

YESHUA THE PHARISEE?

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There are some who teach that Yeshua was a Pharisee because of similar teachings between the two of them (and/or the Rabbis),¹ yet, even though some teachings might appear similar on the surface, their *substance* or *essence* is as different as salt is from sugar. Alfred Edersheim, the leading authority on Judaism in relation to the New Testament in his day, himself a believing Jew well studied in the Talmud, writes of the *theological discontinuity* between Yeshua and the Pharisees. Edersheim points out that the teachings of Messiah Yeshua and the Pharisees (and by extension the Rabbis) might at first appear to look similar, but they are radically opposed to one another:

‘we shall thus vividly realise another and most important aspect of the words of Christ. We shall perceive that their form is wholly of the times, their cast Jewish—while by the side of this *similarity of form* there is not only *essential difference*, but *absolute contrariety of substance and spirit*. Jesus spoke as truly a Jew to the Jews, but He spoke not as they—no, not as their highest and best Teachers would have spoken. And this *contrariety of spirit* with manifest *similarity of form* is, to my mind, one of the strongest evidences of the claims of Christ.’²

Similarity of saying is important to note because some try and match some of Messiah’s sayings with those of the Talmud, but the question must be asked, ‘Is it of the same spirit,’ and if so, ‘Who said it first?’ Did Yeshua say it first or did a later rabbi add it after having heard Yeshua’s saying? As we’ll see, Yeshua’s words, teachings and lifestyle leave no doubt that they are totally different than the Pharisees, their teachings and lifestyle, and therefore, Yeshua wasn’t a Pharisee.

CONFRONTATION OVER DOCTRINE

One perspective that reveals that Yeshua wasn’t a Pharisee are the passages in the New Testament where Yeshua speaks of Pharisaic teachings *as those of men* (i.e. not of God). Some say that Yeshua only rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, but not their actual teachings, but this isn’t true.³ The Gospels

¹ As Paul speaks of in Acts 26:5, the Pharisees were the strictest in their understanding and practice of the Jewish religion. The Rabbis also followed *the Tradition of the Elders* (i.e. what would later become the Talmud), but not with the same rigidity, yet, after the Temple was destroyed the Pharisees and Rabbis merged. Today in Orthodox Judaism there are those who are more strict (Pharisaical) and those who are less strict, based upon their following of *the Tradition of the Elders* (the Talmud).

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. xii. Edersheim lived from 1825-1889.

³ In Matthew 23, Yeshua calls the Pharisees ‘hypocrites!’ seven times (vv. 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29); ‘fools and blind!’ twice (vv. 17, 19); ‘blind guides!’ twice (vv. 16, 24); ‘blind Pharisee!’ once (v. 26); ‘serpents and brood of vipers!’ once (v. 33). Certainly hypocrisy was a heart problem for them, but note Yeshua’s use of ‘blind’ five times, which implies that they couldn’t see (i.e. interpret) the Word of God properly. This is brought out in Mt. 23:4, 8-10, 13-26. For more on why we shouldn’t listen to the modern day Pharisees (the Rabbis) or think that Yeshua was commanding us to walk out our faith by rabbinic teachings (Mt. 23:2-3) see *Do as the Pharisees*

record clashes over the issue of proper interpretation of Scripture (Mt. 15:1-20; 23:1-39). In Mt. 15, Yeshua sternly rebukes the Pharisees for both their hypocrisy *and* their man-made teachings:

“You hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their *heart* is far away from Me. For in vain do they worship Me, *teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*’” (Mt. 15:7-9).

Yeshua speaks of Pharisaic *doctrines* as being ‘the precepts of men’ (not just one doctrine and not just an isolated minor doctrine, but *doctrines*; many). These words of Messiah form a powerful barrier against anyone who thinks that Yeshua was a Pharisee or that their teachings were conceptually the same as His.

Another admonition of Yeshua’s against Pharisaic teachings is when He and the disciples got into a boat to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Yeshua warns them about the leaven of the Pharisees (Mt. 16:5-6). They didn’t understand, and Scripture records:

‘Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the *teaching* of the Pharisees and Sadducees’ (Mt. 16:11; see also Mk. 8:15; Lk. 12:1).

The problem with Pharisaic teachings, and the Pharisees, is further seen when Yeshua says,

‘But woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut off the Kingdom of Heaven from people! You do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in’ (Matt. 23:13).

The Pharisees are the spiritual Fathers of the Rabbis today. Are the Rabbis leading their flocks into the Kingdom of Heaven any more than the Pharisees and Scribes did back then? The teachings of the Rabbis are imbued with the spirit of anti-Christ *much more so today* than back in Messiah’s day, and if Yeshua was so adamant against Pharisaic teachings then, *how much more so for us today?* The word that Messiah spoke to His Apostles in the boat 2,000 years ago certainly applies to us today: ‘Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees!’ (Mt. 16:6)

Where did Yeshua’s Teachings Come From?

Nowhere does any Pharisee call Yeshua a Pharisee, nor does any New Testament writer ever refer to Yeshua as a Pharisee.⁴ If Yeshua was a Pharisee they wouldn’t have asked of Him, ‘Where did this man learn *letters?*’ (i.e. knowledge of the Scriptures):

“Now about the middle of the Feast Yeshua went up into the Temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know *letters*, having never studied?’ Yeshua answered them and said, ‘*My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.* If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the *doctrine*, whether it is *from God* or whether I speak on My own authority.’” (John 7:14-17 NKJV; see also Mt. 7:29; 13:54; 21:23)

These ‘Jews’ marveling aren’t the common Jews who loved Yeshua,⁵ but the Jewish religious authorities (i.e. the Pharisees and Sadducees).⁶ If Yeshua was a Pharisee, the Pharisees would have known that

Say?! Matthew 23:2-3 at <http://www.seedofabraham.net/Do-as-the-Pharisees-Say.pdf>.

⁴ Interestingly enough, Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil. 3:5), but he never speaks of Yeshua as having been a Pharisee.

⁵ Of the 110 times that the Gospels speak of great multitudes following the Messiah, the majority of these people in those multitudes were the Jewish people who loved Him.

Yeshua had studied with them (i.e. at their academies), but Yeshua says that His teaching wasn't His, but the One who had sent Him (i.e. His Father). Yeshua certainly hadn't learned His teachings from the Pharisees.

Letters are the ancient way of speaking of the Scriptures, which were written with Hebrew letters, hence, calling the Scriptures 'letters.' Note well how it speaks of Yeshua never having learned from the Pharisaic or rabbinic academies in the following versions of the Bible:

"The Jews, therefore, were marveling, saying, 'How has this man become learned, *having never been educated?*'" (John 7:15) NASB

"The Jews therefore marvelled, saying, 'How knoweth this man letters, *having never learned?*'" (John 7:15) ASV

"Then the Jewish leaders were astonished and said, 'How does this man know so much *when he has never had formal instruction?*'" (John 7:15) NET

"Then the Jews were amazed and said, 'How does He know the Scriptures, since He hasn't been trained?'" (John 7:15) Holman Christian Standard Bible

Yeshua's teachings weren't from the Pharisees, nor the Rabbis, but from His Father (Jn. 7:14-17). Eder-sheim, in summing up the difference between Yeshua's teachings 'on the Mount,' and Pharisaic or rabbinic teaching says that there is no comparison:

"One by one, as we place the sayings of the Rabbis by the side of those of Jesus in this Sermon on the Mount, we mark the same essential contrariety of spirit, whether as regards righteousness, sin, repentance, faith, the Kingdom, alms, prayer, or fasting." Concerning "the Lord's Prayer...such petitions as 'forgive us our debts,' could, as has been shown in a previous chapter, have no true parallel in Jewish theology."⁷

'It must suffice to indicate that such sayings as Matt. 5:6, 15, 17, 25, 29, 31, 46, 47; 6:8, 12, 18, 22, 24, 32; 7:8, 9, 10, 15, 17-19, 22, 23, have no parallel, in any real sense, in Jewish writings, whose teaching, indeed, often embodies opposite ideas.'⁸

'Perhaps no other mode of teaching was so common among the Jews as that by Parables. Only in their case, they were almost entirely illustrations of what had been said or taught;⁹ while, in the case of Christ, they served as the foundation for His teaching.'¹⁰

⁶ See John 7:10-13 and note the two different meanings for 'Jew' in vv. 11, 13, 15. Verse 11 speaks of the common Jews, while verses 13 and 15 speak of the Jewish authorities (i.e. the Pharisees and Sadducees). F. F. Bruce writes of the 'Jews' of John's Gospel: "Here for the first time (Jn. 1:19) we come upon the use of the term 'the Jews' in this Gospel to denote not the people as a whole, but one particular group—here, the religious establishment in Jerusalem, whether the Sanhedrin or the temple authorities. Elsewhere it is occasionally used (as in John 7:1) to mean the Judeans as distinct from the Galileans, while at other times it has quite a general meaning. Attention to the sense which the word bears in each place where it occurs could save the reader from supposing that the Evangelist (who was himself a Jew) had an animus against the Jews as such." F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 46.

⁷ Eder-sheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 369-370.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 400-401, note 8: 'I am here referring only to the form, not the substance, of these Jewish parables.'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 401, note 10. 'It is, indeed, possible that the framework of some of Christ's Parables may have been adopted and adapted by later Rabbis. No one who knows the early intercourse between Jews and Jewish Christians would deny this *a priori*.'

The teachings of Yeshua were substantially and qualitatively different from the teachings of the Pharisees. That’s one of the reasons why they clashed.¹¹ How, then, can anyone say that Yeshua’s teachings were Pharisaic teachings? The next section will thoroughly dismiss that idea.

THE WASHING OF THE HANDS

In the confrontation between the Pharisees and Yeshua over Yeshua’s disciples not washing their hands (Mt. 15:1-21), Yeshua doesn’t claim that *the Tradition of the Elders* is His (He doesn’t accept it), nor does He agree with the Pharisees in this area of ritual purity, which was a distinct mark of the Pharisee. Edersheim states that the,

“two great obligations of the ‘official’ Pharisee, or ‘Associate’ are pointedly referred to by Christ—both that in regard to *tithing* (the vow of the *Neeman*);¹² and that in regard to Levitical purity (the special vow of the *Chabher*).”¹³

In Mt. 15, Yeshua is accosted by the Pharisees and taken to task concerning ritual purity because His followers hadn’t washed their hands and said the implied Pharisaic blessing before they ate.¹⁴ This means that they weren’t following *the Tradition of the Elders* (i.e. the *Oral Tradition* which would become known as the [written] Talmud). Not keeping this tradition was very sinful *in Pharisaic eyes*. This is what the confrontation is about, not clean vs. unclean meats (as the Church wrongly thinks).¹⁵

If one didn’t pronounce the Pharisaic blessing while ritualistically washing his hands, they were sinning according to the Pharisees. It didn’t matter how clean the disciples hands’ might have been: the point was the Pharisaic blessing and ritual for the washing of the hands had to be said before one could bless God for the food. If not said and done properly, the Pharisees saw the hands as defiled. It wouldn’t have mattered if the disciples had thoroughly washed their hands and had only eaten a banana, which is never

¹¹ Also important to note is of Messiah’s healings on the Sabbath and how He taught by them that healing could and should take place on the Sabbath, a teaching that the Pharisees sought to murder Him over (Mark 3:1-6, see also Mt. 12:1-8; Mk. 2:23-28 for other instances of alleged Sabbath breaking by Yeshua that angered the Pharisees and again shows us that Yeshua didn’t teach or align Himself with Pharisaic doctrine.

¹² Ibid., p. 216, note 16: ‘Luke 11:42; 18:12; Matt. 23:23.’

¹³ Ibid., p. 216: “The *Neeman* undertook these four obligations: to tithe what he ate, what he sold, and what he bought, and not to be a guest with an *Am ha’arets* (*Dem.* 2.2). The full *Chabher* undertook not to sell to an *Am ha’arets*’ (the common Jewish people of the Land) ‘any fluid or dry substance (nutriment or fruit), not to buy from him any such fluid, not to be a guest with him, (and) not to entertain him as a guest in his own clothes (on account of their possible impurity).” Note 17: ‘Luke 11:39, 41; Mt. 23:25-26.’

¹⁴ Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, General Editors, *The Artscroll Siddur* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., January, 1987), p. 224. The blessing that the Pharisees would have said while washing their hands is known as *netilat yadayim* (נטילת ידים) literally, the ‘lifting of the hands.’ It is still practiced today in Orthodox Judaism. If a Jew doesn’t say this blessing, then, according to the Rabbis, they are seen as eating food that is ‘unclean’ because their hands are ‘defiled.’ This is why Yeshua came against it. The Pharisees had made something ‘sin’ that God hadn’t made sin.

¹⁵ Yeshua was not speaking about the dietary laws or changing them. He was asked why His disciples didn’t wash their hands according to *the Tradition of the Elders* (Mt. 15:2; Mk. 7:2). Missing from the account in Mark, the account in Matthew ends this way: ‘These are the things which defile a man: *but to eat with unwashed hands* defiles *not* a man’ (Mt. 15:20). For more on why the encounter that day wasn’t about clean vs. unclean meats, see *Law 102* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Law-102.pdf>.

classified as an *unclean* food. Because they hadn't gone through the *ritual of the Tradition of the Elders*, their hands were seen as defiled in Pharisaic eyes, and therefore, anything that they would have eaten was considered defiled by the Pharisees.

If Yeshua was a Pharisee, He would have agreed with the Pharisees and rebuked His disciples. Of course, there's really nothing inherently wrong with washing hands before one eats, but what made it offensive to God was that the Pharisees taught that it was commanded by God to do so, and if anyone didn't do it they were sinning. The Pharisees had made something a sin that God hadn't made sin. This was not a light matter and why Yeshua came against it.

Also implied in their confrontation, they were trying to make Yeshua out to be a sinner, and therefore, He couldn't be the Messiah. Yeshua, though, turns it around and takes them to task and calls them the sinners for *nullifying* the Word of God by *their* traditions. They said to Yeshua:

“‘Why do your disciples transgress *the Tradition of the Elders*? For they don't wash their hands when they eat bread.’ But He answered and said unto them, ‘Why do you also transgress the Commandment of God by *your* tradition?!’” (Mt. 15:2-3)

It's clear that Yeshua is coming against their *teaching* on this subject when He speaks of them nullifying God's Word by their 'tradition.' The disciples of Yeshua hadn't washed their hands according to *the Tradition of the Elders*, nor did Yeshua think it was wrong of them not to do so. How, then, can some think that Yeshua was a Pharisee? Also, note that Yeshua doesn't speak of *the Tradition of the Elders* as something that He followed or aligned Himself with. He doesn't say, 'Why do you also transgress the Commandment of God by *our* Tradition?', nor does He make it a neutral point by saying, 'Why do you also transgress the Commandment of God by *the Tradition of the Elders*?' No, He speaks of *the Tradition of the Elders* as being theirs—Pharisaic.

Edersheim relates the minute details of ritual hand washing and how critical it was to the Pharisees. He also says that the passage in Mark (7:1-23),

“expresses it with graphic accuracy: ‘with common hands’ (Mk. 7:2). Once more we have to mark, how minutely conversant the Gospel narratives are with Jewish Law and practice...At the outset we have this confirmation of the Gospel language, that this practice is expressly admitted to have been, not a Law of Moses, but ‘a tradition of the elders’ (*Chull.* 105a/b, 106b). Still, and perhaps on this very account, it was so *strictly* enjoined, that to neglect it was like being *guilty of gross carnal defilement*. Its omission would lead to temporal destruction (*Sot.* 4b), or, at least, to poverty (*Shabb.* 62b). Bread eaten with unwashed hands was as if it had been filth (*Sot.* 4b). Indeed, a Rabbi who had held this command in contempt was actually buried in excommunication (*Eduy.* 5.6; *Ber.* 19a).¹⁶ Thus, from their point of view, the charge...against the disciples, so far from being exaggerated, is most moderately worded by the Evangelists. In fact, although at one time it had only been *one of the marks of a Pharisee*, yet at a later period to wash before eating was regarded as affording the ready means of recognising a Jew.”¹⁷

“The water was poured on both hands, which must be free of anything covering them, such as gravel, mortar, etc. The hands were lifted up, so as to make the water run to the wrist, in order to ensure that the whole hand was washed, and that the water polluted by the hand did not again run down the fingers. Similarly, each hand was rubbed with the

¹⁶ This gives us an insight into how the Pharisees saw Yeshua.

¹⁷ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 481.

other (the fist), provided the hand that rubbed had been affused: otherwise, the rubbing might be done against the head, or even against a wall. But there was one point on which special stress was laid. In the ‘first affusion,’ which was all that originally was required when the hands were Levitically ‘defiled,’ the water had to run down to the wrist ...If the water remained short of the wrist...the hands were not clean. Accordingly, the words of...Mark 7:3 can only mean that the Pharisees eat not ‘except they wash their hands to the wrist.’”¹⁸

Yeshua had a completely different understanding about ritual purity than the Pharisees. The Pharisees, by their tradition, had made something to be sin that God didn’t call sin. For the disciples to eat without washing their hands and saying the Pharisaic blessing was not a sin in God’s eyes. Yeshua didn’t follow the Pharisees in this foundational Pharisaic doctrine on ritual purity. This is pointedly brought out by Luke on another occasion when Yeshua had been invited by a Pharisee to dine with him:

³⁷‘And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. ³⁸When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that *He had not first washed* before dinner. ³⁹Then the Lord said to him, ‘*Now you Pharisees* make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.’ (Luke 11:37-39)

It’s clear from v. 39 (*italics*) that Yeshua didn’t include Himself with the Pharisees. Immediately after this (vv. 42-44) Yeshua launches into a scathing rebuke of them, beginning each rebuke with, ‘Woe unto you, Pharisees!’ It’s clear that Yeshua wasn’t a Pharisee. Also, He never followed the Pharisaic tradition of washing the hands and saying their blessing because it was sin to do so. How, then, can anyone say that Yeshua was a Pharisee and that His teachings were similar to the Pharisees?¹⁹

THE WEARING OF TEFILLIN

Another point that torpedoed Yeshua being a Pharisee is the wearing of *tefillin*. In Messiah’s day *only the Pharisees wore them for prayer*. *Tefillin* are two leather boxes with Scripture in them, held in place upon the forehead and the left arm by leather bands or straps. When the Roman soldiers gambled for Yeshua’s clothes (Jn. 19:23), *tefillin* are not listed as one of the things that they gambled for, even though He had been praying in the Garden when the Jewish guards came for Him (Mt. 26:36ff; Mk. 14:32ff; Lk.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 482, also note 22: ‘The rendering ‘wash diligently,’ gives no meaning; that ‘with the fist’ is not in accordance with Jewish Law; while that ‘up to the elbow’ is not only contrary to Jewish Law, but apparently based on a wrong rendering of the word פֶּרֶק (Hebrew for ‘wrist’ in NT times).

On pp. 216-217, Edersheim writes of the strictness of the Pharisees concerning alleged Levitical impurity, and how the Rabbis and the Sadducees mocked the Pharisees for it: “‘It is as a tradition among the Pharisees (*Abhoth de R. Nathan* 5) to torment themselves in this world, and yet they will gain nothing by it in the next.’ The Sadducees had some reason for the taunt, that ‘the Pharisees would by-and-by subject the globe of the sun itself to their purifications’ (Jer. *Chag. 79d*; *Tos. Chag. 3*), the more so that their assertions of purity were sometimes conjoined with Epicurean maxims, betokening a very different state of mind.” (Epicurean; one devoted to sensual enjoyment, especially that which is derived from fine food and drink.)

¹⁹ In Mt. 15:10-14, Yeshua says that it’s not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of a man that truly defiles him. His disciples came to Him and asked if He realized that His saying had offended the Pharisees. Yeshua replies that they are blind guides, leaders of the blind (v. 14). Yeshua is not speaking about their hypocrisy here, but their inability, due to their hypocrisy no doubt, in being able to properly interpret the Scriptures.

22:39ff.).²⁰ Also, there's never any mention of Yeshua praying where *tefillin* are mentioned or seen on Him, and Scripture speaks a number of times of Him praying.²¹

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary states that Yeshua didn't wear *tefillin*: 'We have no reason for thinking that they were worn either by Christ or his disciples.'²² If Yeshua had worn them, which would have made Him a Pharisee, certainly His disciples would have worn them, too, but there's no record of them wearing them, either, or teaching that they should be worn.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia speaks of recently discovered first century *tefillin* from Qumran and Murabba that shed light on Yeshua's remark, 'they make their *phylacteries* broad'²³ (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.'²⁴

It seems that the boxes on Pharisaic foreheads were much larger than what are worn today. That really would have made Yeshua 'stand out' as a Pharisee, and everyone, including us, would have known it. With the leather straps and the boxes protruding from the left arm and the forehead, Edersheim writes that the 'wearer of them could not be mistaken.'²⁵ This should not surprise us because 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* (*tefillin*) and lengthen the tassels (*tzit-tziot*) of their garments' (Mt. 23:5).

Shouldn't we all be using them? Aren't *tefillin* commanded in the Torah? The Rabbis would have us believe that, but most scholars have correctly understood that the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages, which the Pharisees based their *tefillin* on, to be figurative, not literal.

As with all rabbinic tradition, the Rabbis insist that *tefillin* go directly back to Moses who got it from God on Mt. Sinai. As an added incentive to wear *tefillin*, they say that God Himself dons *tefillin* every morning to pray. Edersheim affirms this, saying:

'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*).'²⁶

The actual dating of when *tefillin* came into being can be gauged 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

²⁰ They are called *tefillin*; prayer objects, so they should, at the very least, be used in prayer. They were worn *all day long* by the Pharisees to give the impression that they were pious men, always praying. If Yeshua had been praying He certainly should have had them on, if He wore them.

²¹ Mt. 14:23; Mk. 4:26; Luke 6:12; 9:28, etc.

²² 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. 1228. Article: *Phylacteries*.

²³ *Phylacteries* is a Greek term for *tefillin*, and conveys the sense of an *amulet* to ward off evil.

²⁴ 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*.

²⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 202.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204. Like God has to wear *tefillin* to be reminded of His Word.

worn. Also, the head and the arm *teffilin* weren't worn at the same time (as is done today in morning prayer). Most likely, this Pharisaic tradition came into being a generation before Hillel and Shammai. Moses and King David, though, never knew *tefillin*, and obviously, never wore them.

Edersheim writes that they were not commanded in Scripture, but that the Pharisees had taken a metaphorical concept and turned it into a literal one. Edersheim further dispels the belief that Yeshua was a Pharisee by revealing that *only the Pharisees* wore *tefillin* in the days of the Messiah:

'There was certainly no warrant for them in Holy Scripture, and only Pharisee externalism could represent their use as fulfilling the import of Ex. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18. The admission that neither the officiating priests, nor the representatives of the people, wore them in the Temple (*Zebhach*. 19 a/b), seems to imply that this practice was not quite universal' (as it is today among Orthodox Jews). '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 prayer.'²⁷

With Edersheim stating that neither the priests, nor Elders of the people wore them ('the representatives of the people), and knowing that the common Jewish people didn't wear them, the only ones left to wear them were the Pharisees. If it could be proven that Yeshua wore them, that would certainly have made Him a Pharisee, but there's nothing to support that position. On the other hand, if Yeshua never wore them, which seems to be the case, then it's wrong to teach that Yeshua was a Pharisee. Ellison confirms 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...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.'²⁸

In the days when the Septuagint²⁹ was made (about 250 BC), the Jewish Sages who translated it into Greek wrote that the passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy were metaphorical. In other words, there were no *tefillin* in their day.³⁰ The Scripture passages don't command a literal wearing of *tefillin*, but speak of

²⁷ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 429-430. Note 42: "As the question is of considerable practical importance, the following...may be noticed. From Jer. *Ber.* 4 c, we gather: **1.** That at one time it was the practice to wear the phylacteries all day long, in order to pass as pious. This is denounced as a mark of hypocrisy...**2.** That it was settled, that phylacteries should be worn during a considerable part of the day, but not the whole day. **3.** That it was deemed objectionable to wear them only during prayer. **4.** That celebrated Rabbis did not deem it necessary always to wear the phylacteries both on the head and on the arm. This seems to prove that their obligation could not have been regarded as absolutely binding. Thus, R. Jochanan wore those for the head only in winter, but not in summer, because then he did not wear a headgear. As another illustration, that the wearing of phylacteries was not deemed absolutely requisite, the following passage may be quoted (*Sanh.* 11.3): 'It is more culpable to transgress the words of the Scribes than those of the Torah.' He that says, 'There are no phylacteries,' 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.'"

²⁸ Douglas, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, part 3, p. 1228, article: *Phylacteries*.

²⁹ The Septuagint is the Hebrew Old Testament in Greek. It was the official Bible of all the Jewish people outside of Israel before, during, and after the days of Messiah Yeshua because Greek was the *lingua franca* of the nations due to conquests of Alexander the Great (333 BC).

placing the *words of the Torah* upon the heart and doing it, not the actual making of leather boxes for the head and the arm.

Finally, there's a verse in the New Testament that some use to declare that Yeshua endorsed *tefillin*, but upon closer inspection of the verse it's seen that this is a false interpretation of the verse:

'But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments.' (Matthew 23:5 NASB)

Their logic for *tefillin* goes like this: since Yeshua also speaks of lengthening or making longer their tassels (*tzit'tziot*), which are commanded in Num. 15:37-41, the *tefillin* must also be a literal commandment. The problem with their shaky interpretation is their 'authorization by association' logic. Just because Yeshua mentions both *tefillin* and *tzit'tziot* in the same verse there's nothing that He says that condones or affirms *tefillin*. It's truly not logical to say that Yeshua was authorizing *tefillin* from His use of both in the same verse. He was only making a remark on how large the Pharisees had made their *tefillin* **and** their *tzit'tziot*. That's the connection—how ostentatious both had become. The verse cannot be used as Messiah Yeshua's endorsement of *tefillin* just because it's in the same sentence with *tzit'tziot*.

CONCLUSION

Yeshua didn't teach Pharisaic doctrine, but came against it and them. Also, no Pharisee or religious authority would have questioned *where* Yeshua got His authority or teachings from if Yeshua had worn *tefillin*—everyone would have known that He had got His teachings and authority from the Pharisees! Yeshua never wore *tefillin*, though, the distinctive mark of a Pharisee.

Obviously, Yeshua did not observe the central Pharisaic tradition of 'the washing of the hands,' which also reveals His staunch theological opposition against Pharisaism. Even though some of Messiah Yeshua's teachings might seem to parallel Pharisaic teaching, the people who teach that this made Yeshua a Pharisee would most likely also confuse the police with the Mafia because they both have guns. Yeshua was not a Pharisee, and we're not to follow the sons of the Pharisees today—the Rabbis and their teachings.³¹

"No servant can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things and they derided Him, but He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts for what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'" (Luke 16:13-15)³²

³⁰ See *Tefillin: To Wear or Not to Wear?* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Tefillin-To-Wear-or-Not-to-Wear.pdf> for a fuller treatment of what God commanded in those passages isn't to be taken literally, and why Yeshua didn't wear them. Also, the word *tefillin* is not found in the Exodus or Deuteronomy passages. It's an interpretation of the Pharisees.

³¹ See *Do as the Pharisees Say?! Matthew 23:2-3* at <http://www.seedofabraham.net/Do-as-the-Pharisees-Say.pdf> for why we're not to obey the Rabbis, the Sons of the Pharisees.

³² Revised on 29 March 2016.