

Paul's Last Letters

1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy

Study 16 - March 4, 2016

Naples Friday Morning Men's Bible Study

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- I. Review**
- II. Paul's Instruction to Timothy about Teaching** (1 Timothy chapter 1)
- III. Paul's Instruction to Timothy about Spiritual Life** (1 Timothy chapter 2)
- IV. Paul's Instruction to Timothy about Leadership** (1 Timothy chapter 3)
- V. Paul's Warning to Timothy about Attack on the *Ekklesia***
 - A. The Coming Attack from Within - 1 Timothy 4:1-5**
 - 1. Gnosticism** - *"men who forbid marriage ..."*
 - 2. Legalism** - *"men who...advocate abstaining from foods which God has created ..."*

(See attached Article by Mottel Baleston, "They Broaden Their Phylacteries")
 - 3. Replacement Theology**
 - 4. False Teaching Regarding the Ministry of the Holy Spirit within the *Ekklesia***
 - B. Protection Against the Coming Attack from Within**

1 Timothy 4:6-16 - *How do we defend against the coming attack?*
- VI. Paul's Instruction to Timothy about Others**
 - A. Older and Younger Brothers and Sisters**

1 Timothy 5:1-2 - *How do we treat older and younger brothers and sisters?*
 - B. Widows**



They Broaden Their Phylacteries

by Mottel Baleston

If you are like many Christians, coming across a verse like the one above will make you wrinkle your forehead for a moment, assume it's something you won't understand, and then continue reading. However, you're reading *Ariel Magazine*, so you appreciate the fact that the original Jewish context of the New Testament will help you understand what this verse means. This article will discuss the phylacteries; in the next issue, we'll talk about the 'fringes'. Great, let's get started.

The word "phylacteries" in Matthew 23:5 is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *tefillin*. That word is well known in traditional Jewish circles, as it describes small leather boxes containing Scripture verses that are strapped to the arm and forehead of Orthodox Jewish men during their weekday morning prayers. **The practice of wearing the tefillin and meditating on the verses found therein is based upon four Scripture passages: Exodus 13:9 and 13:16 and Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18.** The set of tefillin contains very small hand-written scrolls on which those verses from Exodus and Deuteronomy are found.

You shall put these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall tie them for a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (Deut. 11:18)

But all their works they do to be seen by men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and lengthen the fringes of their garments. Matthew 23:5





While Orthodox men are usually careful to keep this observance, it should be remembered that only about 15 percent of the Jewish population worldwide is Orthodox. While traditions vary among various strains of Orthodox Jews regarding the exact design of the tefillin and methods for tying them for the morning prayers, their daily use does serve as a reminder of just how deeply these ingrained traditions give routine, structure, and direction to Orthodox life. The tefillin are not worn on Shabbat, as the routines for that day are very different than for weekdays.

Attached to each box are black leather straps that allow the person wearing the phylacteries to bind them on specific parts of their bodies. The tefillin that goes on the arm is called *shel yad* (*yad* being the Hebrew word for hand). It is placed on the upper left arm, and the suspended leather straps are wound around the arm, hand, and the middle finger. The tefillin placed on the head is called *shel rosh* (*rosh* being the Hebrew word for head). It is placed just above the forehead. The box of the arm-tefillin consists of a single compartment into which all four Scriptures, written on a single strip, are inserted. The head-tefillin has four separate compartments, one for each of the four verses.

The Hebrew letter *shin* is inscribed on the leather box of the head-tefillin. On the right side, the *shin* is written with three strokes. On the left side, a highly unusual *shin* is made with four staffs, which correlate to the four compartments and four verses inside the box. The craftsmanship that goes into a pair of tefillin is meticulous and governed by hundreds of traditional rules found in the Talmud. The cases are made from a single piece of thick leather, with the scroll strips being the special type of parchment that is also found in Torah scrolls. And just like Torah scrolls, a carefully trained scribe takes a quill pen, and using hand-produced vegetable ink based on

ancient formulas, carefully writes the verses, a process of artistic calligraphy that takes about 10 hours. For this reason, a new pair of tefillin will typically sell for a minimum of \$300.

I grew up in Brooklyn in a neighborhood where both religious and secular Jews lived. On many days, I would see young men from the Hasidic Orthodox Yeshiva (rabbinical seminary) out and about looking for Jewish boys and men who were not as religious as they. As soon as you answered that you were Jewish, they would ask, "Have you put on tefillin yet today?" They were seeking to encourage the observance of this *mitzvah*, this commandment. After coming to faith, I would always take the opportunity to stop and allow them to put the tefillin on me, and during the process, I would share my story of coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua! The conversations that ensued were amazing and deserve a special article all by themselves.

In the Deuteronomy 6 passage, the preceding verses talk of the well-known practice of placing a *mezuzah* scroll on the doorpost of Jewish homes. This was always understood to be taken literally, and the predominant evidence is that the practice of wearing the tefillin boxes as part of Mosaic Law was also taken literally, not figuratively. There are both Jewish and non-Jewish ancient writings that show





the practice to have been prevalent during the period of the second Temple, with several sources referencing its use in the first century BC.

That brings us to a very interesting point: Messiah Yeshua kept Mosaic Law perfectly. We have several instances in the New Testament that demonstrate this. In Matthew 9:20, we see that He wore the *tallit/tzitzit* fringes commanded in the Mosaic Law. While in Matthew 23:9 He cautions against the misuse of those fringes, it still must be kept in mind that Yeshua Himself, living under the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, voluntarily subjected Himself to all the provisions of that law. That means Messiah Jesus wore tefillin. However, it must be remembered that He wore them during the period in which the Mosaic Law was the rule of life for Jewish believers.

Believers today are no longer under the obligation to keep that law, because it came to an end when the dispensation ended at the cross. (For a detailed discussion of this, see Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Faith Alone: The Condition of our Salvation*.) This reinforces an additional lesson: simply because Jesus did something during the time He was on earth does not mean it is a commandment for believers today. This has become a disputed issue in parts of the messianic movement as well as the Hebrew roots movement, segments of which teach a current obligation to keep all of these physical items of the Mosaic Law. They pressure the doubtful with the following line: "If Jesus did these things, shouldn't you?"


Once it is understood that believers today are not under obligation of to keep the Law of Moses, these confusions and disputes are answered.

Now, back to the question at the top of the article . . . what did Jesus mean by *they broaden their phylacteries*? The phylacteries/tefillin case seems to have always been the same size, about two inches (45 mm) square. They are held onto the arm and

head by straps. In earliest times, those straps seem to have been thin. By the time that Messiah Jesus makes His earthly appearance, it was the custom of some Pharisees to use wider leather straps that were dyed black and buffed and polished to glossy sheen. In this way, their observance of this commandment would be noticed and seen by all. That is why Messiah charges them with putting on a religious show for appearance's sake.

Thus, we are reminded of the verse: man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)



While I dearly value my Jewish heritage and love and practice the culture (1 Cor. 9:20), I need to ask: Do I ever do things for the sake of religious appearance? Do you? It's a sobering question we must ask ourselves. As believers in Messiah Yeshua, we know His promise that He will write His word and His will upon hearts that are soft, hearts that are truly yielded to Him. Let's not broaden the straps of our phylacteries and do things for the sake of religious appearance, but let's be yielded so He can accomplish His will through our lives. 

Mottel Baleston is the director of the Messengers Messianic Jewish Outreach of New Jersey and a teacher at Ariel's School of Messianic Jewish Studies. This text is the first of a series of articles that will look at different items and terms found in the Scriptures, while offering an understanding of these topics from the Jewish context and culture of the first century and today.