

# Bind Them as a Sign...

*Is there Scriptural evidence for literally binding  
the Torah on ones hand and forehead?*

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I get joy out of being obedient to the commandments of Yahweh. I believe that this is how it should be for the follower of the Most High. He is our Father and we are His children. He knows what is best for us, and every command He gives us is for our benefit; whether we realize it or not. There have been so many things I have put into practice over the past 15 years of my life that I did not understand completely when I began, but as I started to obey, and then continued for weeks, months, or years, I would slowly begin to gain a deeper understanding of certain commandments.

I remember sitting in my Father-in-laws house years ago and listening to an elderly friend of his explain to me what the strings hanging from his clothing were all about. "Why do you wear those fringes?" I asked. As I watched his mouth speak through his long, white beard he told me of a few Scriptures where the heavenly Father commanded His people to don fringes or tassels with a string of blue within each fringe. I listened to him, and then we talked about it for

about an hour. As I read the Scriptures, I looked over at my Father-in-law and asked him "Why aren't we wearing these things?" He told me he didn't know why, but we needed to begin to be obedient right away. I soon sat down with strings in my hand and tied my first set of tassels<sup>1</sup>; I've been wearing them ever since.

Wearing tassels makes for quite a scene in the modern community. Oftentimes I am speaking to a cashier behind a counter and they are constantly glancing up and down, looking at my face for a few seconds and then looking down at these tassels hanging from my tunic.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes I never receive a question from the on-looker, but most often I hear this, "May I ask you a question

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study on the fringes/tassels please visit our website and take a look at the article titled, "*Wearing Fringes Under the New Covenant.*"

<sup>2</sup> A tunic is long shirt-like garment hanging anywhere from above the knees to the ankles. For a further study on modest apparel please visit our website and take a look at the booklet titled, "*Modest Apparel: for Men and Women.*"

sir?" I've gotten to the point where I know what the question is going to be. I love it when I hear this because I know that I am about to get the opportunity to share my faith, the faith I love so dearly, with someone else. Most of the time the person I am talking with thinks it is pretty neat. Every now and then I talk with someone who thinks it is neat enough to study it their self. There's been a few times where it has impacted the listener to the point of them eventually making their own set of tassels.

I do not wear tassels to receive the praise of men, but there have been people in history who have worn them for this reason. It has been used by some to appear to others as if the person wearing them was a holy person. Surely the guy who wears the longest tassels is the holiest of all. Of course I'm being facetious. We should never think that anything we do outwardly for the Lord automatically means that we have a clean heart. We can appear to be one thing on the outside, but the entire time be just as dirty as a septic tank on the inside. Yeshua spoke to people like this in Matthew 23. He said to them at one point, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence! (Mt. 23:25)"

One way that these scribes and Pharisees tried to look holy in the

sight of others was by *lengthening* their tassels. Yeshua said this about them: "They do everything to be observed by others. They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. (Mt. 23:5)" I can picture a Pharisee walking around with his two or three foot tassels hanging on the ground dragging behind him as he walks. These long tassels would be impossible not to notice if you were the cashier behind a counter at the local "Jerusalem Market." Yeshua rebuked the Pharisees for trying to draw attention to themselves.

On the other hand we must not go too extreme here, because Yeshua was not contradicting what he had already told his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount back in Matthew 5. Yeshua says here, "...let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Mt. 5:16)" In context here Yeshua is speaking of a man's obedience to Yahweh's law as letting his light shine (Mt. 5:16-19). As disciples of Yeshua we are to not be ashamed of how we live even when this lifestyle calls for something to be worn like tassels on the four corners of our clothing. The tassels worn by the people of Israel were probably fairly long to begin with. This means they would be noticeable by others. The key here is that it is possible to wear tassels that may be seen by others, but to do so for the purpose of bringing glory to the Father rather

than to yourself. I believe this is the manner in which Yeshua wore the tassels.

"You mean to tell me that Yeshua wore the same tassels he rebuked the Pharisees for wearing?!?!" Well... yes and no. He did wear tassels with a cord of blue in them, but his were most likely not as long as those he was condemning in Matthew 23:5. Nevertheless he did wear the tassels. We can know this to be certain because (1) he was the sinless Son of God. Had he not wore tassels, he would have been transgressing the law of his Father, and (2) certain texts speak of the tassel of Yeshua's garment. Texts like Matthew 9:20 and 14:36 mention people touching the "hem" of his garment. The word "hem" (KJV) is taken from the Greek word *kraspedon* which carries the meaning of a fringe or a tassel. It is the word used in the Septuagint<sup>3</sup> translation of Numbers 15:37-41 for the fringes of the garment. This all means that Yeshua was not condemning the wearing of the fringes, he was only condemning the ostentatious manner in which they were being worn by the Pharisees. The enlarging of them and the pride behind their being worn.

I would like to now bring your attention to another aspect of Matthew 23:5 that is not as well

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<sup>3</sup> The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Tanak (Old Testament). The translation was begun around 250 B.C.

known by people as the tassels. I realize that many people do not even know about the tassels, but that is generally not the case amongst Torah-keeping communities and congregations. I am not degrading anyone here, I'm just saying that while Methodists, Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, and many other people generally do not know about the tassel commandment, most people in the Hebrew Roots and Messianic movement do. However, I have met very few people who comment on the phylacteries mentioned in Matthew 23:5. Remember, Yeshua said that the scribes and Pharisees enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. What in the world is he talking about when he says phylacteries? On the surface, that sounds to us like some kind of tool used by a brain surgeon.

### **What Are Phylacteries?**

The word phylacteries is basically a transliteration of the Greek word *phylakterion*. Various lexicons define the word as a "guard case, preservative, safe-guard, and amulet." The *NET* online Bible translation gives as a footnote on Matthew 23:5, "Phylacteries were small leather cases containing OT scripture verses, worn on the arm and forehead by Jews, especially when praying. The custom was derived from such OT passages as Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18."

Yeshua was then speaking of leather cases which Judahites of the first century wore, attached to their forehead and hand, based upon a literal interpretation of a few texts in the Torah.<sup>4</sup> Some commentators believe that there were Jewish people who wore these cases out of fear of evil spirits and demons. In other words, the phylacteries were some sort of an *amulet* worn for protection. While it is possible that some Judahites held this view of the item I do not believe we arrive at this meaning of the object from the word phylactery itself. In this context the word rather carries with it the meaning of protecting that which it holds. The Scriptures that are placed inside of the leather cases are being kept safe (safe-guarded) by the cases. I believe this is the correct view of the word in the context of the Torah commandment from which it is derived.<sup>5</sup> Evidently there were

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<sup>4</sup> *The Scriptures*, 1998 Edition | Matthew 23:5 "And they do all their works to be seen by men, and they make their t'fillen wide and lengthen the tzitziyot of their garments." *Aramaic/English New Testament* | Matthew 23:5 "And they do all their deeds that they might be seen by the sons of men. For they widen their Tefillin and lengthen the Tekhelet of their robes." The *New American Standard Bible* translates Exodus 13:16 as, "So it shall serve as a sign on you hand, and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand Yahweh brought us out of Egypt."

<sup>5</sup> *On the Term Phylacteries* (Mt. 23:5) by Jeffrey Tigay, *Harvard Theological Review*, Jan. - Apr. 1979, pages 45-53.

Judahites living in the first century A.D. that took the words of Yahweh literally in texts like Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18. Here we find that Yahweh speaks of His Torah being bound as a sign upon ones hand and being a symbol on the forehead. At first glance one may feel that this is to be interpreted metaphorically. In other words "bind them on your hand" carries with it the meaning of doing or performing. It is with the hands that a person accomplishes their work. "Let them be symbol on your forehead (or between the eyes)" would carry the figurative meaning of thinking about them, or having them in your mind. With this being said, does it then follow that a metaphorical understanding rules out an additional literal understanding?

Before going to these texts let me just point out something simple. In Matthew 23:5 we have established that Yeshua spoke of something literally worn by the scribes and Pharisees when he mentioned the lengthening of the tassels. Yeshua was not condemning the tassels, he was only speaking against the reason they were being worn by certain people and the manner in which they were worn. At the same time Yeshua wore the tassels. There is no reason why the exact same logic should not apply to the other item mentioned in the sentence - the phylacteries. Yeshua was not condemning the wearing of

phylacteries, he was rather speaking against the reason they were being worn by certain others, as well as the manner in which they were made, enlarged.<sup>6</sup> It stands to reason that if Yeshua represented in his own life the proper manner of wearing tassels, then he also represented in his own life the proper manner of wearing phylacteries. What we have seen here, before going further, is that our Master, Yeshua the Messiah, *endorsed a literal understanding* of passages like Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18. To argue for an only

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<sup>6</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, 1995, Hendrickson Publishers, Volume 1, John Lightfoot on Mt. 23:5 - "Our Savior does not so much condemn the bare wearing of them, as the doing it out of pride and hypocrisy. It is not unlikely that he wore them himself, according to the custom of the country: for the children of the Jews were to be brought up from their infancy in saying *the phylacteries*; that is, as soon as they were capable of being catechised. The scribes and Pharisees made theirs very *broad* and visible, that they might obtain a proportional fame and esteem for their devotion with the people; these things being looked upon as arguments of the study of the law, and signs of devotion." *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1976, Vol. 4, page 786 states, "The term occurs only once in the NT (Matt 23:5), which records Jesus' accusation against the scribes and Pharisees... This was not necessarily a condemnation of the custom of wearing phylacteries, but only of ostentation that prostituted an ancient custom full of symbolism in the interests of outward display."

metaphorical understanding of these passages does not align with Yeshua's understanding he presents in Matthew 23:5. In the words of one author, "Just as Jesus faulted the ostentatious wearing of *tzitziyot* (tassels), which he himself wore, he was probably wearing *tefillin*<sup>7</sup> while he criticized those who wore them hypocritically. Had he not worn *tefillin*, it is unlikely that his criticism would have been directed only at the excess. Criticizing the way they were worn implies Jesus' acceptance of the practice and the sages' literal interpretation of the biblical commandment."<sup>8</sup>

### Is the Command Only Figurative?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word *tefillin* carries the meaning of a "prayer fillet" or "prayer box." This is the Hebrew name for the phylacteries and is so called this in Hebrew because the traditional time for wearing the sign on the hand and forehead was during one's morning prayers.

<sup>8</sup> *Tefillin*, 2010 First Fruits of Zion, by Toby Janicki, page 12.

<sup>9</sup> There are many Biblical commentators and scholars who feel the commands given concerning the "hand and forehead" are only figurative in nature. For example, Edward Mack, writing an article titled *Phylacteries* in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states, "It is evident that the words in Exodus are beyond all question used figuratively; a careful reading of the verses in Deuteronomy in close relation to their contexts, in which are other figures of speech not to be taken literally, is sufficient proof of their purely figurative intention also. Only the formalism of later ages could distort these figures into the gross and

materialistic practice of the phylactery." I respectfully disagree with his conclusions and I explain why in this section of the article. Later in his article, Edward Mack comments on Yeshua's words in Matthew 23:5 by saying, "In the New Testament passage (Mt 23:5) our Lord rebukes the Pharisees, who make more pronounced the un-Scriptural formalism and the crude literalism of the phylacteries by making them obtrusively large, as they also seek notoriety for their religiosity by the enlarged fringes, or "borders." Mr. Mack fails to recognize that Yeshua wore the tassels that he here condemns *because of* their "showy" nature; therefore Yeshua would not be condemning a genuine wearing of either the phylacteries or the tassels. In actuality, Yeshua endorsed a literal understanding of the "hand and forehead" commandment.

*Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible* (Revised 1843 Edition, by Edward Robinson) states on page 442 under the heading "Frontlets" the following: "It has been much disputed whether the use of frontlets and phylacteries was literally ordained by Moses. Those who believe their use to be binding, observe, that the text speaks as positively of this as of other precepts. Moses requires the commandments of God to be written on the doors of houses, as a sign on their hands, and as an ornament on their foreheads, Exod. xiii. 16. If there be any obligation to write these commandments on their doors, as the text intimates, then it is said, there is the same for writing them on their hands and foreheads. The use of frontlets was common in our Saviour's time not only in Judea, but also among the Indian Jews, the Persians, and Babylonians. Indeed, long before that time, the doctors, whom the high-priest Eleazar sent to Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, spoke of the phylacteries, and referred the origin of them to Moses. Others, on the contrary, maintain, that these precepts should be taken figuratively and allegorically; meaning, that

When we look at each of the texts that Judahites based the wearing of phylacteries upon, do we see texts that should only be taken figuratively or do we see anything implying a literal understanding of the texts?

*Exodus 13:9* | Let it serve as a sign for you on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that Yahweh's instruction may be in your mouth; for Yahweh brought you out of Egypt with a strong hand.

*Exodus 13:16* | So let it be a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead, for

the Hebrews should carefully preserve the remembrance of God's law, and observe his commands; that they should always have them in their 'mind's eye.' Before the Babylonish captivity, no traces of them appear in the history of the Jews; the prophets never inveigh against the neglect of them; nor was there any question concerning them in the reformation of manners at any time among the Hebrews. The almost general custom in the East of wearing phylacteries and frontlets, determines nothing for the obligation or usefulness of the practice. Christ did not absolutely condemn them; but he condemned the abuse of them in the Pharisees, their wearing them with affectation, and larger than other Jews. The Caraites, who adhere to the letter of the law, and despise traditions, call the rabbinical Jews 'bridled asses,' because they wear these tephilim and frontlets."

Yahweh brought us out of Egypt by the strength of His hand.

*Deuteronomy 6:4-9* | Listen, Israel: Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is One. Love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

*Deuteronomy 11:18-21* | Imprint these words of mine on your hearts and minds, bind them as a sign on your hands, and let them be a symbol on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the heavens are above the earth, your days and those of

your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your fathers.

When I read these texts I can assuredly say that at the very least each text teaches us to be doing the Torah with our hands and thinking about the Torah with our mind. This means there is a metaphorical understanding to the "hand and forehead" commandment. This being said, a metaphorical understanding does not rule out an additional literal understanding to these commandments. Placing the Torah upon your forehead in some fashion would be an outward sign of an inward reality; likewise with placing the Torah upon your hand. For example, water baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. What is happening inside of a person spiritually does not negate the outward, literal act of having someone baptize you under literal water. It's not like your sins are hanging upon your skin and you need to be dunked under water so that your sins can be washed away. We are assuredly cleansed from our sins by the working of Yahweh alone; the process whereby He cleanses our hearts and minds. However, we are given the ordinance of baptism, which among other things, shows, in an outward way, what is taking place inwardly. Both the inward reality and the outward sign are important.

Granted, there have been many people go through the outward motion and remain unregenerate, but this does not negate the fact that we are still given the outward sign to obey. Likewise, it is possible to wear a phylactery on your forehead, but not truly love the Torah of Yahweh with all your mind. However, that would not negate the wearing of the outward sign.

Also think about this. Both passages in Deuteronomy find the "hand and forehead" commandments linked with the commandments to write the Torah upon your doorposts and gates. Are we to understand the commandment of the "doorposts and gates" only metaphorically? I do not think so, and I have believed in writing the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) on my doorposts and gates for a very long time. It is also a very ancient practice to literally write the *Shema* upon ones gates and doorposts.<sup>10</sup> It stands to reason that the "hand and forehead" commandments in the same context should likewise be taken literally.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Works of Josephus, Antiquities 4.8.13 (213); Bernard Grossfeld, trans., The Targum Onkelos to Deuteronomy, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 9 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988), p. 35. Also consider that the archaeological excavations from Qumran--the ancient site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found--reveal the use of literal *mezuzot*.*

One may point out that certain of these texts speak of "these words" being in your heart or "impressed" upon your heart. This is certainly metaphorical because there is no way I can cut my chest open and write the *Shema* on my heart. However, this does not rule out literal commandments within the text. For instance, is talking about them when you sit in your house metaphorical? What about rising up and lying down? What about repeating "these words" to your children? All of these things are literal in spite of being mentioned right beside a metaphorical statement. Likewise the "hand and forehead" command, along with the "doorpost and gate" command, is able to be done literally. I certainly do not think I can prove with certainty that these commands should only be taken metaphorically (as with the heart).

### The Septuagint

Some people I've read on this subject believe that the Septuagint text of these passages (LXX) can only be taken metaphorically. Let's look at them.

*Exodus 13:9* | And it shall be to thee a sign upon thy hand and a memorial before thine eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in thy mouth, for with a strong hand the Lord God brought thee out of Egypt.

*Exodus 13:16* | And it shall be fore a sign upon they hand, and immovable before thine eyes, for with a strong hand the Lord brought thee out of Egypt.

*Deuteronomy 6:8* | And thou shalt fasten them for a sign upon thy hand, and it shall be immovable before thine eyes.

*Deuteronomy 11:18* | And ye shall store these words in your heart and in your soul, and ye shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and it shall be fixed before your eyes.

I must say that after examining the Septuagint text, I disagree with interpreting these texts in an "only metaphorical" manner. This is especially in light of the Deuteronomy texts. Deuteronomy 6:8 speaks of "fastening" them on your hand, and 11:18 speaks of "binding" them on your hand. I would agree that the LXX is more metaphorical when it comes to the "forehead" command. It is interesting that in the *Letter of Aristeas* (scholars date it to the second century B.C.) it only mentions the binding upon the hand.<sup>11</sup> It may be because the LXX

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<sup>11</sup> *Letter of Aristeas* | "...Moreover, upon our garments he has given us a symbol of

was the text being read by the writer of this letter.

### **Phylacteries in Philo**

There are also some commentators and authors who believe that the Jewish historian Philo knew nothing of a literal interpretation of the aforementioned passages. They reason from what I believe to be an incorrect view of the LXX texts and then work from that basis seeing that Philo would have read the LXX translation of the Torah. Here is what Philo has to say in regards to these specific texts from the Torah.

137. The law tells us that we must set the rules of justice in the heart and fasten them for a sign upon the hand and have them shaking before the eyes. The first of these is a parable indicating that the rules of justice must not be committed to untrustworthy ears since no trust can be placed in the sense of hearing but that these best of all

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remembrance, and in like manner he has ordered us to put the divine oracles upon our gates and doors as a remembrance of (159) God. And upon our hands, too, he expressly orders the symbol to be fastened, clearly showing that we ought to perform every act in righteousness, remembering (our own creation), and above all the (160) fear of God." Take note that this letter mentions the fastening upon the hand in the same context as putting the divine oracles upon ones gates and doors.

lessons must be impressed upon our lordliest part, stamped to with genuine seals.

138. The second shows that we must not only received conceptions of the good but express our approval of them in unhesitating action, for the hand is the symbol of actions, and on this the law bids us fasten and hang the rules of justice for a sign. Of what it is a sign he has not definitely stated because, I believe, they are a sign not of one thing but of many, practically of all the factors in human life.

139. The third means that always and everywhere we must have the vision of them as it were close to our eyes. And they must have vibration and movement, it continues, not to make them unstable and unsettled, but that by their motion they may provoke the sight to gain a clear discernment of them. For motion induces the use of the faculty of sight by stimulating and arousing the eyes, or rather by making them unsleepfull wakeful.

140. He to whom it is given to set their image in the eye of the soul, not at rest but in

motion and engaged in their natural activities, must be placed on record as a perfect man...

141. Indeed he must be forward to teach the principles of justice to kinsfolk and friends and all the young people at home and in the street, both when they go to their beds and when they arise, so that in every posture and every motion, in every place both private and public, not only when they are awake but when they are asleep, they may be gladdened by visions of the just...

142. He bids them also write and set them forth in front of the door posts of each house and the gates in their walls so that those who leave or remain at home, citizens and stranger alike, may read the inscriptions engraved on the face of the gates and keep in perpetual memory what they should say and do, careful alike to do and to allow no injustice, and when they enter their houses and again when they go forth men and women and children and servants alike may act as is due and

fitting both for others and for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Philo mentions here of "fastening them for a sign upon the hand." As I read this I find it very difficult to interpret in a mere figurative fashion. The words "fastening" and "for a sign" lead to a more literal interpretation, not excluding an additional figurative meaning. Why though does Philo mention having them *shaking* before your eyes? The answer lies in recognizing that there is a variant in the text of the LXX at certain of these Scriptures. Some manuscripts read the word *asaleuton* (immovable; not moving) while others read *saleuton* (moving). This leads one to the conclusion that Philo was probably reading a LXX that contained the more difficult reading of *saleuton*. Philo further describes his view concerning "shaking before your eyes" in section 139 mentioned above. He mentions having vision of something, as well as something having vibration and movement. He also speaks of motion inducing the use of the sense of sight by stimulating the eyes. In other words he is saying that a persons eyes look to what is moving.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Works of Philo*, volume 8, pages 93-97, translated by F.H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, London, England.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that 19th century author Alfred Edersheim, in his *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1993, Hendrickson

Philo could be speaking of a "forehead phylactery" that a person could feel upon their head throughout the day as they wore it in obedience to the forehead command. However, Philo could be speaking of the phylactery fastened to the hand here. As I was reading the texts of Scripture to my wife from the LXX she commented that it sounded as if the LXX only spoke of wearing the "hand phylactery" and that the eyes looked upon the hand phylactery throughout the day. It is possible that Philo is speaking of this here. As a persons hand moves throughout the day the phylactery upon the hand moves and the eyes are constantly glancing at a visual representation of the Torah.

Philo also mentions the writing of the Torah on the doorpost and gates in connection with the fastening upon the hand. Notice how Philo says in the afore cited section 142, "He bids them also write and set

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Publishers, page 52, footnote 13), writes the following in a footnote concerning the tefillin: "It is remarkable that Aristeeas seems to speak only of the phylacteries on the arm, and Philo of those for the head, while the Septuagint takes the command entirely in a metaphorical sense." I agree with Edersheim concerning Aristeeas' mentioning only the arm tefillin, but his comments on Philo and the Septuagint are not agreeable to my ear. I would lean more towards Philo mentioning only the arm tefillin (if I had to choose between the two), and I would say the Septuagint could be interpreted in like manner.

them forth..." It sounds as though Philo is saying that just as they write them out and fasten them on the hand, the Creator *also* tells them to write them on the doorposts and gates.

When the "dust settles" after reading the LXX as well as Philo I cannot honestly come to the conclusion that these manuscripts are only speaking metaphorically or figuratively. I agree that this is part of the message of the passages, but a literal interpretation can be borne out even if one only has the LXX in front of him to read.

### **Flavius Josephus**

We do find a literal reference to the commandment of the "hand and forehead" in the writings of the first century A.D. Judahite historian Flavius Josephus. Josephus, in *Antiquities* 4.8.13 (213) records for us that:

They are also to inscribe the principal blessings they have received from God upon their doors, and show the same remembrance of them upon their arms; as also they are to bear on their forehead and their arm those wonders which declare the power of God, and his goodwill towards them, that God's readiness to bless them may appear everywhere conspicuous about them.

As we have seen with the texts in the Torah, and the writings of Philo, Josephus also connects the "hand and forehead" commands with the "gate and doorpost" commands. Josephus speaks of this as though it is the normative rule amongst his fellow kinsman. He does not mention it as being a new invention or even as a tradition only observed by the Pharisees as some would have us to believe.

### **Archeological Evidence**

I find it nothing short of fascinating that phylacteries dating to the time of Yeshua have been unearthed in the same location that the Dead Sea Scrolls were found; the Qumran Caves. The Essene sect is believed to have lived in this area, and the finding of tefillin or phylacteries here is evidence that the Essenes believed in a literal application of texts like Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18. While we do not read much of the Essenes in the pages of our New Testament, both Philo and Josephus speak of the sect as one which believed in Holy Scripture and practiced a life of piety or strict obedience to the commandments of Yahweh.

A Mr. Yigael Yadin had the privilege of personally examining a set of forehead tefillin on January 31, 1968. He writes in his book titled *"Tefillin from Qumran"* the following concerning this particular set:

With the acquisition of these tefillin it becomes apparent that they are unique in that for the first time - as far as is known from publications until now - the capsule still contained the slips. Furthermore, three of the slips were still securely tied and in a generally satisfactory condition. In this light I decided to devote special attention to the type of leather, the slips, the threads of tendon and hair... and to the technical problems of the system of folding and tying. With this purpose in mind, the tefillin were photographed at each and every stage of treatment; before opening, during opening (at times with the aid of a microscope) and after opening.<sup>14</sup>

Below is a picture of the open forehead phylactery in which was found four slips of parchment.



By looking at the above picture, one notices that the slip furthest to the left is smaller than its "container." It was concluded by Mr. Yadin that this slip was not the original slip for the tefillin. However, when examining the writing upon the other slips it was found that the traditional texts we have already spoken about (Ex. 13:1-10; Deut. 6:4-9; Ex. 13:11-16) were most definitely written on the individual parchments. Here is a graph showing all that was written on each parchment.

Slip #1	Slip #2	Slip #3
Ex. 12:43-51	Deut. 5:22-33	Deut. 5:1-21
Ex. 13:1-10 Deut. 10:12-19	Deut. 6:1-3 Deut. 6:4-9	Ex. 13:11-16

It was also concluded by Mr. Yadin that the original fourth parchment (not found immediately inside the tefillin) most likely would have contained Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and may have contained other

<sup>14</sup> *Tefillin from Qumran*, by Yigael Yadin, 1969, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, page 8.

passages along with it in light of the findings.

This find is certainly not alone. There have been around 27 tefillin parchment slips and about 25 leather tefillin cases found in the Qumran area.<sup>15</sup> All of this concurs with Yeshua's words in Matthew 23:5. There were those in first century Judea that obeyed the commandment of Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18 literally.

### **Should We Follow Tradition?**

When you begin to study the commandment concerning the phylacteries you will find that there is much tradition involved in wearing them. There are traditions concerning what hand they are to be put on, how they are to be wrapped around a certain finger, what color they must be, what you must think about while putting them on, which Scriptures must be placed into the phylactery, how many compartments there must be in the forehead phylactery, and in what order should the Scripture texts be written. This is just the tip of the iceberg.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *The Content and Order of the Scriptural Passages in Tefillin* (A Reexamination of the Early Rabbinic Sources in Light of the Evidence From the Judean Desert), Yonatan Adler, page 1.

<sup>16</sup> For a very good lesson on the Rabbinical practice of tefillin, I refer you to an audio recording titled "*The Mitzvah of Tefillin*" by

There are some people who feel that all of these traditions should be followed, I however am not one of them. While some of them may be harmless so long as viewed as tradition and not Torah, I do not believe Almighty Yahweh requires us to follow the decisions of men in relation to how we must or must not obey the written Torah. The command as found in the Torah is simply to bind the law as a sign on your hand and let the law be a symbol upon your forehead. The particulars of exactly how one should do this literally is not laid out in the Torah and thus is flexible. A person is at liberty when it comes to making a decision as to how they are to obey this commandment.

When one looks at the tefillin that are sold today verses the tefillin discovered in the Qumran area, it is very easy to see that there is a difference in the style and size of the two. The forehead tefillin mentioned earlier are very small in nature measuring in inches and centimeters while some of the tefillin that I've seen today look like they are the size of a camera you'd buy in the 1990's.

We also see when examining the parchments within the Qumran tefillin that there was flexibility when it came to including certain Scripture texts within one's tefillin. It is true that the four texts which

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Rabbi Nissan Dovid Dubov found at [chabad.org](http://chabad.org).

actually speak of the command were written therein (and I think they should be today) but additional texts (even the entire 10 commandments) were included upon the parchment as well.

Yahweh has told His people to keep commandments. He has told us to practice things like honoring the Sabbath day, making fringes on our garments, and binding His law on our hands and foreheads. When someone comes along and says that according to tradition you can't heal on the Sabbath, or you have to tie your tassels in a certain way, or you must only wear phylacteries of this style, it is adding commandments of men to the already given commandments of Yahweh. I believe what is most important is that we keep what Yahweh says to keep and not add to or take away from that. If someone feels *personally* that they should wear only one kind of tefillin, that is fine, so long as they do not force such tradition on other people.

### Conclusion

As we study the life of Yeshua our desire should always be to be more and more like him in any way possible. If this means literally binding the Torah to our hand and forehead then so be it. It certainly is no sin to do so, and it may very well be a commandment from the Father.

I say "may very well be" because I can honestly see how someone could read these texts of Scripture and

come to the conclusion that they are only metaphorical. While I do not agree with such a conclusion, I can still see how one could interpret the verses in that fashion. I am of the opinion though that there is an *extremely strong* possibility that the commandment is to be taken both metaphorically and literally. Therefore I have decided that I will obey in both areas. I will think about and practice the Torah, as well as bind it upon my hand and forehead each and every day that I live.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For more information you may visit our website and listen to sermon #325 titled, "What Are Phylacteries?"