's readiness to bless them may appear everywhere conspicuous about them."⁴³ Josephus wrote this about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (circa 70 CE). This, therefore, is the earliest confirmation that we have that *tefillin* were literally to be worn on both the head and hand. So until about four decades after Messiah, no one ever spoke of wearing both of them together. Furthermore, agreement concerning the actual contents of the four compartments (four texts or five?) was not universal in Judaism until the 12th century CE, again supporting the concept that the practice of wearing *tefillin* was evolving as a work in progress over a period of about 1500 years (from about 200 BCE to 1300 CE).

As I previously mentioned, it is not certain when the Aristeas letter was written, but estimates range from second to first century BCE, and that parts of it were at least written in the first century BCE. Whether one wishes to recognize Aristeas as a credible authority or not, he is the first known person to make reference to the wearing of *tefillin*. The incidental evidence from his letter is most intriguing to our discussion. In that letter he speaks of the parts of the phylacteries and its casings using Aramaic (not Hebrew) words, such as *titora* (square base of leather), *ma'abarta* (a hollow projection at the back of it), and of course *tefillin*. Based on this additional evidence, it is highly unlikely that the *tefillin* could have been introduced during the time of Moses. It is far more likely that this occurred sometime after the Babylonian captivity—when Aramaic was commonly spoken.

Philo, who lived during the time of the Messiah, tells us that the Torah commands of Exodus and Deuteronomy were intended to convey a metaphorical meaning.⁴³ We understand that he was a great leader among the Jews and had great influence with the people. He was a knowledgeable person, he upheld obedience to Torah, and would therefore be a general representative of Jews living at that time. The fact that Philo agreed with the symbolic understanding provided by the Septuagint translators serves as a powerful witness that this was the understanding of normative Judaism at that time, especially when we consider how highly respected Philo was among his fellow Jews. And yet, since he surely would have known about the strong influence of the Pharisees on the people, Philo plainly tells us that the "*tefillin* command" is only to be understood **figuratively**. This is what he wrote:

"The law says, it is proper to lay up justice in one's heart, and to fasten it as a sign upon one's head, and as frontlets before one's eyes, **figuratively** intimating by the former expression that one ought to commit the precepts of justice, not to one's ears, which are not trustworthy, for there is no credit due to the ears, but to that most important and dominant part, stamping and impressing them on the most excellent of all offerings, a well approved seal; and by the second expression, that it is necessary not only to form proper conceptions of what is right, but also to do what one has decided upon as proper without delay. For the hand is the **symbol** of actions, to which Moses here commands the people to attach and fasten justice, saying that it shall be a sign of what indeed he has not expressly stated, because it is not a sign as I conceive of one particular thing, but of many, and, I may almost say, of everything with which the life of man is conceived. And by the third expression, he implies that justice is discerned everywhere as being close to the eyes.⁴⁴

We thus see that neither the translators of the Septuagint nor Philo believed that the *totaphot* mentioned by Moses were to be interpreted literally. I do not deny that there may have been misplaced zealots (such as the Pharisees) who wore the *tefillin* during that time frame in history (the time after the Babylonian captivity), but I see no evidence that this was the common practice or the "Hebraic understanding" of Yahushua's day. Nor is there a shred of evidence that Messiah ever wore the *tefillin*. Indeed, we know from the Hebrew Matthew that He wore the *tzitzits*, but there is no record that He or anyone else donned the *tefillin*. I believe the reason is obvious: He didn't! (In Hebrew Matthew 23:5

⁴³Edersheim's comments in this regard are interesting, yet confusing: "It is remarkable that Aristeas seems to speak only of the phylacteries on the arm, while Philo of those for the head, while the LXX takes the command entirely in a metaphorical sense." (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000], p. 52, note 13.) While it is true that Aristeas speaks only of wearing the *tefillin* on the arms and hands, and that the Septuagint speaks of them in a "metaphorical sense", we have searched the works of Philo extensively in order to find any statement from him which speaks of wearing *tefillin* at all! While we highly respect the scholarship of Edersheim, yet we have found nothing which supports this particular contention from him. Instead, we find that Philo (like the Septuagint) speaks of these Torah commandments in a purely metaphorical sense.

the word *tefillin* is left out of the translation, while the *tzitzits* are retained. The Greek translation mentions *phylacteries*, which is even more suspicious since this word implies a forbidden magical amulet.)

With regard to the question of who first began to wear the tefillin and how often, the evidence we have suggests strongly that the Pharisees (or their forbearers, the Hasidim) were the first to wear them, and they wore them all day. In addition to what has already been said, notice the following commentary by Alfred Edersheim:

“The members of the Pharisaic confraternity wore them all day long. The practice itself, and the views and ordinances connected with it, are so characteristic of the party.”⁴⁵

If there were a clear command of Scripture, complete with instructions on how to make *tefillin*, and if it came from the time of Moses, there would not be so much uncertainty as to how to wear them or which of these items are to be worn. At the time of the Messiah, only the Pharisees were wearing the *tefillin*, and probably only the headpiece. Some people may have been wearing both, and within a few decades both the headpiece and the arm piece would typically be worn. But it would be 11 centuries **after** the time of the Messiah before the Jews were unified in how to wear the *tefillin*, requiring both of them to be worn and texts placed in only four compartments of the headpiece.

If the Messiah had felt that the people should also be wearing the *tefillin*, why did He not condemn them also as He had boldly done to the Pharisees (in Matthew 23:5) regarding how they were wearing them, and their pompous attitude. The Messiah would typically rebuke sin that was open, so if the people were sinning by not wearing the *tefillin* (as the evidence clearly reveals they were not)—should He not have rebuked them also for not wearing them? We have clear evidence that the typical Jew living at the time of the Messiah (unlike the Pharisees) were not even wearing the *tefillin at all*. In fact, the Samaritans were also not wearing them—and yet the Messiah had good things to say about the Samaritans, and was even falsely accused of being a Samaritan Himself! The *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* offers this commentary regarding the wearing of *tefillin* by the people:

“Both the somewhat later Talmudic acknowledgment that they were not worn by the common people (am ha'aretz) and the failure of pagan writers to mention them indicate that in the time of Christ they were still worn only by a minority of the people. We may be sure that all Pharisees wore them, not merely during morning prayer but throughout the hours of daylight. Their later restriction to the time of prayer was due to their providing an all too easy mark of recognition of the Jew in times of persecution.”⁴⁶

Regarding the Talmudic admission pertaining to the wearing of *tefillin*, notice this reference to the Talmud by Alfred Edersheim (the reference from the Talmud in question is tractate Zevachim 19a and 19b):

“The admission that neither the officiating priests, nor the representatives of the people wore them in the Temple (Zebach. 19a,b), seems to imply that this practice was not quite universal.”⁴⁷

If the people were not generally wearing the *tefillin*, and the priests and leaders were not wearing the *tefillin*, why is it that the Messiah did not rebuke them for this? He rebuked them for breaking other Torah commandments, so why not this one—if indeed it was really to be understood in a most literal sense?

Now someone might turn this around and say, “Why didn’t the Pharisees rebuke the Messiah and His disciples for *not* wearing the *tefillin*?” Of course, the obvious answer is that they could not rebuke Him for something which most of the people themselves were not doing, including the Sadducees who also had a great deal of political power in Israel at that time. The Pharisees were seeking an occasion against the Messiah (not the people), so they would never have introduced an issue which might alienate them further from the people. At that time this practice was in its infancy and they had not yet made the wearing of *tefillin* mandatory for all, nor was it generally practiced by the people until later (as the Talmud clearly tells us in Tractate Zevachim 19a and b).

9. *Talmud Teaching on Tefillin is a Contradictory non-Binding Tradition.* The Talmud is the embodiment of the “Oral Torah” which was put in written form about four centuries after the time of Messiah. It is based on the Mishna, which did exist at the time of Messiah. Even the Talmud, which practically **commands** that these items be worn at the proper times by faithful Jews, did not initially command everyone to wear these objects. Moreover, it admits (in tractate Zevachim 19a and 19b) that this was not practiced by either the priests or the civil representatives of the people. Thus, if this is true, why would the Talmud state something to the effect that it isn’t a grievous sin to say, “There are no tefillin’?” If even the strictest of Jews at the time of Messiah (which the Talmud may indeed go back to, since it was an expansion of the Mishna) say that it is not a sin to deny that *tefillin* are literal, why should we adhere to such conflicting traditions? Even the Rabbinic Jews living in the first centuries admitted that the wearing of *tefillin* was not an absolute command, nor was it practiced by all of the people, nor was it practiced with any uniformity (even if some practiced it) so how could this practice have originated at or before the time of Moses? Here is what the Talmud says (*Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Sanhedrin, Chapter 10, 88b):

“It is more culpable to transgress the words of the Scribes than those of the Torah. He that says, ‘There are no tefillin’, transgresses the word of the Torah, and is not to be regarded as a rebel; but he who says, ‘There are five compartments’ (instead of four), to add to the words of the Scribes, he is guilty.”⁴⁸

Can you see that in this very statement offering support for the wearing of *tefillin*, they also admit that those who disagree should not be considered rebels? By saying this, they admit that there were some even then who did not believe in wearing *tefillin* and that this was an optional (non-binding) tradition (at least it was around the year 100 BCE when this tradition was started). In addition, those who change the words of the scribes are more culpable, because it is believed by rabbinic Judaism that the words of the scribes are of more value than the words of Scripture. I would consider this a most blasphemous statement (since it places the words of the rabbis **above** the words of Scripture), and yet it is given in the context and in support of the wearing of *tefillin*!!

10. *There is No Evidence the Messiah or His Disciples Wore Tefillin.* Finally, while we have evidence that the disciples and/or the Messiah Himself wore such things as the *Tallit* (Matthew 6:6, Luke 12:3, and Acts 18:3) and the *Tzitzit* (Mark 6:56 and Luke 8:44), we have no evidence at all that they ever wore the *tefillin*. If the Messiah did indeed wear them, we should see some evidence of this, since wearing *tefillin* is a distinguishing mark of a Pharisee. The Messiah was never accused of being a Pharisee by the people. In fact, the Pharisees falsely accused Him of being a Samaritan (John 8:45-48). The only passage which mentions *tefillin* (Matthew 23:5) speaks of them in a negative light (where Messiah condemns the Pharisees because they have broadened theirs to appear more righteous than their neighbors). Also, please take note that it is in Matthew 23:1-3 that the issue of the authority of the rabbis (the Pharisees) is called into question. What He really meant in that text **was not** that the Pharisees do not practice what they preach (they were simply deluded). He was telling them that the Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses, and all that Moses says (through them) we must do—but we are not to follow the practices or teachings of the Pharisees when they are in such obvious conflict with Moses. And then read the rest of the chapter. It contains some of the most bitter and biting rebukes ever recorded in the gospels. When the Pharisees speak the words of Moses, we must do what Moses says (not the false interpretations and practices of the Pharisees). Do these false teachings and practices include the wearing of *tefillin*? Based upon the evidence I have found, I believe it does. Please see <http://www.ancientpaths.org/APRNnote1.html> for more detailed information regarding that issue of authority as mentioned in Matthew 23.

If the Messiah had indeed been wearing *tefillin*, He would have appeared to everyone around Him to be a Pharisee—for this practice was indeed limited largely to the Pharisees. They would not, as shown in these passages (Matthew 7:29; 13:54; 21:23), have ever questioned His authority—for they would have recognized Him (because of His *tefillin*) as a Pharisee.

The Greek text (in Matthew 23:5) has “phylacteries” (which indicates “magical amulets”), the Old Syriac “straps of tefillin” the DuTillet simply says “frontlets” and the Hebrew Matthew leaves it out entirely. Whichever translation you want to use, He makes no all out effort to say it is wrong to wear them, nor does He endorse wearing them. And remember, based upon the latest Aramaic

translations of this text (Matthew 23:1-7) it is obvious that Messiah was not endorsing the teachings or practices of the Pharisees, but condemning them. Nowhere in the Gospels do we read of the Messiah taking off or putting on His *tefillin* for prayer, though it does tell us of several occasions in which He had a special prayer session (Matthew 14:23; Mark. 4:26; Luke 6:12; 9:28, and others). Nowhere does it say that they drew lots over his *tefillin* at the foot of the cross (John 19:23). Yet the Messiah had just finished praying when the chief priests and Pharisees had come to take Him (Matthew 26:36, Mark. 14:32, Luke 22:39). If He had indeed been wearing the *tefillin* it should have been listed among the items taken from Him. And yet it is simply not there. Moreover, if the Pharisees had even themselves regarded it as a grievous sin to **not** wear the *tefillin*, they would have condemned the Messiah, the priests and the people, which would have been recorded in the gospels. Since we know from the evidence that the general populace did not wear them, it only makes sense that they did not consider it a command in the time of the Messiah. Bottom line: there is no evidence that Yahushua or His disciples ever wore *tefillin*. Since Yahushua fulfilled all of Yahweh's commandments as given in the Torah, the wearing of literal *tefillin* could not possibly have been one of them.

The Hypocrisy of Desiring To Be Seen

As noted earlier, the Pharisees wore their head *tefillin* throughout the day to impress the people with their religious piety. When the Messiah spoke out against them in Matthew 23 (if He indeed spoke out regarding the wearing of *tefillin*), His statement must be considered within that context. In other words, His condemnation is with regard to doing things for the purpose of being seen by men to be pious. While His main objective is to criticize the **size** of their *phylacteries*, even the wearing of them, whether they are large or small, would therefore qualify as doing “deeds to be noticed by men.” And note also that He does not use the rabbinic term *tefillin*, but the Greek term *phylacteries* (which directly implies a magical amulet). The fact that the term ‘borders’ [referring to tassels] is used alongside of *phylacteries* is merely incidental:

“But **they do all their deeds to be noticed by men**. For **they broaden their phylacteries** and **lengthen the borders** [tassels] of their garments.”
(Matthew 23:5)

Many Messianic believers (and some Jews) have typically understood the four Scriptures regarding the signs on the forehead and the hand to be metaphorical, not literal. Please notice a couple of commentaries regarding this issue, as they demonstrate that even though it might be possible to see this command as literal—all the evidence available to us (much of which has already been presented here) supports the fact that it was an “innovation” brought in by the Hasidim (early Pharisees). In summary, therefore, it could not (prior to that time) have been taken literally. The following information is taken from *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*:

“Though Christian exegesis has always understood the passages as metaphorical, our increasing knowledge of the ancient Near East would

not rule out their possible literal intent. All available evidence suggests, however, that they were a late innovation brought in by the Hasidim, the spiritual forefathers of the Pharisees, being intended as a counterblast to increasing Hellenistic influence. There is no mention of them in the OT, and they seem always to have been unknown to the Samaritans. LXX [the Septuagint] clearly takes the passages on which the custom is based as metaphorical.”⁴⁹

Alfred Edersheim, in his work *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, adds the following:

“The above may serve as a specimen alike of Rabbinical exegesis and theological inferences. It will also help us to understand, how in such a system inconvenient objections, arising from the plain meaning of Scripture, would be summarily set aside by exalting the interpretations of men above the teaching of the Bible. This brings us straight to the charge of our Lord against the Pharisees (Mark 7:13); another indication that Yeshua was not a Pharisee, 'that they made 'the Word of God of none effect' through their 'traditions.' The fact, terrible as it is, nowhere, perhaps, comes out more strongly than in connection with these very 'tephillin.' We read in Mishnah (Sanh. xi. 3), literally, as follows: 'It is more punishable to act against the words of the Scribes than against those of Scripture.'”⁵⁰

The Messiah continually berated the Pharisees for adding to Yahweh's commandments with strict interpretations which are not founded upon Scripture. Scripture supports this understanding, for it says plainly in the Torah:

“Whatever I command you, you must be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.” (Deuteronomy 12:32)

Does Yahweh command us to wear the *tefillin*? The evidence I have presented in this study reveals that He does not! Would it be sinful for us to wear the *tefillin*, knowing now that it is not a commandment to do so? That is an interesting question. Consider this: Scripture teaches that when people begin to add to Yahweh's requirements, they will eventually take away from His requirements and begin persecuting those who do not fulfill their religious ideals. As a result, those who call “evil good” will eventually be led to call “good evil”:

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isaiah 5:20-21)

We see this very attitude spoken of here in the history of the Pharisees, and in their introduction of the wearing of *tefillin*. Isaiah chapter five offers a famous listing of woes to the wicked leaders of Israel, and this is reflected by the Messiah's famous rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. The historical evidence indicates that at first (about 100 BCE) the wearing of *tefillin* was an innovation introduced by the Pharisees which was

not generally required of the people. In time (by about 100 CE), it began to be enforced upon the Jews. Finally (during the Middle Ages up until today), it has turned from an optional rabbinic tradition into a rabbinic requirement and another oral law. Let us not forget that it is very likely that the wearing of *tefillin* has been borrowed from the Egyptian practice of wearing magical amulets. Does the wearing of magical amulets bring honor or dishonor to Yahweh?

The answer would have to be yes, the wearing of *tefillin* would be a sin (since it is a tradition which claims to be a mitzvah, but is not founded upon the plain teachings of Scripture)! It is a false teaching, and an erroneous practice. 2 Peter 2:18, 3:6-17; 1 John 4:6, and Jude 1:11 defines “error” as a form of sin.⁵⁰ By bringing in an erroneous practice and false teaching it could eventually lead to persecution of the righteous (those who keep the true meaning of that passage, not the outward appearance). We know that one definition of sin is the “transgression of the law [Torah]”: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Let us also consider that there is another definition of sin which is equally valid: Another definition of sin is “to miss a mark.”⁵¹ Do we miss the mark when we begin to do and openly teach something that Yahweh does not require—and *use a misguided interpretation of Scripture to support that practice*? Yes we do. Error, while in its initial stages of development may seem harmless, will in time grow to produce an evil harvest of its own. While the rabbis certainly have misunderstood the Torah in this and many other respects, they have also brought condemnation upon those within their influence who do not follow them (both then and now). Orthodox rabbis today generally believe it is a sin for their Jewish brethren **not** to wear the *tefillin* and to pray in the prescribed manner. Since Scripture is clear that this is not the teaching of Yahweh, they are in many ways guilty of “adding” to the words of Yahweh. We would do well **not** to follow their example in this particular regard.

Please notice how these statements of Messiah are of even more value when we take note of the fact that the audience to whom He was directing His curses to (Scribes, Pharisees, and other hypocrites) were openly wearing the *tefillin* at that very moment to display their great piety:

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, *do not sound a trumpet before thee*, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, *let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*:² That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the

⁵⁰We do not wish to make summary judgments against any individual for doing what they perceive to be a work of righteousness, but since it seems (from our investigation) that the wearing of *tefillin* originated from the custom of wearing magical amulets, it may also qualify as a grievous sin (since it appears to be a form of divination). At the very least, it appears to be an error which is also classified as a sin.

²Note: The hand *tefillin* are almost universally worn on the left (or weaker) hand. Was the Messiah making a derogatory reference here to the wearing of the hand *tefillin* at such an early date?

hypocrites are: for *they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.*[∞] Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” (Matthew 6:1-5)

“Then spake Yahushua to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe [*as given by Moses*], that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. *For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders;* but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries,*[⊗] and enlarge the borders of their garments.” (Matthew 23:1-5)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, *which indeed appear beautiful outward,* but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so *ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men,* but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Matthew 23:27-28)

While these references may not be explicitly directed toward the wearing of tefillin (with the possible exception of Matthew 23:5), the knowledge that the Pharisees were wearing the head *tefillin* makes for a strong case that at least part of His condemnation addresses that practice. Other than the wearing of costly robes and fine ornaments, the only other physical aspect of the Pharisees that would have stood out as distinct from the average person would have been the *tefillin*.

The evidence I have presented here demonstrates that the wearing of *tefillin* was largely a Pharisical practice that was not generally practiced by the rest of Jewish society (at that time). While Messiah kept the Torah and did indeed keep some of the traditions, like Hanukkah, He never placed traditions on an equal footing with the TaNaK, or with the purpose of replacing Yahweh's commands. In fact, He often chastised them for adding to the commandments of Yahweh as given in Scripture.

The oral teachings of the Jews (for what eventually became the Talmud) contain many teachings regarding the wearing of *tefillin*. Any Orthodox Jew today who attempts to attend worship service, especially to speak, but does not wear the *tefillin* at the appropriate times is considered a "false witness" against himself. The wearing of *tefillin* is mandatory for them today and in the time of Messiah it was apparently in the process of becoming mandatory through the Pharisees. Simply put, if the Messiah Himself did

[∞]The word *tefillin* comes from an Aramaic word meaning “prayer” and when worn in public it is very visible. The Messiah Yahushua may have had the *tefillin* in mind when speaking of the public prayers of the Pharisees.

[⊗]*Phylacteries* is from a Greek word meaning *magical amulet*, and would be given here in reference to the *tefillin*. Most of the original Greek documents use this term as apposed to the term *tefillin*. An amulet is a type of jewelry that could be worn anywhere on the body and is used to ward off evil spirits, and is believed to have magical properties.

not identify with or align Himself with the Pharisees as indicated by Matthew 23 and other texts (especially through the wearing of *tefillin*) then neither should we.

On Returning to Our Hebrew Roots

Personally, if I felt that there was a command in Scripture that I should wear a box on my head, as well as a box with leather straps on my arm and hand, I would be the first one in line to start making them and wearing them. However, the evidence we see here is clear: According to all of the historical evidence available to us, this tradition (before the Babylonian captivity) was not even a gleam in the eyes of the Jewish nation. Certainly, it could not have existed during Abraham's day, as the additional evidence presented here has clearly shown.

I had one person tell me that part of the return to our Hebrew roots involves not only wearing the *tefillin*, but also wearing robes. I answered, "Can you show me the commandment of Scripture that tells us we have to wear robes?"

He replied, "No, but that is what the Jews did back then so that is what we have to do."

Friends, the Jews also wore magical amulets (as our research here has uncovered). Does that mean we have to wear magical amulets also? They also started wearing the Kippah after their exile in Babylon. Does that mean we also have to start wearing the Kippah?⁸ If you want to start wearing robes to experience the ancient Hebrew culture, I am not going to condemn you for that. Want to wear the *tallit*? Great, the Messiah also likely wore the *tallit*—but it is also not commanded by Scripture, unless you take it as part of that command regarding the *tzitzit*. However, if you start saying things similar to what the person above told me, then you have overstepped your authority. Yahweh does not command us to wear robes, and those who judge and/or condemn others regarding this matter demonstrate that they are truly ignorant, unlearned, and missing the mark! Yahweh is not so much concerned about our outward appearance as He is the integrity of our hearts.

Does Yahweh concern Himself about the outward appearance, or is He more interested in looking at the inward thoughts and attitudes? Please notice the plain statements of Scripture in this regard which decisively prove that the wearing of prayer ornaments (*tefillin*) are not a prerequisite for Yahweh to hear our prayers:

"The righteous cry, and Yahweh heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. Yahweh is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." (Psalms 34:17-18)

"Thus saith Yahweh, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those

⁸The Kippah has also been found to be of pagan origin. There is no command in Scripture requiring the wearing of the Kippah.

things have been, saith Yahweh: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. . .” (Isaiah 66:1-2)

Notice that they “trembleth at my word” **NOT** the vain traditions and commandments of men, such as found in the “oral torah.” Notice also that the wearing of prayer ornaments are **NOT** a prerequisite for Yahweh hearing our prayers! Rabbinic Judaism does not focus on the thoughts, but upon outward demonstrations of piety. Sadly, many other religious faiths do *the same exact thing in different ways*. The following three verses from that same passage reveals exactly who it is Yahweh is condemning here:

“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of Yahweh, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let Yahweh be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.” (Isaiah 66:3-5)

Returning to Scripture truth (and trembling “at His word”) means essentially returning to our Hebrew Roots. But this does not mean returning to Judaism, for the Judaism of today is not the Judaism of Moses and the ancient Hebrew people. It is the same Pharisees who Messiah rebuked in Matthew 23 that have evolved into modern rabbinic Judaism. Our heavenly Father is not so concerned with the outward façade (rabbinic Judaism) as He is the inward purity of heart (as will be found in the true last day Hebrew Roots Movement to restore the two houses of Israel).

I appreciate the fact that many believers desire to return to their Hebrew roots. This is commendable. And Hebrew is an ancient language, the language of Scripture. But that doesn't mean we should throw out the basic rules of interpretation, the rules of grammar and syntax, the rules of context, and rules such as “compare Scripture with Scripture.” Moreover, this doesn't change the fact that context is also a very important means of determining the truths of Scripture—and when we take phrases out of context and seek to find something that is not really there, it doesn't matter how much ancient Hebrew we know, it doesn't matter how “Jewish” we try to become, we will still miss the mark. Ultimately, it is pride which takes us down that road.

That does not mean we cannot look at what the rabbis historically taught, or what other historical figures believed. But we have to put the weight of evidence on the side of Scripture and its clear meaning as shown in the original languages. For example, Philo was a great leader among the Jews who lived during the time of Messiah. Since he is somewhat of a high ranking official and an example of what it was like to be a Jew in those days, then what he says on a matter is important—because it reflects the

teachings and practices of normative Judaism. If Philo says something important in his writings (indicating that the *tephillin* are to be regarded as figurative, not literal) I have to consider this important. If Scripture clearly supports that argument, then this is evidence I must accept. I must weight all the evidence in my pursuit of truth and not limit myself by not considering **ALL** the evidence.

We must consider a variety of issues as it relates to Scriptural studies, such as the original language, the context, other texts which have a bearing on our understanding, the historical background, traditional practices of the Jews, ancient archeology, etc. If we only studied Scripture from our own perspective and knowledge, or with the filters that our religious background tells us to use, then we would never find the truth. Our only goal should be to discover Yahweh's message to us as given in Scripture, and we should do so without any filters, and then do exactly what He says to do! If that includes rejecting the false teachings of rabbinic Judaism, evangelical Christianity and our modern western culture, then so be it. I fear that many are falling back into the same trap Yahushua warned us about, the trap of viewing Scripture through the vain traditions of men (whatever the source). Therefore, I ask the question—are you, my Messianic friend, looking at Scripture through the filters of rabbinic Judaism?

The Hebrew roots movement, my friend, will go on. Don't think that it cannot go on without you (or me). Yahweh is preparing a people who will come to the point in their experience that they will not be deceived by this or that wind of doctrine, but will honestly and with sincerity (like the noble Bereans) test the messengers to see if they are of Yahweh, and then *do exactly* what Yahweh commands.

Special thanks to Larry and June Acheson for consultation and editing on this important subject.

¹Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 202-204.

²*Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Menachote, book 35a.

³*Ibid.*, Book 36a-b.

⁴Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three, p. 864. Article: Phylacteries.

⁵J. D. Douglas, M.A., B.D., S.T.M., Ph.D., Organizing Editor, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), p. 1227. Article: Phylacteries.

⁶Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book III, pp. 624-625.

⁷Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 202.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 202-203.

¹²*The Etymology of Totafote*, by Herbert Rand. .

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¹³THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY: SCROLLS. *Scrolls from the Dead Sea (Library of Congress Exhibition)*.

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¹⁴*Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times*, Reader's Digest Association, Inc, page 272

¹⁵*Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, Herbert Lockyer, Sr, editor, pages 840-841

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- ²²*The Letter of Aristeas*, R.H. Charles-Editor, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913. See also online at http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/ot/pseudo/aristeas.htm
- ²³*Ibid.*
- ²⁴Douglas, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3, p. 1228. Article: Phylacteries.
- ²⁵*Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, by Davidson, p. 399, section 11.
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