

**Tassels: All About Them and Why I Wear Them**  
 2005; Revised 2022 (by Matthew Janzen)

I first started learning about Yahweh and His Torah in 1996. I learned that the one I called “God” had a proper name (Yahweh), and that the Sabbath and dietary law were still commandments for today. It was a very exciting (yet scary) time in my life. I was a young man, still a teenager, and some of what I considered to be my foundation was crumbling underneath me. How I lived my life on a day-to-day basis changed. What calendar you follow (how your schedule is arranged), what you eat, and what you call the Creator, these are all things that effect your life directly. So I started building a new foundation for life, and that foundation was based upon Almighty Yahweh, which meant that whatever He taught I did my best to follow.

In 1998 (after I married) I met this man who came to visit my father-in-law. My father-in-law got all sorts of “strange” visitors; strange to the world, but now I see that they were holy in the sight of the Almighty. I’m now one of those people, lol... by the Father’s mercy.



The man’s name was Orlando Smith. He had an impact on my life, so much so that I would later (2013) write a song about him titled, “Brother Orlando.” Man do I wish I would have taken a picture with Orlando; we didn’t have smart phones back then, and people didn’t carry cameras around with them all the time. I’ve got one picture of him (far right) with my father-in-law, from 2003 up at a Feast of Tabernacles in Pennsylvania. They were studying the calendar together that day.

I remember walking into my father-in-law’s living room and seeing a man sitting on the couch with 70’s style plaid pants on (pulled up high like Fred Mertz on “I Love Lucy”). He had a long white beard (my calculations place him around 71 at the time), and he had long side locks (that I would later understand as *pe’ot*, one interpretation of Leviticus 19:27a). He wore a bonnet or mitre (the one I remember was a Philadelphia Eagles ball-cap with the bill cut off), and he had these strings hanging from his belt loops, tied around his wrists, and one hanging around his neck.

He had books covering the coffee table there in the living room, and I later found out that he would sit there and study all day long until he dozed off to sleep. When he woke up he’d start back studying. I’m blessed to have met Orlando. I was amazed at the time, but I was only 17 years old. Yahweh had already took hold of my heart, but I still didn’t understand then how much I should appreciate a man like that.

We are called to honor men who dedicate their lives to the service of the Creator. All through Scripture certain men are held in high esteem. Men like Noah, Enoch, Moshe, Eliyahu, Ezra, Iyob, Daniel, and of course Yeshua of Nazareth. Sirach 39:1, 5, 7-9 (OSB) says this:

“How different is the man who devotes himself the study of the law of the Most High. He will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients and be occupied with their prophecies... He will give his heart to rising early before the Lord who created him, and will make supplication to the Most High; and he will open his mouth in prayer and make supplication for his sins... He will direct his counsel and knowledge aright, and he will reflect on his hidden things. He will reveal instruction in his teaching and boast in the law of the Lord’s covenant. Many will praise his understanding, and it will never be blotted out. His memory will not disappear, and his name will live through all generations.”

I believe brother Orlando fits this, and his memory and name is living through me today. I honor him in this study, because he’s the first man to ever tell me about the tassels. I was so “on fire” in ‘98, wanting to do everything I could for Yahweh. I didn’t have much knowledge, but I had a ton of zeal, and my zeal made me ask Orlando about the strings hanging from his clothes. He taught me about the tassels, mainly from Numbers 15, and that night I sat by my in-laws’ wood heater, made me a little loop on a hook at the side of the heater, and started tying my first tassel with yarn that brother Orlando had with him.

### **The Command**

Let’s look now to Numbers 15:37-41 and center in on some key points. I’m gonna’ read it first from the KJV (because that’s where I read it the first time).

And Yahweh spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am Yahweh your Mighty One, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your Mighty One: I am the Yahweh your Mighty One. (Numbers 15:37-41, KJV)

If you’ve ever heard me sing the song brother Arnold (my father-in-law) and myself wrote back in ‘98 - that very night after I tied my first tassels - you can see this is where I got some of the lyrics to the song. Let’s now read it from a more modern translation, the HCSB.

Yahweh said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and tell them that throughout their generations they are to make tassels for the corners of their garments, and put a blue cord on the tassel at each corner. These will serve as tassels for you to look at, so that you may remember all Yahweh’s commands and obey them and not become unfaithful by following your own heart and your own eyes. This way you will remember and obey all My commands and be holy to your Mighty One. I am Yahweh your Mighty One who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your Mighty One; I am Yahweh your Mighty One.” (Numbers 15:37-41, HCSB)

### **All Generations**

The commandment was given to the Israelites and was to be throughout their generations. That sounds to me like as long as Israel keeps populating the earth, as long as there are new generations of offspring, the tassels should be worn. I don’t see how an Israelite would ever read

that text and think, “I don’t need to wear tassels in my generation.” The ERV says, “You must wear these things now and forever.” The GNB says, “You are to do this for all time to come.” We will see later in our studies that Yeshua must have understood this to be true for he wore the tassels, and he lived almost 1,400 years after Moshe.

### Tassel or Fringe

The word tassel comes from what is probably one of the best known Hebrew words among Messianic and Hebrew Roots people: *tzitzit*. This word is only used four times in the Hebrew Bible, three times in Numbers 15 (in regards to this command) and one time in Ezekiel 8:3 where Ezekiel says the hand of Yahweh picked him up by a lock of his hair. If you think about that, a lock of hair forms a tassel or fringe. Ezekiel’s hair must have been long enough to pull.

The Deuteronomy 22:12 “sister command” doesn’t use the word *tzitzit*, but instead *gedil*<sup>1</sup> meaning “twisted threads or tassels,” only used twice in the Hebrew Bible - once in Deuteronomy and once in 1 Kings 7:17 about “wreaths of chain work” (KJV). Again you think of a tassel, but you also think of some type of interweaving together (like a braid). Because of this, people who have followed this command throughout history have looped or braided strands of thread together that formed a tassel at the bottom.

### Four Corners

The tassels go on the borders or corners of one’s garment. You’ll notice that there is no mention of *four* in Numbers. We get that from Deuteronomy 22:12 (HCSB), “**Make tassels on the four corners of the outer garment you wear.**” Deuteronomy though doesn’t say anything about the blue cord, we get that from Numbers. Here’s a case where in order to know how to fully obey a command we have to take into account each text that speaks to it.

But what are the “borders” or “corners” of your garment? The Hebrew word is *kanaph* and is defined (in part) by Brown, Drivers, and Briggs Hebrew lexicon (BDB) as “wing, extremity, edge, border, corner.” Gesenius’ defines it as “(1) a wing, (2) edge, extremity - (a) of a garment, the skirt... (b) the extremities of the earth... (c) the highest summit.” The word border or corner is an English interpretation of what is being commanded. The edge, extremity, or wing of your garment is better.

The word is used 109 times in the Hebrew Bible. A few examples are Genesis 1:21, “every **winged** fowl after his kind,” Exodus 25:20 “and the cherubim shall stretch forth their **wings**,” 1 Samuel 24:4, “Then David arose and cut off the **skirt** of Saul’s robe,” and Job 37:3 where Yahweh sends “lightning to the **ends** of the earth.” It’s most often translated as wing (KJV; or some form of that word) in relation to a bird.

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<sup>1</sup> This word comes from the root *gadal* meaning [BDB; SEC] “to grow, become great or important; to twist, that is to be or make large.” This again leads us to the conclusion that the tassels were long enough to pull, be considered like a lock of hair, and swing back and forth when attached to clothing.

Deuteronomy 22 teaches us that there was some kind of outer garment that had four wings, edges, extremities (or borders, corners). From this text derives the *tallit* (shawl, cloak) whether the *tallit gadol* (big; worn over clothes) or *tallit katan* (small; like a sleeveless shirt worn under clothes). The specific, required *tallit* is most likely later Jewish tradition; the original wearing of the tassels was on the already worn outer garment of the Hebrew.

Jacob Milgrom in his commentary on Numbers (JPS) writes, “The rendering ‘corners’ is really inappropriate here since, in ancient days, men wore closed robes or skirts just as did women. The term may, however, refer to the scalloped hems resembling wings or to the embroidered threads that hung from the hem at quarter points.” Jeffrey Tigay adds in his Deuteronomy commentary (JPS), “The four corners were probably either the points on the scalloped hems or the places at which vertical bands of embroidery met the hems. Both styles, sometimes with tassels attached, are visible in ancient Near Eastern murals.”

Some people read corners (in many Bible translations) and think of an actual English corner, but that cannot be substantiated as the only legitimate understanding of *kanaph*. I do believe in the wearing of a tunic (as seen in my study on modesty), but the *kanaph* of a tunic can be any edge, extremity, or wing of that tunic. Along the lower border is sufficient, and the same may hold true for the border of one’s sleeve. The ancient Israelites most likely wore them somewhere along the bottom hem of their tunic or robe.

Some in the Messianic Jewish community have spoken out pretty harshly against brothers who wear tassels on their belt loops. Modern pants were not worn by ancient Hebrews, but a belt loop is technically a modern day *kanaph*, as is the bottom of the pants, and I don’t ever condemn anyone for trying to keep a commandment the best they know how. Gently leading (mostly by example) produces much better results. I think if we get back to wearing the tunic, along the bottom hem of the tunic somewhere, in four places, would be the best application. I cut slits on the sides of my tunic (mostly for easier walking) that produce four actual corners, and that is one application of this commandment, but it certainly is not the only application. There is liberty where there is no specific written (fuller) explanation.

### **Why Blue?**

We learn from Numbers 15 that a blue cord (ribband [KJV], thread [NET]) is commanded to be placed in each tassel. There are other dark colors that stand out besides blue, like red or green, but Yahweh specified blue. I did not learn this until many years later (2013), but the blue thread is best understood as depicting the color of the Ten Commandment stones. We generally think of these stones as being granite, curved at the top, and fairly large, but this comes from modern drawings and paintings. I think of Charlton Heston walking down the mountain in the 1950’s movie, “The Ten Commandments.” Such is not the case though. It’s most likely that Yahweh wrote the Ten Commandments on sapphire stone, and that’s why a blue thread is specified for the tassel.

This is pulled primarily from Exodus 24:10-12, Ezekiel 1:25-28, Ezekiel 10:1, and Exodus 31:18. In those texts you will see that the throne of Yahweh is made out of sapphire. The elders of Israel see Yahweh (in some form) in Exodus 24:10,<sup>2</sup> and it says, “beneath his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.” Exodus 24 is after Yahweh spoke the Ten Commandments to all Israel, and after Yahweh spoke directly to Moshe in Exodus 20:22 through 23:33. After Exodus 24 Yahweh continues to give commands in regards to the building of the Tabernacle in Exodus 25-31, and then in Exodus 31:18 we read, “when He finished speaking with Moshe on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the testimony, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of Elohim.”

Back in Exodus 24, right after it mentions Yahweh standing on a sapphire stone (vs. 10), it reads (vs. 12), “Yahweh said to Moshe, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and stay there so that I may give you the stone tablets with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.’” The Hebrew is *ha eben* meaning “the stone,” so the stone being referenced in verse 12 is the one already mentioned in verse 10, the sapphire Yahweh was standing on.

Let me show you something from an Aramaic Targum<sup>3</sup> that dates back to around 1,500 years ago. The text I discovered in my studies here was a Targum of the Song of Solomon. The author of this Targum interprets the Song as a description of Yahweh's relationship with His metaphorical bride - Israel - and he believes it chronicles for us the journey's of Israel through the wilderness.

Following the text in this Targum we read Song of Solomon 1:11 - "We will make the plaits of gold with studs of silver." The Targum<sup>4</sup> then says: "Wherefore the word came unto Moses: Get thee up to the firmament, and I will give unto thee the two tablets of stone, hewn of sapphire of My glorious throne, bright as pure gold, arranged in lines, written by my finger, upon which are chased the Ten Words, refined more than silver purified seven times seven... and I will give them by thy hand unto the people of the House of Israel."

I also found a commentary on another portion of Exodus (34:1) that speaks of the commandments being written on sapphire tablets. This commentary dates back over 900 years

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<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint (OSB) at Exodus 24:10 reads, “And they saw the place where the God of Israel stood. Under His feet was, as it were, a paved work of sapphire stone and the appearance of heaven’s firmament in its purity.” Some Aramaic Targums present the elders of Israel as seeing the glory of Yahweh, but here in the Greek OT we see the understanding to be more about seeing where or the place Yahweh stood. They saw His feet, but not His face (compare Exodus 33:20-23).

<sup>3</sup> When the Jews came back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, many of them had been raised speaking Aramaic and no longer spoke Hebrew. The priests who still spoke Hebrew would read the Torah in Hebrew and then give a translation or explanation in Aramaic. It would be like me reading a portion of the Torah in Hebrew, and then translating and explaining it in English. Over time these Aramaic explanations came to be written down and sometimes they were read in the synagogues in the first century A.D. They can give us insight into how certain texts in the Torah were looked upon in ancient times.

<sup>4</sup> You can read this at [sefaria.org](http://sefaria.org) under “Aramaic Targum to Song of Songs 1” English translation by Jay Treat.

ago, written by a wise sage known as Rashi.<sup>5</sup> Before we read what Rashi says about Exodus 34:1, let's read the text itself: Exodus 34:1 "Yahweh said to Moses, 'Cut two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets which you broke.'"

This brings to mind when Moshe came off the mountain in Exodus 32 - after receiving the first set of stones - he was so angry that the people were worshipping a golden calf that he threw the stones down to the bottom of the mountain, smashing them to pieces. This is why Yahweh gives Moshe the command to cut two more stone tablets *like* the first ones.

Rashi comments on this text: "He showed him a sapphire mine from within his tent, and he said to him, 'The sapphire chips shall be yours,' and from there Moses became very wealthy." Evidently, Rashi believed that this second set of stones were made from sapphire; not sapphire stone cut from the throne of Yahweh, but nonetheless still sapphire. This was likely a common understanding of his time because he was (and still is) considered to be one of the most prestigious Rabbis in Judaism. If these stones were *like* the first ones, the first ones were made from sapphire.

I also (personally) believe this is why Yahweh made the sky blue. I think it's a reminder of His beautiful Torah that teaches us the path we should walk. It shows us the throne of Yahweh. He even says "heaven is My throne" in Isaiah 66:1, so the blue sky reminds us of the blue throne. A clear, blue sky produces the best feeling or mood in a person.

### **Blue = Tekhelet (H8504)**

If the Israelites were to place within each tassel a blue thread, where did they get the blue from? These are things we sometimes don't think about because we drive over to Michael's or Hobby Lobby and buy blue thread we don't have to dye ourselves. James Strong defined the word blue from the Hebrew *tekhelet* as "the cerulean mussel, that is, the color (*violet*) obtained therefrom or stuff dyed therewith." Gesenius' lexicon defines *Tekhelet* as "a shell fish... a species of muscle found in the Mediterranean Sea, with a blue shell, from which the cerulean purple is made." Cerulean comes from the Latin word *caerulus* meaning "dark blue," but the cerulean family is a wide range of blue shades. BDB tells us that *tekhelet* can range from a brilliant red to a deep purple. This wider semantic range is fine, and we can still view the blue in the tassel as similar to sapphire (deep, darker blue). Some do say that unless your blue thread is died with the secretions from a particular shell-fish the blue is unacceptable, but I don't think we should not be dogmatic about one particular shade of blue.

Jacob Milgrom in his commentary on Numbers (JPS) says, "There are three relevant varieties of the murex snail. The *Murex trunculus* gives a blue-purple or violet color, and the *Thais haemastoma*... and *Murex brandaris* give a red-purple color. Both the red-purple dye... and the blue-purple... were used in the

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<sup>5</sup> "Rashi" is not the full name of this man, it is only a combination of the three Hebrew letters, Resh, Shin, Yud, which stand for Rabenu Shlomo Yitzchaki - our Rabbi Solomon, the son of Yitzchak. He is believed to be a descendant of King David, and thus a Yehudim or Judahite. He was born in the town of Troyes in France, and later in life was great scholar of the Torah/Tanak writing commentary on many texts of Holy Scripture.

manufacture of the inner curtain of the Tabernacle (Exod. 26:1) and of the garments of the High Priest (Exod. 28:6, 15, 31, 33).”

Although this dye came to be an expensive one, which took about 12,000 of these snails to produce just shy of 1.5 grams, it must have been relatively easy for the Israelites to catch and obtain the dye for four strings of thread to go in their four tassels. Yahweh’s law is not too difficult to understand or observe (Deuteronomy 30:11). Thousands of Israelites would have been able to immediately and with ease do a short travel over to the Mediterranean Sea (from their location in the wilderness) and obtain the snails for the dye.<sup>6</sup>

If you absolutely want to acquire this particular blue dye you can do so as it has been rediscovered and produced by some in the Chassidic community in Israel.<sup>7</sup> I wonder though: if the Israelites first dyed a thread blue from the dye in this shell-fish, would any color resembling this dye be permissible? Does *tekhelet* refer to *only* the *dye* in this shell-fish, or does it refer to the *color* the shell-fish produces, and so any dye that produces that same or similar color is permissible? I tend to think the latter is the case. It’s neat to have threads of blue from the same shell-fish the Israelites first derived the blue from, but I think that any thread dyed blue that resembles or looks like *tekhelet* is permissible. Here again, if we do not follow Oral Torah as binding (like written Torah) then there is flexibility on how to obey the commandment.

### **Deuteronomy 22:12 - a Technical Point**

I want to jump over to Deuteronomy 22:12’s command for the tassels and show you something that I’ve only discovered in the last few years. It’s wonderful to be able to continue to study Torah and have more and more layers of understanding develop as you get older.

This point has to do with the adjoining of verses 11 and 12 in Deuteronomy 22. Reading them together from the JPS Tanach: “You shall not wear cloth combining wool and linen. You shall make tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself.” Hebrews read these two verses together and interpreted them as “the common Israelite is not to wear clothing that combines wool and linen, except for the tassels - in wearing those you may combine wool and linen.” It’s not that verse 12 cancels out verse 11 (as some have suggested), it’s that verse 12 is a lone exception to verse 11.

In my earliest years of Torah observance I read this command as one prohibiting the mixing or combining of any material. I got rid of all my clothes that were mixed and only wore 100% cotton, but I believe I was wrong in my understanding. That doesn’t mean I wasn’t genuine; I was honestly reading Torah and obeying it the best I knew how, but we keep learning, growing, and hopefully changing. We don’t change just to be changing, but we do make changes as we

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<sup>6</sup> This is proof that an unclean animal is unclean for eating purposes, not for other purposes. Just like the Tabernacle was covered with badgers’ or manatee (sea-cow) skins (Exodus 25:5; 26:14) and Yochanan the Washer was clothed in camel’s hair (Matthew 3:4), the single thread of blue for the tzitzit was dyed from the secretions of a shell-fish.

<sup>7</sup> Visit “Ptil Tekhelet” online.

learn better. After several years of Torah observance I heard people say that the prohibition was mixing a plant material (cotton) with an animal material (wool). That sounded pretty good, and when I studied the two texts<sup>8</sup> with this command closer in Hebrew, I saw that neither were speaking of all materials, only a combination of wool and linen. At that point I kept wearing (mostly) 100% cotton clothes, but I would buy my children any material clothes as long as they weren't a wool-linen mixture.

I've come to see that what is being prohibited here is not a blanket condemnation of combining wool and linen altogether, but a condemnation for the *common* Israelite to wear a wool and linen garment at the same time,<sup>9</sup> because that was a priestly or temple combination. Josephus in recounting this command says (Ant. 4.8.208): "Let not anyone of you wear a garment made of wool and linen, for that is appointed to be for the priests alone." A wool-linen garment wasn't a wicked garment, it was a special, holy garment or *combination* of materials.

Right after this command against combining wool and linen comes the command for the tassels. Listen to Deuteronomy 22:11-12 in the Aramaic Targum Yonathan: "You shall not clothe nor warm yourselves with a garment combed (carded) or netted, or interwoven with wool and linen mixed together. Nevertheless on a robe of linen thread you may be permitted to make fringes of wool upon the four extremities of your vestments with which you dress in the day." Rashi comments on Deuteronomy 22:12 by saying, "You shall make yourself twisted threads: even from a mixture [of wool and linen]. For this reason, Scripture juxtaposes them [these two commandments: sha'atnez and tzitzith]." Sha'atnez is the Hebrew word behind the phrase "a garment of divers sorts" (KJV; Deut. 22:11).

The *sha'atnez* garment was reserved for the priests and Temple service. In Exodus 28:6 (JPS) we read, "They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twined linen, worked into designs." Notice how the blue, purple, and crimson yarn or material is distinguished from the fine twined linen. The same is seen in Exodus 39:29 with the sashes for the priests. Exodus 28:37-39 shows the priest's linen turban was bound with a thread of blue (*petil tekeleth*), the same phrase used in Numbers 15. The same can be seen for the inner curtain in the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1-6).

The dyed threads are wool and they are being mixed or interwoven with linen thread for sacred use in the Temple. In his paper titled "Of Hems and Tassels" Jacob Milgrom writes, "The tassel with a thread of blue signified more than royalty or nobility... It also signified the priesthood. We may assume that the thread of blue was made of wool. The ancients had great difficulty in dyeing linen because the colors would run, so all dyed garments are assumed to be wool."

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<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11

<sup>9</sup> In all of this the question arises: should one garment of wool and another garment of linen not be worn at the same time? That is a possible understanding. For example, if I am wearing linen pants I would then not be allowed to wear wool socks. Another possibility though is that the garment being prohibited is not two separate garments (one of wool the other of linen) being worn at the same time, but a garment where the wool and linen threads are interwoven together, like in a tassel. Right now I lean toward this latter understanding.



White linen cords and dyed wool cords were actually found in the Dead Sea Scroll caves in the excavation at Qumran.<sup>10</sup> So what's happening here is Yahweh is making an exception to the rule of combining wool and linen when it comes to the *tzitzit*. Each Israelite is allowed to walk around with one priestly garment and thereby (as verse 40 states) "be holy to your Elohim." The holiness prescribed is one of a priest, but the tassels worn by each Israelite are a reminder to strive for priestly holiness, as in a general sense the whole nation is to be a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:5-6).

### **A Reminder**

In Numbers 15:39-40 we see that the tassels were to be looked at as a reminder of the commandments, to be obedient to them. Remember that the Israelites would have seen Moshe coming down from the mountain carrying those sapphire stones in his hands (they were probably much smaller than we've been accustomed to seeing in pictures). In later days, when the stones were housed in the Ark of the Covenant, or when they were lost to the nation, an Israelite could look at the blue thread and be reminded of the blue stones of the Covenant.

Notice the instruction here is to look at the tassel, be reminded of the commandments, and obey them - not becoming unfaithful or following your own heart and eyes. Our own heart and eyes are our own fleshly desires, what we see and feel in the natural. Our natural person is inclined to sin, but the tassel helps remind us that our body is not our own. We were created by the Almighty. He gave us our life. We should follow His desire for us, which is always for our good.

The word "unfaithful" in the HCSB (Numbers 15:39) is the Hebrew word *zanah* meaning "to commit fornication, play the harlot, commit adultery" (BDB; SEC). In a metaphorical sense we are married to the Almighty, meaning we are in a Covenant relationship with Him. Transgressing His teachings and instructions, going after our own heart and eyes is like a wife running around on her husband. The opposite then is that obedience equals faithfulness and fidelity.

### **How to Tie Them**

I'd like to point out something here that is not mentioned in the text. Nowhere in either Numbers or Deuteronomy are we told *exactly* how to tie the tassels. Later Judaism established a few different ways of their permissible tying. Some say that the lack of directive on how to tie the tassels proves there must be an Oral Torah - a verbal Torah that lived alongside the written Torah given to Moshe on Mount Sinai. The Oral Torah would then explain some of the specifics that are lacking in the written Torah.

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<sup>10</sup> Haaretz.com, *Rare Find - Fragment Containing Ancient 'Tekhelet' Dye Discovered Near Dead Sea*, by Judy Maltz. "In a rare discovery, scientists have confirmed that an almost 2,000-year-old piece of fabric found near the Dead Sea contains remnants of the Biblical blue color known as tekhelet. It is only the third piece of fabric ever found to contain this precious blue dye derived from snail glands. In accordance with a Torah commandment, tekhelet was used in ancient times to dye the tassels, or tzitzit, attached to the four-cornered garment traditionally worn by men, as well as the clothing worn by the High Priest during the days of the temple." See also Excurses 38 in the JPS Torah Commentary on Numbers by Jacob Milgrom.

I (and others) say that the lack of directions on the specific tying of the tassel shows that the exact how is a grey area, an area of liberty. If you want to tie your tassels like those in Judaism that is fine, but it is not a commandment. Yeshua himself reprimanded some in Judaism for how they were tying/wearing their tassels in the first century. He condemned them in Matthew 23:5 for *lengthening* their tassels. We know from the Hebrew that the tassels were like locks of hair or wreaths of chain work, so they had to have been long enough to swing back and forth and look somewhat like a chain. Some of the Pharisees must have been going above this and making their tassels extra-long in order to appear pious in the sight of others. Yeshua does say there, “They do everything to be observed by others,” so he is condemning their showiness and pride. (Take note that it’s okay to be observed by others if you have the right spirit and motive, Matthew 5:16.)

Some of my tassels are pretty short, with just a loop, knot, and tassel, maybe around 3 to 4 inches long. Others that I wear when I’m not working (or to a holy convocation) are longer, around 6-8 inches long, because I tie them how brother Orlando showed me years ago, to the numerical value of Y-H-W-H (10-5-6-5). I’ve seen all sorts of ways brothers and sisters have tied their tassels. I think as long as they are like a lock of hair and wreath of chain work, and as long as they have a thread of blue in them, they are fine. I do recommend that your white strings be linen or cotton, and your blue string be wool.<sup>11</sup>

### **Should Women Wear Tassels?**

I’ve often heard this question posed when the subject of wearing tassels comes up. I think it’s asked because the Hebrew for “children of Israel” is *beney Yisrael* literally meaning “sons of Israel.” The word *ben* (in some form) is used almost 5,000 times in the Hebrew Bible, and there are certainly cases where both male and female are intended. I always bring up Leviticus 11’s dietary laws where the *beney Yisrael* are told to eat clean (Leviticus 11:2). Are the women exempt from following a clean diet?

There are some commandments that are gender specific (for either side), but there are also some commandments that are gender inclusive. Just before the tassel command was given there was a man put to death for defiantly violating the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36). The Sabbath is certainly a command given to everyone; manservants, maidservants, and livestock were not to work on Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). With that backdrop I think it’s best to see the tassel command applying to all those that the Sabbath command applied to.

There is an Aramaic Targum to consider here, at Deuteronomy 22:5. The written Torah states (JPS): “A woman must not put on man’s apparel, nor shall a man wear woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to the LORD your God.” Targum Yonathan says, “Neither fringed robes nor tephillin which are the ornaments of a man shall be upon a woman; neither

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<sup>11</sup> In the modern Hebrew Roots movement it has become popular for tassels to be multi-colored while making sure that one string in the tassel is still blue. People reason that there is no command against various colors so long as the blue is retained. I can see this, but I also think that anciently the understanding was that the blue string “stand out in the crowd.” The other strings or threads were probably just the natural color of the wool off a sheep. Either way I think is permissible.

shall a man shave himself so as to appear like a woman; for every one who doeth so is an abomination before the Lord thy God.”

It is possible that I am wrong in my contextual exegesis of Number 15 and only men are required to wear *tzitzit* as Patriarchal leaders. It could be though that this Targum has in mind not the fringes or tassels themselves, but the particular *robe* that a male would wear with tassels on it. A female might wear her tassels in a different way than a male (I’m not sure).<sup>12</sup> It could be likened to the subject of distinction in dress. Men and women were given the same basic garment to cover their nakedness (ketoneth; Genesis 3:21), but still they were not to purposefully try to look like the opposite sex (Deuteronomy 22:5). So there is similarity yet difference. The same may be true for *how* the tassels are worn by either sex.

### **But They Were for Israel**

Many, when approached with these commands proclaim that because they were meant for Israelites, they do not apply to “Gentiles under the New Covenant.” What is usually overlooked by this contention is that the New Covenant was made with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 9:4-5; Hebrews 8:7-12). In fact, the entire law was only given to Israel (Psalm 147:19-20), but this does not mean non-Israelites were incapable of committing sin. The prophet Jonah told the Assyrian nation of Nineveh to repent (Jonah 1:1-2, 3:1-2). Daniel told the Babylonian King to put away his iniquities (Daniel 4:27). Jethro, a priest of Midian, offered sacrifices to Yahweh, and ate a meal with Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel (Exodus 18:10-12).

Of course someone not in a covenant relationship with Yahweh shouldn’t be wearing tassels, but when a foreigner joins to Israel there is one law for the native-born as well as the stranger (Exodus 12:48-49; Numbers 15:27-29). A person walking around proclaiming to be in covenant with the Almighty needs to be abiding by the covenant rules. I’m not saying all the rules have to be plopped in the lap of a new convert; no, Yahweh is gracious and merciful with us as we learn His instructions. But to say that part of the instructions you have the ability to keep do not apply to you is a sneaky way to weasel your way out of obedience. We should always be looking for ways to be obedient.

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<sup>12</sup> Tigay writes on Deuteronomy 22:12 (JPS Torah Commentary) “There is nothing in the commandment to suggest that it is limited to men, and some of the early rabbis held that tassels are to be worn by women, too. Women were eventually exempted when the halakhah endorsed the view that this is one of the commandments from which women are exempt because it must be performed at a fixed time of day.” Milgrom writes (Numbers, JPS Torah Commentary, Excurses 38), “Another historical fact revealed by early rabbinic sources is that *tsitsit* were worn by women. In fact, some rabbis actually affirmed that... women are required to wear *tsitsit* (Sif. Num. 115, Men. 43a) because they fall into the category of a commandment whose observance is not limited to a fixed time... (Tosef. Kid. 1:10)” It sounds to me like these two commentators contradict each other (I could be misunderstanding). Tigay appears to be saying the command for tassels is limited to a fixed time, and Milgrom appears to be saying the command for tassels is NOT limited to a fixed Tim. Either way, there is historical evidence that some Hebrews understood the command to be for both male and female, although the manner or style in which they were worn by either sex was different.

### Added Because of Sin?

Some quote the text of Galatians 3:17 to say that any law “added because of transgressions” is abolished under the New Covenant,<sup>13</sup> but this is a misuse of that text.

There were many laws that Yahweh implemented after or because of the sins of people. There was no clothing for men or women before sin (Genesis 2:25). After sin Yahweh made both sexes clothes (tunics) to cover their nakedness (Genesis 3:21). Manual labor for man (Genesis 3:17-19) and pain in childbirth for women (Genesis 3:16) were also added because of sin. The divorce clause of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was added because of sin. Capital punishment was put in place because of sin (Genesis 9:5). If you think that any law that gets put in place due to sin is now abolished then you should be walking around naked, not working, not divorcing for any reason, and letting criminals go free when they commit capital crimes.

We need to look at the context of Galatians 3; Galatians 3:10 specifies what law is being spoken of. It makes a point to mention **everything written in the book of the law**, a direct quote from Deuteronomy 27:26. In Deuteronomy 27 we have a list of laws given, and it is said that those who violate these laws will be cursed. We see here that the entire law is in view, and not just laws that came individually, at a later time than Genesis.

When Paul mentions the law that came 430 years after the promises were spoken to Abraham, he is not contrasting the (1) laws in existence in Genesis with (2) the added laws at Mount Sinai. He is mentioning the entire law being *codified* or *written down* and thus added as a whole in order to make transgressions clear. Many laws of Yahweh existed prior to Mount Sinai, but none of them were codified (added) until 430 years after the promises made to Abraham. It’s like you having a verbal instruction for your children that they keep disobeying, so you decide to write in down on a piece of paper and post it at various places in the home.

Lastly, those espousing this view of Galatians 3:17 don’t even believe their own view for the most part. For example, both animal sacrifices and physical circumcision existed before Mount Sinai, yet when questioning adherents to this view they do not believe that either of the two aforementioned laws are binding for today.

### We Now Have the Holy Spirit

The most popular objection I have heard towards the tassel commandment is that we have the Holy Spirit to remind us to obey Yahweh’s law, therefore tassels are not needed. Keep in mind

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<sup>13</sup> It’s beyond the scope of this paper, but I want to briefly point out that the New Covenant hasn’t even come to completion yet. It is true that the Messiah inaugurated the New Covenant, but a careful exegesis of Jeremiah 31-33 shows that the New Covenant has to do with the final restoration of Israel, safe in the New Jerusalem, with the fullness of the Torah being written on our hearts and minds, so much so that we don’t even have to teach each other to obey Yahweh. It also includes a restoration of the throne of David and priesthood of Levi. At this point it is possible that tassels will not be a requirement, but in our current state, still being susceptible to sin, tassels are needed.

though that the law to wear tassels is also a commandment the Holy Spirit could remind us to obey. I'm sure the Spirit is prompting me to put mine on every morning.

Contrary to popular, Christian opinion, people under the Old Covenant possessed the Holy Spirit. King Saul was said to have the Spirit come upon him (1 Samuel 10:5-11). Azariah had the Spirit come upon him (2 Chronicles 15:1-2), and he gave the King righteous instruction. In Psalm 51:11 David prayed to Yahweh: "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." The only way the Holy Spirit could be taken from David is if he possessed it to some degree.

In Luke's gospel we read that an angel of Yahweh spoke to Zachariah (Luke 1:15, HCSB) that the child that would be born of he and his wife Elizabeth would be "great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb." This came to pass when the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:41, 44), and even Elizabeth was said to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41) and began to prophesy.

It does seem that there would be some kind of change in the giving of the Spirit at the glorification (resurrection to immortality) of Yeshua the Messiah (John 7:39),<sup>14</sup> but we must remember that the Messiah indeed possessed the fullest portion of the Holy Spirit of any man *before* he was ever resurrected; he had it without measure (John 3:34-35; Luke 4:1).

### **Did the Messiah Wear Tassels?**

Many times I've asked people if Yeshua could have remembered to keep the commandments without the tassels. Everyone answers yes, and I agree, but he still wore them in obedience to Yahweh in Numbers and Deuteronomy. A man who was filled with more of the Spirit than you, I, and anyone else who has ever lived still wore the tassels.

In Matthew 9:20, 14:34-36, and Luke 8:44 we find that there were people who desired to touch the *hem* of the Yeshua's robe. Mark 6:56 says (KJV) "And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole."

The word border is the Greek word *kraspedon*, defined by various lexicons (Mounce, SEC, Thayer) as "margin, border, edge, fringe, tuft, tassel, extremity, prominent part." Some modern Bibles say something like, "that they might touch the fringe of his garment" (ESV, LSV, WEB, YLT). The HCSB and Weymouth say "tassel of his robe," and at the back of my 2004 HCSB

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<sup>14</sup> It's possible that what Yeshua spoke about in John 7 was what took place in Acts 1-2 where the personal disciples of Yeshua were given a promise of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. This happened in Acts 2 when they began to speak in languages they'd never learned as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.

Bible, the footnote for tassel says, “Fringe put on the clothing of devout Jews to remind them to keep the law; Nm 15:37-41.”<sup>15</sup>

The word *kraspedon* is used in direct reference to the fringes in Matthew 23:5 where we find that the Pharisees, “enlarge the borders of their garments (KJV)” to be noticed among men.<sup>16</sup> This word is also used in the Septuagint at Numbers 15:37-40 and Deuteronomy 22:12 in direct reference to the tassel command. It’s only other use in the Septuagint is Zechariah 8:23 where ten men from the languages of the nations take hold of the *kraspedon* of a Judean man saying, “We shall go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” The NETS Septuagint reads *hem*, and the LES reads “then let them seize the fringe of the garment of a Judean man.”<sup>17</sup> It is not difficult to see that Yeshua is this Judean man being prophesied about.

So being full of the Holy Spirit did not stop Yeshua from wearing tassels. How in the world can a lesser portion of the Holy Spirit that you possess stop you from wearing them?

Malachi 4:2 comes to life after learning all of this. Yahweh says there through His prophet (KJV), “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.”

The word *wings* is translated from the Hebrew word *kanaph*, the same word translated borders or corners in the text of Numbers 15:38. The healing people obtained by touching the tassel of Yeshua’s robe is a beautiful parallel.

In Luke 1:78 Messiah is described as the Day-Spring, which corresponds to the use of the word *Sun* in Malachi 4:2; both texts speaking to a rising of light. Almighty Yahweh is where healing power originates, but the tassel of Yeshua’s robe was the means through which the healing flowed. He was the sun of righteousness with healing in his tassels. It is no coincidence that Yahweh’s law (represented by the tassels) is said to be health to our navel, and marrow to our bones (Proverbs 3:8).

### **True Purpose and Intent**

We should be overjoyed to have the tassels as a gracious reminder from Yahweh. Yahweh shows faithful love toward those that keep His covenant [and] remember to observe His instructions

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<sup>15</sup> The IVP Bible Background Commentary by Craig Keener says in part on Matthew 9:20, “In an act of scandalous faith, she touches Jesus’ garment’s ‘fringe’ - no doubt one of the tassels (zizith) worn by Jewish men, in obedience to Numbers 15:38-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12, on the four corners of their outer garment, and later on the prayer shawl (tallith). The tassels were made of blue and white cords woven together.”

<sup>16</sup> The CEV reads, “they wear big tassels for everyone to see,” while the GNB has Yeshua saying, “Notice also how long are the tassels on their cloaks!”

<sup>17</sup> The footnote in the OSB at Zechariah 8:23 (which is translated from the LXX) reads in part: “The hem of the Jewish man’s garment refers to the prayer shawls worn by Jewish men, which had tassels representing all the commandments of the Law. The Hebrew text has ‘wings’ instead of ‘hem.’” The Hebrew Bible uses the word *kanaph*.

(Psalm 103:18). He will destroy all those that go whoring after their own hearts and ways (Psalm 73:27), which is one thing the tassels help us not to do (Numbers 15:39-40). The Apostle John tells us that the one who says he remains in Yeshua should walk just as he walked (1 John 2:6), and he walked around wearing tassels with a cord of blue.

In modern times we aren't exempt from battling with sin, the Devil, and our flesh. A good disciple still has problems with his or her carnal ways. The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 7:14-18 when he wrote about the law being spiritual but he being carnal. He said that the good things he desired to do were sometimes not done, and the bad things he didn't want to do were sometimes done, all because his flesh desired to sin. Surely, if Paul had problems with his flesh, he would have had no problem placing four reminders on the border of his tunic. We find that the Apostle Paul must have worn tassels, considering his words in Acts 25:8 as well in Acts 28:17. Hopefully as a believer in Yeshua, you will join with Paul and thousands of other faithful Hebrews in obedience to this command.