

TEFILLIN: TO WEAR OR NOT TO WEAR?

by Avram Yehoshua

[THE SEED OF ABRAHAM](#)

Understanding the Word of God is the desire of all those, both Jew and Gentile, who love Him. With proper discernment of God's Word, one is able to know His will and strive to walk in it. With false understanding, one walks in heresy and misses what God has for them.

No one intentionally desires to follow false teachings but billions of people do. Aside from counterfeit religions like Islam, the New Age (movement) and Buddhism, etc., and false offshoots of Christianity like Jehovah Witness and Mormonism, we see the Catholics, generally accepted as 'Christian' by many. They comprise approximately one billion adherents and have many false teachings such as prayer to Mary, the celibacy of their priesthood, the Pope as the literal representative of Christ on Earth, and a salvation that comes from belonging to the Church, not Jesus. One reason why they are able to teach things that are anti-Scriptural is because in their understanding, tradition trumps Scripture. Another reason is because 90% of them don't read the Bible because it's forbidden by the Catholic Church to do so.¹ Because of this, many are trapped within the Church, not realizing that they are being fed polluted waters.

Protestants too, whose motto is 'Only Scripture!' (for their basis of what they believe and therefore what they should teach), have no biblical authority for Christmas, Easter and Sunday yet continue to propagate it as God's Word. Also, their stance on the Law of Moses is that it is wrong for a believer to even consider it, let alone walk in it. Many Protestants would sincerely but ignorantly tell us, 'Christ did away with the Law.' And even though there seems to be Scripture 'to back up their claim' the Body of Messiah is coming to see that the Law is part of God's gift to His people.

Orthodox Judaism still insists that Jesus is not the Messiah and any Jew believing in Him will go to Hell. They will continue to believe this to the end because like the Catholic Church, the maintenance of the institution has become greater than the quest for God's Truth. They too walk in traditions that nullify the Word of God because tradition is greater than God's Word to them.

The Messianic Community, which should be leading the way by teaching and example, in helping believers to walk with Yeshua and the Torah (Law of Moses), has its share of false teachings also, like the kipa,² and Gentiles 'don't have to walk in Torah.' And unfortunately, many Messianic congregations are not that serious about Torah observance for the Jew either, preferring Jewish tradition over God's Word.³

God chose the Hebrew nation because of His word to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and because of His love for Israel (Deut. 7:7-8). For more than 2,000 years, Jewish people have put on *tefillin* (also called *phylac-*

¹ The Catholic Church allows the reading of Scripture in the language of the people, in English, in the United States. But in countries like France, Mexico, Brazil and India, etc., only the priest can read the Scriptures, and only in Latin. This is a form of witchcraft, keeping the people ignorant of the world so they have to rely on the priests.

² See *The Kipa* at <http://seedofabraham.net/The-Kipa.pdf> for why it's a false practice, and see *Jewish Idolatry* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Jewish-Idolatry.pdf> for some things that are not kosher in Judaism.

³ We were at a Messianic conference in 1990 where the traditional candle lighting ceremony for welcoming in the Sabbath were lit after the Sabbath had begun (it was already dark on Friday night). Of course, lighting a fire on Sabbath is expressly forbidden (Ex. 35:1-3). After the ceremony I approached one of the leaders and asked for an explanation. He told me that they had to light the candles, as it was a tradition. He didn't seem to be aware of the Scripture that forbid the making of fire on the Sabbath.

teries). According to Orthodox Judaism it's a commandment from God. But is this really the will of God for His people Israel? If it is, then all men who call upon the Name of Yeshua need to practice this too. (In Orthodox Judaism only men wear *tefillin*: 'Women, slaves, and minors, as well as those persons whose dead lay unburied' are 'exempt from wearing *tefillin*'.⁴ The biblical authority to wear *tefillin* are seen coming from four passages in Scripture: Ex. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18.)

What Are Tefillin?

Tefillin are two small, black leather boxes attached to black leather straps that contain the four passages of Scripture mentioned above. One box is placed on the left arm by the biceps and the other is placed on the forehead by or on the hair. They are held in place by the straps. H.L. Ellison in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* tells us that the present form of *tefillin*,

'became standardized by the early years of the 2nd century AD and consists of two hollow cubes made of the skin of clean animals. They vary between 1.25 cm and 4 cm a side' (about half an inch to one and a half inches respectively). 'That for the head is divided into four equal compartments; that for the hand has no division. In them are placed the four passages Ex. 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Dt. 6:4-9; 11:13-21 written by hand on parchment (on four pieces for the head, on one for the hand). The *phylacteries* are attached to leather straps by which they are fastened to the left hand and the center of the forehead by the men before morning prayers, whether in the home or the synagogue, except on the sabbath (sic) and high festivals. They are put on after the' prayer 'shawl (*tallit*), that for the hand coming first. Both they and the straps are always colored black. The *phylactery* for the head can be recognized by a three- and four-armed' ψ *sheen*⁵ 'on its right and left sides.'⁶

The Prayers For Wearing Tefillin

Before the *tefillah* (singular for *tefillin*), for the arm is put on, a prayer-blessing is offered. This prayer tells us that for the Orthodox Jew, the wearing of *tefillin* is seen as a commandment from God. They say in Hebrew,

'Behold, in putting on *tefillin* I intend to fulfill the commandment of my Creator, Who has commanded us to put on *tefillin*, as is written in His Torah: "Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be *tefillin* between your eyes."⁷ (This last sentence comes from

⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor, Everett F. Harrison, Roland K. Harrison and William Sanford LaSor, Associate Editors, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 864. Article: *Phylacteries*.

⁵ The ψ *sheen* is the Hebrew letter that begins the name of Shaddai as in El Shaddai (God Almighty).

⁶ J. 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*.

⁷ Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, General Editors, *The Artscroll Siddur* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., January, 1987), p. 7.

Deut. 6:8 although as we'll see, the Hebrew word is not *tefillin*, but *totafote*, 'bands'.)

The idea that the wearing of *tefillin* is commanded by God is further seen in the next prayer which is said after the left arm *tefillah* is in place, but the straps haven't been tightened yet. The box goes on the biceps, the prayer is said, and then the straps are wound around the arm and hand seven and three times respectively while the other box on the forehead is also placed in a 'mystically significant manner.'⁸ It is wrapped in such a way as to form seven 'circles' around the forearm and three on the hand (forming three *sheens*). The seven circles around the forearm are said to make two *sheens*, one of three prongs and one of four,⁹ while that on the hand makes another *sheen*

The prayer in between the placing of the arm *tefillah* and the tightening of the straps is, 'Blessed are You, Oh Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with the commandments and commanded us to put on *tefillin*.'¹⁰ This is twice they have said that God commanded them to wear *tefillin*. Today though, only the latter blessing is said.

The head *tefillah* is placed in the center of the forehead with yet a another prayer recited. The straps in the back are knotted so as to form the Hebrew letter dalet, and the arm strap by the hand is to be in the form of a yod. These three Hebrew letters form the name Shaddai (Almighty). Alfred Edersheim writes of their mystical significance:

'for their value and importance in the eyes of the Rabbis, it were impossible to exaggerate it. They were revered as highly as the Scriptures...It was said that Moses had received the law of their observance from God on Mount Sinai; 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 of' Yahveh, while the *tefillin* 'contained it not less than twenty-three times'.¹¹

For the Orthodox Jew the wearing of *tefillin* is a *commandment* from Heaven. *The Chumash* by Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz (Gen. Editors), confirms this. In a comment on Deut. 6:8, it states,

'The Torah commands that this passage be written and inserted into *tefillin* that are to be placed on the upper arm and on the head, above the hairline, directly above the space between the eyes.'¹²

They also tell us that Rashi got the idea where the four compartments (which house the parchments), came from. They are from two foreign words which both mean 'two' and when combined, form the Hebrew word *totafote*. The 'word טט *tat*, means two in *Katpi* and פפ *fas* (*faht*), means two in Afriki, two ancient languages.'¹³ (The '*tat*' will change with a different vowel to a 'tote' sound and likewise with '*faht*' to '*fote*' to make *totafote*, the rabbinic base for *tefillin*.) How this connection between the foreign words for 'two', and the four compartments of the *tefillin* was made, is hard to see but shows us how free association played an important part in Rashi's life (1040-1105 A.D.). Rashi's 'theology' is impregnated with it.

⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 202.

⁹ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three, p. 864. Article: *Phylacteries*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 202.

¹² Scherman, *The Chumash*, p. 975.

¹³ Ibid., p. 365.

The Biblical Concepts Behind Tefillin

Rambam (1135-1204 A.D.), considered by many, the greatest Rabbi who ever lived, writes about the biblical concepts behind the wearing of *tefillin*:

‘The two passages in this chapter’ (Ex. 13), ‘speak of the Exodus, which is basic to the Jew’s awareness of his responsibilities to God, Who liberated him and made Israel a nation. The first two passages of Shema’ (in Deut. 6, 11) ‘express the concept that God is One and that we accept His Kingship, the concept of reward and punishment, and the responsibility to observe all the commandments. These principles must always be with us—upon the arm that symbolizes our capacity for action and is opposite the head, the seat of emotion; and upon the head, the abode of the intellectual soul and the power of memory which enable us to be conscious of our antecedents and obligations to do His will. The Torah repeats over and over that commandments are reminders of the Exodus from Egypt. Clearly, therefore, there is a dimension of the Exodus that affects the entire Torah...This message of the Exodus is not only basic to our belief and existence, but it must be reiterated constantly. Therefore, we wear it on our person in the form of *tefillin* and recall it when we perform the commandments.’¹⁴

The *concepts* behind the wearing of *tefillin* are certainly biblical, but do they pertain to *tefillin*?

The Dating of Tefillin

R. L. Omanson in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* writes that the ‘Letter of Aristeas’ (ca. 130 B.C.) refers to the practice as already old (verse 159).¹⁵ I think Aristeas may have been wanting us to view the tradition as coming from Mt. Sinai, and speaks of it as ‘old’ in this way. All rabbinic traditions are said to come from Mt. Sinai, and therefore, supposedly lend God’s authority to the tradition.

We also question the date that Omanson uses for the *Letter* as this would have given more than enough time for the practice of wearing *tefillin* to have been solidly established in the days of Yeshua, 160 years later, but it wasn’t. Actually, there is much debate over the dating of the *Letter*. Even Omanson acknowledges that *tefillin* were ‘unknown among the Samaritans; hence one view concludes that the custom must have developed after the Samaritan-Jewish schism (3rd cent. B.C.).’¹⁶

The purpose of the *Letter of Aristeas* was ‘to tell the story of the translation of the Septuagint (the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible).’¹⁷ Unfortunately, as with some ancient writings, it takes great liberty in terms of historical accuracy. Aristeas, the alleged author, unknown in any other ‘historical literature,’ was supposed to be a court official of King Ptolemy the 2nd Philadelphus of Egypt (285-246 B.C.).¹⁸ The story goes that because of the influence of Aristeas, the king sent to the High Priest in Jerusalem and received 72 scribes who, in 72 days, present the Torah (the five books of Moses) in Greek

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three, p. 864. Article: *Phylacteries*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 1041. Article: *Pseudepigrapha*.

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. four, p. 402. Article: *Septuagint*.

to the king.¹⁹ The rest of the Hebrew Bible would be translated into Greek fifty to one hundred years later. G. E. Ladd says that it ‘is obvious that this story is fictional.’²⁰ The *Letter* itself shows an author who lived long after the translation took place. Aristeas ‘reflects a knowledge and usage of the’ Septuagint, something one would hardly expect from a new Greek translation. He also places in the mouth of the King of Egypt the obvious unhistorical saying that ascribes ‘his throne to the Jewish God’ (verse 37).²¹ It seems that Aristeas’ theology was a little off, too. He writes in the *Letter* that the Jews ‘worship the same god as the Greeks, but under a different name. Zeus is really the same as’ Yahveh, the God of Israel (verse 16).²² Ladd goes on to say that the *Letter* is a ‘piece of Hellenistic Jewish apologetic writing designed to commend the Jewish religion and the law (sic) to the Gentile world.’²³ In other words, the *Letter* itself is a fictitious account of how the Septuagint came into being. It was designed to impress the Gentile world with God and His Law.

The most important understanding for us, though, is that Ladd says the ‘date of the book is an almost insoluble problem. Scholars date it variously from 200 B.C. to 63 B.C.’²⁴ I think the *Letter* was written around 60 B.C. or later. Because Aristeas says that *tefillin* are ‘old,’ they obviously must have been around at least a generation before him, but as we’ll see, in the days of Yeshua, they still weren’t a popular tradition among the common people. In other words, if everyone thought it was a commandment to wear *tefillin*, all or most would have been doing it. *Tefillin* could only have been around for perhaps two generations before Yeshua. For ‘Aristeas’ to say it was ‘old’ might just place him and the writing of the *Letter* in the generation before Messiah (about 30 B.C.).

The irony of all this is that Aristeas, writing of the glory of the Septuagint and the ‘ancient practice’ of *tefillin*, doesn’t seem to realize that the Septuagint marks the four passages out to be metaphorical. Ederheim writes about what can only be described as the beginning practice of *tefillin*, and what the Septuagint says about the passages, stating:

‘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’ (Septuagint), ‘takes the command entirely in a metaphorical sense.’²⁵

When *tefillin* were first invented it seems that only one *tefillah* was put on. Eventually it would grow to both, but the practice of only placing one on was also in the days of Yeshua, too. Actually, Philo (20 B.C. to after 40 A.D.) of Alexandria, Egypt, was alive in the days of Messiah Yeshua.²⁶ It seems that the practice hadn’t really changed much since the writing of Aristeas’ letter, to the time of Philo and Yeshua. That’s why the *Letter* couldn’t have been written before 60 B.C. The wearing of only one *tefillah* seems to provide a time period that couldn’t have been that great.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. three, p. 1041. Article: *Pseudepigrapha*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 52, note 13.

²⁶ Geoffrey Wigoder, Editor in Chief, *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, 7th Edition (New York-Oxford: Facts on File, 1990), p. 750. Phil combined the Bible with Plato.

As for the traditional Jewish interpretation of the four passages, that Orthodox Jews rely on today for *tefillin* (Ex. 13:9, 16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18), the Jewish translators knew nothing of this. They saw the passages in ‘a metaphorical sense.’ There were no *tefillin* when the Torah was translated into Greek. The value of what the Septuagint says is seen from *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia* which states:

‘As the oldest of all ancient versions’ (of the Hebrew Bible) ‘the Septuagint is important for the text and interpretation of the Bible.’²⁷

As late as 250 B.C. the Jewish people knew nothing of wearing a material object called *tefillin* in relation to fulfilling the four passages of Scripture. The Jewish people interpreted the texts as figurative and not literal. *Tefillin* didn’t exist in 250 B.C. As the Prophets and the Writings wouldn’t be translated into the Septuagint until 50 to 100 years later, I see that no revision of the Torah texts that are used to support *tefillin* are ever made. In other words, if by 200 B.C. to 150 B.C., when the Prophets and the Writings were added to the Septuagint, if the Jewish people had begun wearing *tefillin*, the texts for the four passages in the Torah, that the Rabbis claim to authorize *tefillin*, would have been altered in the Septuagint (from a ‘metaphorical sense’ to a literal one,) but they weren’t. *Tefillin* most likely appeared sometime after 60 B.C., a generation or two before Messiah Yeshua.

The Pharisees: The First To Wear Tefillin

Today, *tefillin* are only worn for morning prayer (*Shaharit*), usually around sun up, six days a week, by all religious Jews over *bar-Mitzva* age (13 years old). On the Sabbath and holy days no one wears *tefillin* as the Orthodox Jew considers the holiness of the Sabbath to override the need for *tefillin*.

Interestingly enough, the Pharisees were originally against wearing them for only prayer times.²⁸ They wore them all day long. Yet, there was considerable debate as to which *tefillah* should be worn; either the head or the arm, but not both. Philo, who lived during the time of Yeshua, reveals that when the Pharisees confronted Him, they most likely would have all been wearing the head *tefillah*, as it would be the most noticeable. We don’t generally tend to think this way, as to how the Pharisees looked, but this presents an accurate description of the scene. In wearing *tefillah* all day long, they would have always confronted Yeshua wearing their head piece. Edersheim tells us that it was worn all day (in daylight hours). He writes,

‘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.’²⁹

One of the characteristics of the confraternity was that they wanted to be noticed (Mt. 23:5-7, 14, 27-28; Mk. 12:38-40, etc.). They wanted to be seen as very holy. That’s why most of the Pharisees opted for the head *tefillah*. It seems that they were the first group of Jews to wear *tefillin*. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states:

‘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

²⁷ Ibid., p. 847. Article: *Septuagint*.

²⁸ The prayer times are: *mariv*, *shaharit* and *mincha*; evening, morning and afternoon prayers, respectively.

²⁹ Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 203.

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.’³⁰

Alfred Edersheim also affirms that only the Pharisees wore them:

‘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.’³¹

Edersheim, in typical British understatement says, ‘this practice was not quite universal.’ If the common people, the Elders of Israel, and the priests didn’t wear *tefillin*, there isn’t anyone left who could except the Pharisees. The wearing of *tefillin* was one of several distinct marks of a Pharisee.³² As such, no other Jew wore them.

Edersheim believed that *tefillin* didn’t come from the days of Moses or anywhere near him:

‘The very term used by the Rabbis for *phylacteries*—‘*tephillin*’ prayer-fillets—is of comparatively modern origin, in so far as it does not occur in the Hebrew Old Testament. The Samaritans did not acknowledge them as of Mosaic obligation, any more than do the Karaite Jews.’³³

With the Samaritans not wearing them, *tefillin* must have come upon the scene relatively late. If the Jews had been wearing them before 200 B.C., it’s likely that the Samaritans would have worn them too, in imitation of the Jews, but this is not the case. (Also, the Karaite Jews, a religious sect of Jews who don’t accept the Talmud as divine, interpret the passages as figurative. They began around 700 A.D.³⁴)

Another cite from the Talmud shows us that *tefillin*, in the time of Messiah Yeshua, were not deemed obligatory. In other words, *tefillin* weren’t solidly entrenched in tradition and it wasn’t seen as a commandment from God yet. Every Jew didn’t have to wear them. Sanhedrin 11:3 speaks of the Scribes being more authoritative than the Word of God. Of course, that is very perverse, but the point is that the cite uses *tefillin* as an example that need not be practiced, for it was ‘only’ (supposed to be) God’s word. As such, it shows us that *tefillin* could not have originated before 100 B.C. because not everyone was obligated to wear them. It states:

‘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 (literally: is free) [from punishment]; ‘but he who says, “There are five compartments” (instead of four), to add to the words of the Scribes, he is guilty.’³⁵

Here we see the Rabbis overstepping their authority. The scribe was held in greater esteem than God’s Word. This is truly reprehensible, but such was, and still is, the case today. Many Jews run to their rabbi

³⁰ Douglas, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3, p. 1228.

³¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody, MA U.S.A: Hendrickson Publishers, [no publishing date]), book III, pp. 624-625.

³² Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 195-218.

³³ Ibid., pp. 202-203.

³⁴ J. M. Sinclair, General Consultant, Diana Treffry, Editorial Director, *Collins English Dictionary*, Fourth Edition (Glasgow, Scotland: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 841. The Karaites favor ‘a literal interpretation of the Bible’. But what we’ve found is that they are just as anti-Messiah Yeshua as the Orthodox Jews.

³⁵ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book III, p. 625, note 1, section 4.

to see how he might interpret a passage, even if the passage is plain to understand, but goes against Jewish practice. Most Jews will stand on the side of their rabbi, not God's Word.

The quote about authority reveals that there was room for discussion on the subject of *tefillin*. In other words, it wasn't universally seen that one had to wear *tefillin*. This too reveals that the four passages of Scripture weren't seen as being literal or a commandment. *Tefillin* were not a universal tradition in the Jewish psyche in Yeshua's day, but the use of it would become 'universal before the end of the 2nd century AD.'³⁶

Tefillin as Magic Charms

Although Rambam's concepts and meanings strike biblical cords, many common people, as well as Rabbis, appended other ideas to the wearing of *tefillin*. Edersheim and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* speak of *tefillin* being regarded as 'magic charms' to ward off evil:

The 'Greek term '*phylacteries*' for these '*tephillin*,' is apt. '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.' We 'have it 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.'³⁸

'The word '*phylacteries*' occurs in the Bible only in Mt. 23:5. The Greek word means 'safeguard...means of protection...amulet' and as used in Mt. 23:5 is generally identified as the *tefillin* (lit. 'prayers'), small boxes containing Scripture verse'. 'Rabbinic literature indicates that the *tefillin* were equivalent to amulets or charms for some wearers, yet for many others they were a memorial of God's commandments'.³⁹

As with most any religious object, *tefillin* took on superstitious qualities of its own. Yet here we see in an official Jewish work (the Targum on Cant. 8:3), that Judaism endorsed such superstition and it's possible that *tefillin* began as a form of magic. There are some Jewish scholars that believe that *tefillin* actually 'originated as amulets.'⁴⁰

The concepts behind *tefillin* that Rambam gave are divine. The prayers offered tell us that the wearing of them are a commandment from God. The Septuagint told us that *tefillin* can't be as ancient as the Letter of Aristeas would have us to believe. And we've seen that it's creators, the Pharisees, wore them all day long, at least one *tefillah*, with many thinking of it as a magical charm to ward off evil. Was the Septuagint wrong for speaking of the passages in a metaphorical sense? More on this in a moment.

The reason for the institution of *tefillin* came from a literal rendering by the Pharisees of the four places in Scripture which speak of placing 'something' 'upon the hand and between the eyes'. Because of its im-

³⁶ Douglas, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3, p. 1228.

³⁷ Targums are Aramaic paraphrases of the Bible, either the Torah, the Prophets or the Writings.

³⁸ Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 205-206.

³⁹ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three, pp. 864-865. Article: *Phylacteries*.

⁴⁰ Wigoder, *The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 619.

portance, we've written out the Exodus passage as well as the two from Deuteronomy. This way one has 'a feel' for what Yahveh is saying to Israel and to us:

Exodus 13:1-16

Ex. 13:1-3: 'Then Yahveh spoke to Moses saying, 2. 'Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the Sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.' 3. Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the House of Slavery. For by a powerful Hand, Yahveh brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten.'

Ex. 13:4-5: On this day in the month of Aviv, you are about to go forth. 5. It shall be when Yahveh brings you to the Land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your Fathers to give you, a Land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month.

Ex. 13:6-8: For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a Feast to Yahveh. 7. Unleavened bread must be eaten throughout the seven days and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. 8. You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what Yahveh did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

Ex. 13:9: And it will be for you as a sign (*oat*) upon your hand, and as a reminder (*zikaron*) between your eyes, that the Torah of Yahveh may be in your mouth; for with a powerful Hand, Yahveh brought you out of Egypt!

Ex. 13:10-13: Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year. 11. Now when Yahveh brings you to the Land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your Fathers, and gives it to you, 12. you shall devote to Yahveh the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to Yahveh. 13. But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.

Ex. 13:14-15: And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' Then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful Hand, Yahveh brought us out of Egypt, from the House of Slavery. 15. It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that Yahveh killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to Yahveh the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

Ex. 13:16: 'And it will be as a sign (*oat*) upon your hand and as bands (*totafote*) between your eyes, for with a powerful Hand Yahveh brought us out of Egypt.'

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Deut. 6:4-7: 'Hear Oh Israel, Yahveh is our God! Yahveh is one! And you must love Yahveh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And these commandments that I am giving you today must be upon your heart. And you must impress them upon your sons and talk of them when you sit in your home and when you walk on the road, and when you lie down and when you get up.'

Deut. 6:8-9: 'And you must bind them as a sign (*oat*) on your hand and they shall be as

bands (*totafote*) between your eyes. And write them on the doorposts of our home and upon your gates.’

Deuteronomy 11:13-21

Deut. 11:13-17: ‘It shall come to pass, if you will obey My commandments which I am commanding you today, to love Yahveh your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil. He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them or the anger of Yahveh will be kindled against you and He will shut up the Heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which Yahveh is giving you.’

Deut. 11:18: ‘You must therefore place these words of Mine upon your heart and on your soul and you must bind them as a sign (*oat*) on your hand, and they shall be as bands (*totafote*) between your eyes.’

Deut. 11:19-21: ‘You must teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You must write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the Land which Yahveh swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the Heavens remain above the Earth.’

Yahveh ‘owned’ Israel by His mighty deliverance. As such, He was her King and entitled to direct the lives of His subjects whose devotion to Him meant that they would obey Him. It was the actual doing of the Feast and the redemption of the sons and animals (as well as the relating of it to the sons), that were to serve as a sign upon the hand and as a reminder and as bands between the eyes. This seems fairly evident. There is no request or commandment on Yahveh’s part to make any physical object like *tefillin*. J. Gamberoni affirms this in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*:

‘Literarily, the occasion or subject matter in Ex. 13:11-16 is specifically the law of the first-born; but the rhetorical situation (the child’s question in Ex. 13:14; cf. v. 8) involves the exodus and the’ Law ‘in their entirety (cf. v. 9, the only occurrence in the Pentateuch of’ the Torah of Yahveh), ‘as is stated explicitly in De. 6:8; 11:18; [6:7; 11:19)].⁴¹

Many church goers speak derogatorily about the Law of Moses as if by the mere mention of it, one could catch leprosy. But Moses didn’t create the commandments. He was ‘only’ a scribe for Yahveh. It’s God’s Law to His Bride, Israel. Here, in Ex. 13:9, it’s called the Law of Yahveh which can also be called the Instruction or Teaching of Yahveh.

Gamberoni tells us that the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the rite of redemption for the firstborn, as well as the ‘rhetorical situation’ of the passing on of the faith to the sons, were to serve as the sign, reminder and band between the eyes. There is no mention of a physical object like *tefillin*, to be worn.

In Deuteronomy six we see that all the commandments were to be upon the heart and also passed along to

⁴¹ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, Editors; John Willis, Translator, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 321. Article: *Totafote*.

the sons (vv. 6-7). The same holds true for Deuteronomy eleven. The words that Yahveh speaks (His commandments), are to be upon the heart and to be taught to one's sons (vv. 18-19). There is no making of any *tefillin*. It seems quite obvious that the walking out of the commandments are to serve as a sign upon the hand and as bands between the eyes. Note too, that unlike the writing of His words upon the doorposts (Dt. 6:9; 11:20), there is no literal mention of any such thing for what is to go upon the hand, etc. Also, if one were to take these passages from Deuteronomy literally, then one would or should place all Yahveh's commandments upon both the hand and between the eyes, not just a few verses from the Torah that seem to mention it.

The most questionable part of all the four passages is the word 'to tie' or 'to bind' them as a 'sign' or 'symbol' upon the hand. This is seen in both Deut. 6:8 and 11:18. (The passages in Ex. 13:9, 16 only have, 'and it will be as a sign upon your hand.') The word for bind is קָשַׁר (*kah'shar*) and means, 'to bind, tie.'⁴² One could possibly read a material rendering into this phrase.

It's offset though, by the additional phrase, 'and they must be as bands between your eyes' in 6:8 and 11:18, which speak of the commandments of Yahveh in a figurative way. For the phrase clearly implies 'as bands', referring to the commandments, not any bands or *tefillin*.

On another note, we see that if the words of God were to be taken literally, and something placed between the eyes, it would have to sit upon the bridge of the nose, not upon the forehead by the hairline, as *The Chumash* states (p. 975) and as the practice is.

In Deut. 6:9; 11:20, it speaks of an actual writing of God's words, not in a box to be placed on the head, but on our doorposts. This, in direct contrast to the preceding verse which speaks of the sign upon our hands and the bands between our eyes. There is nothing mentioned about writing anything on our hands or between our eyes or in a box. (*Hand* in Hebrew also carries the understanding of arm. That's how the box can be placed by the biceps and the straps wrapped around the arm and hand.)

What is spoken of in the passages as being written are God's Words upon the doorposts and the gates (Dt. 6:9; 11:12). Nothing like this is said about the sign or the bands. With tzit-tziot (tassels), God again commands something to be made, and it's very evident from the wording (Num. 15:37-41):

'Yahveh also spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Sons of Israel and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of Yahveh so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes after which you played the harlot, so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. I am Yahveh your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am Yahveh your God.'"

Here we see a plain set of instructions for making a religious object. The tassel is to be a sign, something that points to something else, and in this case, as was the case with the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages, it points to the remembering of Yahveh and His commandments. Here it further states that Israel is to do the commandments and not follow their own hearts. And the reason again is because Yahveh delivered them from Egyptian slavery to be His people. Nothing like this is seen for *tefillin*. There is no set of instructions on how to make them or any hint to do so. Obviously, the sign upon the hand and the bands between the eyes are meant as an admonition for us to always be reading and learning the Word of God

⁴² Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 669.

(bands between our eyes), and doing it (as a sign upon our hands). We are to continually be aware of Yahveh, what He has done for us (salvation from Egypt and Satan), and His commandments (to do them) as a way of walking in His will and expressing His reality to the world around us.

The Words

The four passages are almost identical in terms of the English words used to denote ‘sign’, ‘reminder’ and ‘bands’. The only difference being ‘reminder’ in Ex. 13:9 is replaced three times by ‘bands’ in the other passages:

Ex. 13:9	sign (<i>oat</i>)	reminder (<i>zikaron</i>)
Ex. 13:16	sign (<i>oat</i>)	bands (<i>totafote</i>)
Deut. 6:8	sign (<i>oat</i>)	bands (<i>totafote</i>)
Deut. 11:18	sign (<i>oat</i>)	bands (<i>totafote</i>)

This helps us to further understand that the Lord never meant it to be taken literally. The passages in Exodus clearly show us that the observance of the Passover and the rite of the first born are meant to serve as a ‘sign’ and ‘reminder’. There is nothing to substantiate *tefillin* here. The insertion of bands in Ex. 13:16 parallels reminder (13:9). This further reinforces that the redemption of the firstborn and the subsequent telling to the son are the sign upon the hand and the bands between the eyes. When we see the exact same words repeated in Deuteronomy, one is hard pressed to think that God wants us to make a material object such as *tefillin*. There are no biblical grounds for *tefillin*.

The Hebrew Word for Bands

The three Hebrew words used for sign, reminder and bands are *oat*, *zikaron* and *totafote*, respectively. The word *totafote*, which we have translated as bands, is always in the plural in Hebrew but sometimes, for no apparent linguistic or Scriptural reason, it’s translated into English in the singular. And sometimes within the same Bible we find different words used for *totafote* (bands). It only appears three times in the Hebrew Bible, in our three passages (Ex. 13:16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18). An example of *totafote* changing in English is found in the NASB. They use *phylacteries* for Ex. 13:16 but change it to frontals for Dt. 6:8; 11:18. Here are a number of English translations for *totafote*, some Christian and some Jewish:

1. Frontlets: KJV; NKJV; *Torah, Nivi'im and Kituvim: The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text; and Torah, Nivi'im and Kituvim: The Holy Scriptures: A Jewish Bible According to the Masoretic Text.*
2. Ornament: *The Chumash* (Ex. 13:16; Deut. 11:18)
3. Ornaments: *The Chumash* (Deut. 6:8)
4. *Phylacteries*: NASB (Ex. 13:16)
5. Frontals: NASB (Dt. 6:8; 11:18)
6. Symbol: NIV (Ex. 13:16)
7. Symbols: NIV (Deut. 6:8; 11:18)

8. Bands: *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament* (Deut. 6:8; 11:18)

The Chumash, the New International Version Bible, the New American Standard Bible and *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament* switch from plural to singular. With the NASB, we see it deviates from calling it *phylacteries* in Ex. 13:16 to frontals in Dt. 6:8; 11:18, while *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament* names it symbols in Ex. 13:16 but calls them bands in Dt. 6:8; 11:18. This only reflects the problem with trying to accurately translate *totafote* as no one is quite sure what it means.

For our purpose we've used bands to signify *totafote*. Benjamin Davidson tells us that the verb is not used and it seems to come from an Arabic word that means, 'to surround, bind round.'⁴³ *Brown, Driver and Briggs* say that תּוֹתָפוֹת *toe-tah-fote* (*totafote*), is literally, 'bands, frontlet-bands, between the eyes.'⁴⁴ Were there any such things in the ancient world? J. Gamberoni in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* tells us that there were objects placed upon the heads of pagans for religious purposes. Aside from the *uraenus*⁴⁵ and horns of the ancient Egyptians, there is,

'literary evidence for related ideas: 'Upon my belly, upon my back, I bear the word of the king my lord'; 'Behold, I have told you the best that is within me, let it stand as a firm rule before your eyes.' But there is no extrabiblical evidence for 'totafote: bands 'itself...A material or historical connection between' totafote 'and phylacteries (Mt. 23:5; cf. the Targum on 2 S. 1:10 and Middle Hebrew) is not to be assumed.'⁴⁶

Gamberoni tells us that in the ancient world there were things that were placed upon the forehead but shows us that 'bands' in Exodus and Deuteronomy have no connection to these things. It can only be a figurative expression. This is also evident from the concept of the 'word' on the back, and the 'rule before' (between?) 'the eyes'. He states that the custom of wearing *tefillin* did not come from the Scriptures.

In Deut. 6:8 and 11:18, we read that the actual keeping of the Law was to act as a sign upon the hand and as bands between the eyes. This would go along with the figurative use of the phrases as seen above. No where does God speak of writing anything upon parchment, as is done with *tefillin*.

Francis Brown affirms Gamberoni's understanding that *totafote* are not to be taken literally. He writes that the concept for *totafote* (bands) is figurative and not physical:

figurative 'of (the) dedication of (the) firstborn', Ex. 13:16; 'of (the) commandments' of Yahveh, Dt. 11:18; 6:8. 'This injunction, orig. fig. for perpetual remembrance'. 'Now', 'taken literally by later Jews, and hence the custom of wearing *phylacteries*'.⁴⁷

Gamberoni goes on to state that only a 'later age found in the' *totafote* 'the *tefillin* or *phylacteries* to be worn on the forehead'.⁴⁸ For the bands to literally be between the eyes, as the Scripture says, it would mean that whatever it was to be worn, would be worn literally between the eyes at the bridge of the nose.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 283.

⁴⁴ Dr. Francis Brown, Dr. S. R. Driver, Dr. Charles A. Briggs, based on the lexicon of Professor Wilhelm Gesenius; Edward Robinson, Translator and E. Rodiger, Editor, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1978), p. 377.

⁴⁵ Sinclair, *Collins English Dictionary*, p. 1675, *uraeus*: 'the sacred serpent represented on the headdresses of ancient Egyptian kings and gods.'

⁴⁶ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, p. 320. Article: *Totafote*. (See L.I. Rabinowitz, 'Tefillin,' *EncJud*, XV, 898-904', for why there is no connection between *totafote* and *phylacteries*.)

⁴⁷ Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, pp. 377-378.

⁴⁸ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, p. 321. Article: *Totafote*.

As this would make sight almost impossible, if any commandments were written on anything, I think that what Yahveh is saying is that His commandments should always be what we set our eyes on. In other words. If something is literally in front of you, that's what you see. It's God's way of saying that we should always be thinking about Him and His commandments. The other part, that it should be upon our hand, is a metaphor telling us that we should always be doing His commandments.

C.F. Keil says that the word *totafote* was 'interpreted' literally by the Rabbis (Talmudists), but that it's not correct. The word is literally 'bands' but here it signifies,

'headbands, as is evident from the Chaldee אַרְמְלֵט armlet' *totefa* '(2 Sam. 1:10), אַתְּפֵלֶטֶת tiara' *totafa* '(Esth. 8:15; Ezek. 24:17, 23). This command was interpreted literally by the Talmudists, and the use of *tephillim*, *phylacteries* (Matt. 23:5), founded upon it; the Caraites' (Karaites), 'on the contrary, interpreted it figuratively, as a proverbial expression for constant reflection upon, and fulfillment of, the divine commands. The correctness of the latter is obvious from the words themselves, which do not say that the commands are to be written upon scrolls, but only that they are to be to the Israelites for signs upon the hand, and for bands between the eyes, i.e., they are to be kept in view like memorials upon the forehead and the hand.'⁴⁹

'The expression in Deut. 6:8...does not point at all to the symbolizing of the divine commands by an outward sign to be worn upon the hand, or to bands with passages of the' Law 'inscribed upon them, to be worn on the forehead between the eyes'. 'The line of thought referred to merely expresses the idea, that the Israelites were not only to retain the commands of God in their hearts, and to confess them with the mouth, but to fulfill them with the hand, or in act and deed, and thus to show themselves in their whole beings as the guardians and observers of the' Law. 'This figurative interpretation is confirmed and placed beyond doubt by such parallel passages as Prov. 3:3, 'Bind them (the commandments) about thy neck; write them upon the tables of thine heart' (cf. vv. 21, 22; 4:21; 6:21, 22; 7:3).'⁵⁰

Alfred Edersheim confirms what Keil has told us. He says that the observance of *tefillin* are not biblical, but that they,

'arose from a literal interpretation of Exod. 13:9, to which even the later injunction in Deut. 6:8 gives no countenance. This appears even from its repetition in Deut. 11:18, where the spiritual meaning and purport of the direction is immediately indicated, and from a comparison with kindred expressions, which evidently could not be taken literally—such as Prov. 3:3; 6:21; 7:3; Cant. 8:6; Isa. 49:16.'⁵¹

The negation of *tefillin* is also seen from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* which says:

'If 'these words' (Dt. 11:18) refer to all of Dt. 5-11, then a literal fulfillment is not intended', as the injunctions in Ex. 13 are primarily matters of ritual practice and are meant to be obeyed literally.'⁵²

⁴⁹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament*, vol. 1: *The Pentateuch* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001; originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1866-91), p. 343.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 343-344.

⁵¹ Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 202.

⁵² Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three, p. 864. Article: *Phylacteries*.

In Proverbs 3:3; 4:21; 6:21 and 7:3, the writer ‘expands on a pregnant phrase (Ex. 13:16)’, but he ‘does nothing with’ *totafote* (bands) to show us that it might be a physical object,

‘presumably because it suggested nothing specific and there was no alternative in common usage for this barely comprehensible word, so that he did not dare to express himself in clear, concrete terms (cf. the more graphic treatment of the *mezuzoth* in Deut. 6:9; 11:20’). ‘Instead, he made do with vague’ ‘references, since the word’⁵³ *totafote* had no material existence around 900 B.C. when Proverbs was written.

The *totafote* (between the eyes),

‘had a very personal meaning, reminding the individual of deliverance and the’ Law, ‘just as stelaes, inscribed (Dt. 27:1-8; Josh. 8:30-35) or uninscribed (Ex. 24:3-8; Josh. 4:4-7; 24:26f.), served as reminders for the nation.’⁵⁴

Bands between the eyes is a Hebraic way of saying that Yahveh and His commandments must be continually before us, in our soul and in our daily life. Bands cannot be the basis for a physical object such as *tefillin*.

The Hebrew Word for Reminder

The Hebrew for ‘reminder’ זִכָּרוֹן *zikaron* (Ex. 13:9), means, ‘remembrance, memory’ or ‘memorial.’⁵⁵ The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* tells us that the word means,

‘Memorial, reminder, token, record. The *zikkaron* is an object or act which brings something else to mind or which represents something else. As such, it may be a ‘memorial,’ a ‘reminder,’ a historical ‘record,’ or a physical ‘token’ which calls to mind a deity. The Passover feast was a memorial (Ex. 12:14) of a great historical event. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was like a reminder between the eyes (Ex. 13:9).’⁵⁶

The *Wordbook* speaks of our cite and tells us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be the ‘reminder’ for Israel that they had been delivered from Egyptian slavery by Yahveh. Nowhere do we see this entailing the making of a physical object to place upon one’s body or head. The vehicle that will ‘remind’ us is the Feast.

This is extremely important as *zikaron* (reminder) is only mentioned once in the four passages (Ex. 13:9), while *totafote* (bands), is substituted for *zikaron* (reminder), in the other three passages (Ex. 13:16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18). As such, it helps to clarify what God had in mind when He spoke these words to Moses. In the first passage (Ex. 13:9), sign is followed by reminder. In the next three passages, sign is followed by bands, as we’ve already seen schematically laid out in a section before this titled, *The Words*. So, ‘reminder’ and ‘bands’ parallel one another. We know that reminder doesn’t mean a physical object to be placed around the arm or head and therefore, bands (*totafote*) shouldn’t either.

⁵³ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, p. 321. Article: *Totafote*.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 238.

⁵⁶ R. L. Harris, Editor; Gleason Archer, Jr. and Bruce Waltke, Associate Editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 242.

The Hebrew Word for Sign

The Hebrew word for ‘sign’ is *ot* אֹת and means, ‘mark, memorial, warning’, ‘sign’ or ‘miracle.’⁵⁷ It occurs in all four passages (Ex. 13:9, 16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18). *The Wordbook* says that it means a ‘sign, mark, token, ensign, standard, miracle, miraculous sign, proof, warning.’⁵⁸ It tells us that the word ‘sign’ ‘signifies the unusual event itself or in some way points to that unusual event.’⁵⁹ Robert Cate, in *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary* tells us that a sign is something that,

‘points to a meaning beyond itself and it has no value if its meaning is not understood. This is true whether we are speaking of a biblical sign or a street sign.’⁶⁰

The doing of Yahveh’s commandments point to the fact that He is our God, has sent Messiah Yeshua to free us from sin, sickness and death, and promised us Eternal Life in the New Jerusalem. Of course, theologically, *tefillin* could also be seen as a ‘sign’, like tassels, the celebration of the Sabbath, etc., but *tefillin* aren’t biblical.

F.J. Helfmeyer, in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* tells us that the word sign refers to the eating of the matza (unleavened bread) in Ex. 13:9, and to the consecration of the firstborn in Ex. 13:16, and God’s requirement of obedience. He says that these observances were meant to show that Israel belonged to Yahweh (sic).⁶¹ He goes on to state,

‘Just as the consecration of the firstborn in Ex. 13:16 is intended to serve as a sign and a mark (totaphoth, ‘frontlets’) to remind Israel of the exodus (sic) from Egypt, so also the affirmation of Yahweh’s uniqueness together with the demand that the people love God (Dt. 6:4f.) and the admonition to obey him (11:13, 22) are intended to serve as a sign and a mark (6:8; 11:18). These words, in 6:4-9 ‘a chain of very forceful imperatives,’⁶² in 11:18-21 ‘an admonition’⁶³ remind Israel of the uniqueness of Yahweh and of the people’s obligation to love God and to obey him. The summons to this sign has its setting in the proclamation of the law’ (sic) ‘since the summons ‘Hear Oh Israel!’ opened the cultic assembly in ancient times.’⁶⁴

This understanding, that the words were not to be seen as demanding of Israel that they make *tefillin*, but on the contrary, served as reminders to them to observe the ways of Yahweh, is confirmed by F. Stolz in the *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. He states that,

‘According to Exod. 13:9, 16, the Passover *haggadah*⁶⁵ is *ot*’ (*ot*; sign), ‘and *zikkaron*’

⁵⁷ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Robert L. Cate, *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary*, vol. 2: Exodus (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1979), p. 35.

⁶¹ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 170, 180. Article: *Oat* (sign).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 180. Von Rad, Deuteronomy, 63.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Von Rad, 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Von Rad, 63.

⁶⁵ *Haggadah* is Hebrew for ‘retelling’ and means the retelling of the Passover story, how God used Moses to de-

(reminder) ‘or *totapot*’ (*totafote*; bands), ‘for Israel; according to Deut. 6:8, it is the confession of faith’ (the Shema, which is Hebrew for ‘Hear’ in ‘Hear Oh Israel!’), that begins Dt. 6:4); ‘according to Dt. 11:18, it is the entire’ Deuteronomic ‘proclamation. The *ot* here too then, actualizes past salvation history.’⁶⁶

Keil, too, says that the words for sign on your hand, reminder and bands between the eyes, of Exodus 13 are used figuratively for the sanctification of the first born in direct connection with the Passover.⁶⁷ He states,

‘By this the deliverance of the Israelitish first-born was effected, and the object of this deliverance was their sanctification. Because Jehovah (sic) had delivered the first-born of Israel, they were to be sanctified to Him. If the Israelites completed their communion with Jehovah in the Passover, and celebrated the commencement of their divine standing in the feast of unleavened bread (sic), they gave uninterrupted effect to their divine sonship in the sanctification of the first-born. For this reason, probably, the sanctification of the first-born was commanded by Jehovah at Succoth’ (Ex. 12:37), ‘immediately after the exodus, and contemporaneously with the institution of the seven days’ feast of *Mazzo*th’ (Unleavened Bread).’⁶⁸

‘For the parallel passages in Deut. 6:8 and 11:18, ‘bind them for a sign upon your hand,’ are proofs that the allusion is neither to branding nor writing on the hand.’ ‘The words are’ ‘used figuratively, as a proverbial expression employed to give emphasis to the injunction to bear this precept continually in mind, to be always mindful to observe it. This is still more apparent from the reason assigned, ‘that the’, Law of Yahveh, ‘may be in your mouth.’ ‘For it was not by mnemonic slips upon the hand and forehead that a law was so placed in the mouth as to be talked of continually (Deut. 6:7; 11:19), but by the reception of it into the heart and its continue fulfillment.’⁶⁹

‘As the origin and meaning of the festival’ (Ex. 13; Matza) ‘were to be talked of in connection with the eating of unleavened bread, so conversation about the’, Law of Yahveh ‘was introduced at the same time, and the obligation to keep it renewed and brought vividly to mind.’⁷⁰

The ceremony for *Matza* (Unleavened Bread), and the redemption of one’s son (along with the transmission of the faith), are the major motifs found in Ex. 13. The passages in Deuteronomy speak of continually learning Yahveh’s commandments in order to do them and in order to continually be grateful for what He has done. God doesn’t seem concerned with placing some physical object on our heads and hands but that we know and keep His commandments.

liver the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, at the yearly Passover meal.

⁶⁶ Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, Authors, Mark E. Biddle, Translator, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p. 70. Article: *Oat* (sign).

⁶⁷ Keil, *The Pentateuch*, p. 340.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 341-342.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The Hebrew Lamid

Always preceding the three words of ‘remembrance’ *zikaron* זִכָּרוֹן or ‘sign’ *ot* אוֹת or ‘bands’ *totafote* לְטוֹטֶפֶת is the Hebrew letter ל *lamid*. It acts as a preposition and means ‘like’ or ‘as if’⁷¹ or ‘for.’ This is yet another point that the directions that Yahveh gave are not to be taken literally to make a physical object such as *tefillin*. The commandments and the walking out of them are meant to be *as* bands or *like* (something) between the eyes and *for* signs or *like* signs upon the hand. This is another indication that the words are figurative and not meant to be taken literally.

The Septuagint and Tefillin

We’ve already heard that the Septuagint translates the passages in a metaphorical way. This is seen in how it translates *totafote* (bands). The Septuagint translates ‘sign’ and ‘reminder’ as such but for *totafote* (bands), it uses the Greek word *ασαλευστον* *asalutone*, and translates it, ‘And it shall be for or as a sign upon your hand and immovable before your eyes’ (Ex. 13:16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18).⁷² This clearly shows us that the Jewish scribes who translated the Septuagint saw the passages in a metaphorical way.

Wesley Perschbacher states that *asalutone* means ‘unshaken, immovable’⁷³ and gives Acts 27:41 as an example where it’s used:

‘But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained *immovable*, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves’ (Acts 27:41).

The idea behind the word in Ex. 13:16, Dt. 6:8; 11:18, is that whatever it is, it will not be taken or moved from before one’s eyes. This is affirmed by Walter Bauer who says that the Septuagint uses *asalutone* in a ‘special sense’, as, ‘immovable, unshaken’.⁷⁴ He goes on to state that literally, it’s, ‘part of a ship that has run aground’⁷⁵ and obviously is not moving or going anywhere. Hebrews 12:28 is also given as an example of the Greek word where it’s written of, ‘a kingdom that cannot be shaken’.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 399, section 11.

⁷² Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, sixth printing, February, 1997, originally published in London, 1851), pp. 87, 239, 247. In the last Scripture cite (Dt. 11:18), the English translation is slightly different even though the Greek word, *asalutone*, is the same for all three cites. Brenton chose to change ‘immovable’ (Ex. 13:16; Dt. 6:8), to ‘fixed’ for Dt. 11:18. In other words, Brenton could have translated it in Dt. 11:18 as immovable but chose a similar word to it, fixed. Either word could have been used for all three cites. Either word shows us that the Hebrew *totafote* is being seen as metaphorical and not as a physical object.

⁷³ Wesley J. Perschbacher, Editor, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1990), p. 55.

⁷⁴ Walter Bauer, augmented by William F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich and Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 114.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Timothy Friberg completes our perusal of the lexicons by telling us that the word can also mean, ‘fixed’, as well as ‘immovable’.⁷⁷

The Jewish scribes chose to use the Greek word *asalutone* to translate the Hebrew *totafote*. In doing so they have shown us that by 250 B.C. there were no *tefillin*. There were no physical objects that were worn by Jews in supposed conformity with the three passages of Scripture that speak of *totafote* (bands), and so, *tefillin* cannot be traced back to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

‘Bands’ gave way to something that could not be removed from ‘between one’s eyes’ and certainly couldn’t have meant something that was put on and taken off during the day. The Jewish scribes saw the Law of Yahveh and His commandments as that which was to be ever before our eyes.

Yeshua and Tefillin

Nowhere does any Pharisee call Yeshua a Pharisee in their interactions and confrontations. And it would have been very obvious that He would have been a Pharisee, if He were wearing *tefillin*, since we’ve seen that this was a distinctive mark of a Pharisee. For at that time, only they wore them. This excludes Yeshua from their sect, as is now becoming popular to say, that ‘Yeshua was a Pharisee,’ because some of His teachings seem to parallel Pharisaic teaching. Unfortunately, this understanding would also confuse the police with the Mafia because both have guns. Pharisaic teachings were qualitatively very different than what Yeshua taught. Alfred Edersheim states:

‘We can recommend nothing better, to those who have heard that the teaching of the New Testament has been derived from that of the Rabbis, than to collate the revolting details on this subject, as well as those connected with prayer, in *Ber.* 23a to 25b; or else to study their interpretations of dreams, or such details as *Ber.* 62a, b. To those who have been told that Hillel might be compared with Jesus, we recommend the perusal of what at times engaged that great Jewish Rabbi’s teaching; for example, in *Ber.* 23a.’⁷⁸

The Pharisees wore them, but Yeshua never did. For Yeshua to have worn them would have made Him a Pharisee. Everyone would have seen Him as such, and none would have questioned where He got His authority or teachings from (Mt. 7:29; 13:54; 21:23). They would have known! From the Pharisees! Yeshua was not a Pharisee, nor did He ever wear *tefillin*.

There’s no mention of His followers ever coming upon Him and Him putting them on or taking them off. There’s no Scripture that He wore either the head piece or the arm piece. There’s also no mention of Yeshua praying, and Scripture speaks a number of times about Him doing so (Mt. 14:23; Mk. 4:26; Luke 6:12; 9:28, etc.), where *tefillin* are seen or written about. And when the Roman soldiers gamble for His clothes (John 19:23), *tefillin* are not listed as one of the things they took, even though He had just finished praying when the Jewish officials came for Him (Mt. 26:36ff, Mk. 14:32ff, Lk. 22:39ff). (They are called *tefillin*; prayer objects, so they should at the very least, be used in prayer. If Yeshua had just been praying, He should have had them on. They were worn all day long by the Pharisees to give the impression that they were pious men, always praying.) *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* doesn’t think Yeshua wore *tefillin* either:

⁷⁷ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 71.

⁷⁸ Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 204, note 4.

‘We have no reason for thinking that they were worn either by Christ or his disciples.’⁷⁹

Alfred Edersheim was of the persuasion that Messiah never wore them either:

‘For our part, we refuse to believe that Jesus, like the Pharisees, appeared wearing *phylacteries* every day and all day long, or at least a great part of the day. For such was the ancient custom, and not merely, as the modern practice, to wear them only at’ (morning) ‘prayer.’⁸⁰

It’s also interesting to note that *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* speaks of recently discovered first century *tefillin* from Qumran and Murabba that shed light on the phrase, ‘they make their *phylacteries* broad’ (Mt. 23:5):

‘Previously this phrase had generally been understood to mean that the straps were made broad...But these *tefillin* from the 1st cent. A.D. show that the head *tefillin* were not cubical, but rectangular, with the breadth across the forehead varying much more than the length.’⁸¹

It seems that the boxes on their heads were much larger than what is worn today. With the leather straps and the boxes protruding from arm and head, Edersheim writes that the ‘wearer of them could not be mistaken.’⁸² This should not surprise us as Yeshua distinctly says that the Pharisees wore *tefillin* to be noticed:

‘But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men. For they broaden their *phylacteries* and lengthen the tassels of their garments’ (Mt. 23:5).

Believers in Messiah have always understood the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages to be figurative and not literal. Ellison writes that there is no possibility that God intended for the passages to be taken literally:

‘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.’⁸³

The actual dating of *tefillin* can be seen from the fact that in the generation before Yeshua, that of Hillel and Shammai, there wasn’t any established tradition as to when they were to be worn and how many were to be worn. The Hasidim being spoken of could very well have lived a generation before Hillel. More than this and the wearing of *tefillin* would most likely have been already deeply entrenched among the people.

⁷⁹ Douglas, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3, p. 1228. Article: *Phylacteries*.

⁸⁰ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book III, pp. 624-625.

⁸¹ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. three, p. 864. Article: *Phylacteries*.

⁸² Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 202.

⁸³ Douglas, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3, p. 1228. Article: *Phylacteries*.

Does God Wear Tefillin?

Tefillin are an invention of the Pharisees and picked up later by the Rabbis. If God had intended for the commandment to be taken literally, then all Israel would have been wearing *tefillin* 1,300 years before the Hasidim came up with the idea. As with all rabbinic tradition, the Rabbis insist that *tefillin* goes directly back to Moses who got it from God on Mt. Sinai. As an added perversion they believe that God Himself dons *tefillin* every morning to pray. Alfred Edersheim writes:

‘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). The fact is deduced from Isa. 62:8, where the ‘right hand’ by which Jehovah swears is supposed to refer to the law, according to the last clause of Deut. 33:1; while the expression ‘strength of His arm’ was applied to the ‘tephillin,’ since the term ‘strength’ appeared in Ps. 29:11 in connection with God’s people, and was in turn explained by a reference to Deut. 28:10. For ‘the strength’ of God’s people (Ps. 29:11) is that which would cause all to ‘be afraid’ of Israel (Deut. 28:10); and this latter would be due to their seeing that Israel was ‘called by the name of Jehovah,’ ‘this ocular demonstration being afforded through the tephillin.’ (Because the Name of Yahveh is written about 23 times in the boxes.) ‘Such was the evidence which traditionalism offered for such a monstrous proposition.’⁸⁴

‘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.’⁸⁵

The Rabbis would have us to believe that *tefillin* came from Mt. Sinai. They even go as far to say that God Himself wears them. This is their way of investing the tradition with divine authority. Now, tradition is not evil, in and of itself. Tradition can enhance the observance of a commandment. But we must draw the line when tradition, overrides the Word of God, as Judaism endorses, making a mockery of Yahveh and His Word.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 204.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book III, p. 625, note 1, section 4. *Sanhedrin* 11:3: ‘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 (literally: is free); but he who says, ‘There are five compartments’ (instead of four), to add to the words of the Scribes, he is guilty.’ And with such witchcraft they bind the Jewish people in a slavery that is worse than Egyptian. The people who follow them are spell-bound by their understanding of ‘Scripture’ and are commanded not to listen to another. This is nothing less than witchcraft, masquerading as authority.

The Satanic Mark

Having something between the eyes is a mark of ownership of a slave, as is having something upon the hand. Yahveh's 'ownership brand' was to be upon the soul of the Hebrew. The counterfeit is literal and satanic. In the ancient world, there was the 'heathen custom of branding soldiers and slaves with marks upon the hand and forehead.'⁸⁷ And in Revelation 13:16-17 we read:

'And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.'

In Revelation 14:9 it states: 'Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,' and in Rev. 20:4 the Apostle John writes:

'Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Yeshua and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years.'

We are not saying that *tefillin* are the mark of the beast, even though there is a parallel here. But *tefillin* are a literal perversion of God's Word. Is *tefillin* commanded by Yahveh? No. Is it sin to wear *tefillin*? Yes. One of sin's definition's is 'to miss a mark.'⁸⁸ If God never intended for us to wear *tefillin* than those who do are certainly missing the mark as to proper interpretation and walking out of God's Word (i.e. His Will).

Another definition of sin is 'to deviate from the standard' (which is the Law), or 'to twist the standard'.⁸⁹ The Rabbis certainly fall into both categories concerning *tefillin*. They not only misinterpret the Law, they charge those that don't follow them with sin, too.

It's not a sin to put a clump of metal on one's shoulder (Army rank); or on the head (a helmet). But the Orthodox Rabbis believe it is sin not to wear *tefillin* and pray that way. Herein they are guilty of not only perverting God's Word, but of 'adding to' God's Word. Both are sin: Yahveh says,

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

We must do what is right in God's eyes.⁹⁰

'And He said, 'If you will give earnest heed to the voice of Yahveh your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, Yahveh, am your healer' (Ex. 15:26; see also, Dt. 4:2; 6:18; 12:8, 25, 28; 13:18, etc.).

⁸⁷ Keil, *The Pentateuch*, p. 342.

⁸⁸ Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 277.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-278.

⁹⁰ Deut. 4:2; 6:18; 12:8, 25, 28; 13:18. For the opposite of this, see Judges 17:6; 21:25.

Conclusion

Even though Orthodox Judaism is adamant that the wearing of *tefillin* are a commandment from God, we have found nothing to Scripturally substantiate their claim. The Rabbis tell us that it goes back not only to Moses but to God Himself who wears them every morning. This reveals not only the absurdity of the practice but also the Rabbis' lust for authority over the people and their perverse ability to link everything they think of to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

In Ex. 13:9, it's plain to see that the 'it' that will be as a sign and remembrance is the actual doing of the commandment to set apart one's son to Yahveh, the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Matzot*), and the telling of these things to the son. This way the Law of Yahveh can be in one's mouth. Certainly no physical object is implied here.

In the second instance, that of Ex. 13:16, the 'it' that will be as a sign and as bands between the eyes is the sacrificing of one's first born animals to Yahveh, the redemption of the donkey, and the son, and the telling of this to the son. Also, the celebration of the Feast of Matzot, pointing to the great deliverance by Yahveh, and His ownership of all firstborn things; man and animal alike, because of the deliverance. Again, no physical object can be meant here. The remembrance, signs or bands specifically point to what Yahveh has done in setting Israel free from Egypt and the passing along of the event at the Feast of Matzot (Passover-Unleavened Bread), the time of the year when the Hebrews were set free and commanded to keep it (Lev. 23:4-8). It's very clear that what God is telling us to do refers to the keeping of the ceremonies, not the actual, literal binding of anything to the hand or between the eyes.

In Deut. 6:9, the Law of Yahveh has been the topic of the preceding verse and the context of the passage. One is required to place the commandments upon one's heart and soul. This cannot be construed to mean the making of *tefillin*, either.

And finally, in Deut. 11:18, the same concept that we saw in Deut. 6:4-9 is seen. It is the knowing and the doing of His commandments that are to serve 'as signs and bands between the eyes,' not the making of anything material to place upon one's body.

Making the passages of Scripture mean a literal wearing of *tefillin* invites a comparison of the 'mark' of ownership that Satan has used on slaves and soldiers and what will eventually happen with his 'mark.' As Satan is the great counterfeiter and perverter of God's Word, we see a parallel between Satan and the Rabbis' perversion of the passages.

The practical ramification of this is seen in how absurd a Jewish man looks when he is attired in *tefillin*. This graphically shows us that the Pharisees missed God's idea about *totafote*. *Tefillin* are a gross perversion of God's Word. When one 'stands back' and looks at a Jewish man wearing a box on his head and a box on his arm, one can only sigh in sadness. 'How the mighty have fallen!' (2nd Sam. 1:19). Those who should be showing us the Way, are lost in the darkness themselves. How Satan loves to pervert the Sons of Israel through pride and ignorance of God's Word.

Tefillin are certainly not from Yahveh, the God of Israel. As we walk in His commandments, they are to be between our eyes and upon our hand. This is the mark of His ownership upon us, upon our soul, that we do His commandments, not that we just say, 'I believe in Yeshua.' The Torah is to be continually displayed by us, causing Yahveh and Yeshua 'to be seen.' This is the meaning of the passages which brings glory to Yahveh and Yeshua.

Here are twelve reasons why I believe that the four passages the Rabbis use to support *tefillin* are to be in-

terpreted as figurative and not physically:

1. *Tefillin* didn't exist in the days when Proverbs 3, 6 and 7 were written (about 920 B.C.). The writer used bands as figurative. There were no *tefillin* then, so obviously, Moses and King David never heard of them, let alone wore them.
2. All the Jewish sages that translated the Hebrew Bible into the Greek Septuagint saw the four passages in a metaphorical sense. The translation took place more than 200 years before Yeshua was born and so is very insightful as to how the Jewish people understood *tefillin* in 250 B.C. The passages in the Torah that the Pharisees would use to create *tefillin* were seen to be only figurative, not literal, with *totafote* (bands), being substituted for a word that could only be metaphorical; *asalu-tone* (immovable, fixed).
3. The four passages themselves, when read, indicate that the words (sign and bands), should be taken figuratively. The Exodus passages were very plain to see regarding the ceremony of Unleavened Bread and the redemption of the firstborn son (and the passing of the faith on to our sons). And the Deuteronomy passages revealed God's desire that His commandments be within our soul and observed by us and passed on to our children. There is no Scriptural justification for *tefillin*. The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* says it succinctly: 'The scanty evidence, itself formulaic', 'does not support the existence, form or function of a material object'.⁹¹
4. The juxtaposition of the three Hebrew words for sign, reminder and bands, with reminder and bands paralleling each other shows us that bands cannot be taken literally. This is self-evident. All are seen as figurative.
5. Unlike the tassels (Num. 15:37-41), or the making of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25-31), there are no instructions on how to make *tefillin*. This is odd, seeing how all the clothes of Aaron the High Priest are expressly designed by God (Ex. 28). In the Deuteronomy passages we actually see Him speaking of the writing the commandments upon our doorposts and gates (Dt. 6:9; 11:20). But it's silent as to the writing of anything in boxes for our heads or arms. Nowhere does God say that it should be colored black, or be made of leather or have boxes, etc.
6. The word *tefillin* is not seen in the passages. It is a word the Rabbis made up for their invention.
7. The Hebrew letter *lamid* is used in front of all three Hebrew words This makes the words to be 'as a sign...as a reminder' and 'as bands between the eyes', something that can only be taken to be a figurative use of the language.
8. The Letter of Aristeas showed us that *tefillin* were a rather late invention, coming perhaps only two generations before Messiah Yeshua.
9. Pharisaic use of *tefillin* in the days of Aristeas and Philo were not homogenous. One spoke of only wearing the arm box while the other, only the head box. The Talmud noted that it wasn't sin to say, 'There are no *tefillin*.' This shows us it wasn't seen as a commandment from God at that time. Why should it be viewed as such now?
10. Yeshua didn't wear them and neither did any of His students (disciples). This should be another compelling reason why we shouldn't either.
11. Believers have always interpreted the passages in a figurative sense. There's no reason to believe otherwise.

⁹¹ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, p. 320. Article: *Totafote*.

12. The actual picture of a Jewish man wearing a box on his head and on his arm seems strange. Is it a coincidence that it parallels Satan's marks upon his subjects?

The biblical idea behind *tefillin* is what we should emulate, not *tefillin* themselves. For someone who is Christian but doesn't believe in Torah, Christopher Wright pens a beautiful understanding of the Torah concerning Deut. 6:6-9. He says that the Law was not just for the Kings of Israel,

'It was for everyone. It was to be in the heart as well as the head, in the home as well as the courts. These verses powerfully dispel two misconceptions. The first misconception is that OT law was a matter of legalistic conformity to an external code. On the contrary, Deuteronomy 6:6 is part of a strong stream of OT teaching that calls for the internalizing of the law (sic) in the heart, i.e., at the center of a person's mind, will and character (cf. 4:9; 10:16; 11:18; Jer. 4:4; 31:33; Ezek. 18:31; 36:26f.). The second misconception is that religious traditions and observances are the preserve of a professional elite with esoteric knowledge, whether clerical or academic. The priests of Israel were, indeed, to teach the law, but not as something only they within the confines of the professional guild could understand. On the contrary, the law was to be the topic of ordinary conversation in ordinary homes in ordinary life, from breakfast to bedtime (v. 7; cf. the comments on the law being accessible and 'near' in 30:11-14). Such would be its popular scope and relevance.'⁹²

With his dispelling of the first misconception, that the Law of Moses was only an external and mechanical code for Israel, we see the reality of the reason for the New Covenant. Yahveh says in Jeremiah 31:31-34 that He will give us the New Covenant so that our sins could be forgiven, and that the Law of Moses would be in our hearts to walk in it. And in Ezk. 36:26-27, Yahveh speaks giving us a new heart and His Spirit so that we'll be able to keep His Law. Perhaps Christopher is not far from walking in Torah.

The second misconception speaks more to the Jewish community, if only they had ears to hear. I remember speaking to a Jewish man in Jerusalem, on ben Yehuda street (the open air mall in the center of the city), about the dietary laws and how the Rabbis have added to it by saying that we can't eat meat and dairy together. I related the Scripture that the Rabbis use to base this on (Ex. 23:19, which is repeated verbatim in Ex. 34:26 and Dt. 14:21). I explained that it had to do with an ancient pagan rite of fertilizing their fields for the next year's harvest. It has nothing to do with the separation of meat and dairy. God was not wanting Israel to believe in magical rites for their harvest. I also told him that Father Abraham fed God and two angels meat and dairy together so why couldn't we eat it if we wanted to?

'He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate' Gen. 18:8)

He was an intelligent American Jew, a man about 50 years old who had recently made aliyah to Israel. What he told me shocked me. He said that he'd have to go to his rabbi and see what he said. He told me that he wasn't smart enough to understand the Torah. Only his rabbi could unlock the mystery of the proper interpretation. But this goes against the word of God:

'For this commandment' (to obey Him and all His commandments), 'which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in Heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up to Heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for

⁹² Christopher Wright, *New International Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), p. 100.

us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' 'But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity' (Dt. 30:11-15).

'I call Heaven and Earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life!, in order that you may live, you and your descendants' (Dt. 30:19).

It's not that we don't need others at times, to help us in understanding God's Word and how to apply it to our lives, but what I'm coming against is total dependence on the Oral Law and the Rabbi as divine and overriding the Word of God.

Wright goes on to relate that the commandments of Yahveh should pervade our entire world. Speaking of Dt. 6:4-9, he states that the,

'rapid sequence of verbs helps us feel the force of the advice: *impress them* (the commandments)...*talk about them...**tie them...**bind them...**write them*. The law of God is thus to be applied to the individual (your hands and your foreheads), the family (*your houses*), and public, civic society (*your gates*, the place of public business, courts, markets, etc.). The believer must work out the meaning of loving God in appropriate ways for all three levels. The love commitment of the whole person in verse 5 is thus expanded to the whole community in verses 7-9.'⁹³ (Emphasis Wright's)

The 'love commitment' of v. 5, to love Yahveh with all our heart, soul and strength, is not only 'expanded' but explained. What does it mean to love God? God tells us that we must obey His commandments and teach them to our children and walk them out in our community. We must be 'one' with Yahveh and His Word. Of course, this is a play on words as Yeshua too is called the Word of God (Rev. 19:13). The written word of God, His commandments, are a reflection of Yahveh, and that's how two can be one. Yeshua is the veritable mirror image or reflection of Yahveh (2nd Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). The commandments are nothing less than a verbal reflection of our God and King.

Wright goes on to ask Christians, 'whether we are any more serious or successful in flavoring the whole of life with conscious attention to the law of God (v. 7, which is not at all 'symbolic') as a personal, familial, and social strategy for living out our commitment to loving God'⁹⁴ with all our heart, soul and strength. That's a very good question for a religious system that can be superficially based on 'I believe in Jesus' with very little biblical evidence to sustain it. It's a good question for all of us.

Wright believes that the four passages do not justify the literal making of *tefillin*. He states that they were 'intended metaphorically'.⁹⁵

Why is correct understanding of God's Word important? Yahveh says that we are not to add to, or take away from, His Word. If God wanted us to make leather boxes with Scripture in them, in fulfillment of these Scriptures, than it would be important for us to do so. The Rabbis tells us it's sin not to do this, but I think that they have perverted and 'added to' God's Word. In that they sin against God and persuade observant Jews (and some Messianics), to do the same. We must always be studying God's Word to know His Will for our lives and that of our children. Otherwise, we might walk in error, thinking it righteousness, as the traditional Jews do with *tefillin* and Messiah Yeshua, and the as the Church does with the Law

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

of Yahveh:

‘Remind them of these things and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth’ (2nd Tim. 2:14-15).

‘Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted. For evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the holy Writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Messiah Yeshua. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, fully equipped for every good work’ (2nd Tim. 3:12-17).

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⁹⁶ Revised on 29 March 2016.