

# **TZITZIT AND TALLIS, HISTORY AND THEIR PROPER USE**

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**(AND HOW TO NOT MISUSE THEM)**

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# What is this teaching about?

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Many believers who are new to Messianic or Hebrew Roots wonder about the fringes or tassels that YHWH commanded His people to wear. In this teaching we will look closely at the scriptures in regards to Tzitzit, who wears them, what they represent, etc. We will also look at the history of Tzitzit and the Tallit (prayer shawl). We will give examples of the different ways to wear them, how they were used, the controversy of women and Tzitzit, along with examples of how to not use them and some warnings about misusing Tzitzit.

We hope you enjoy this message

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# What does the bible say about Tzitzit?

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“You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with which you cover yourself.”  
**Deuteronomy 22:12**

# What does the bible say about Tzitzit?

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“YHWH spoke to Moses saying ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them they should make for themselves fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put on the fringe of each border a cord of blue; and it shall be to you for a fringe, that you may look on it, and remember all YHWH’s commandments, and do them; and that you not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to play the prostitute; that you may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.’ **Numbers 15:37-40**



# What were the fringes/tassels made of?

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During ancient times Tzitzit were made of linen and wool. Linen is made from the flax plant and it was laborious to manufacture but it was absorbent and valued for its coolness during hot weather. Linen was generally not dyed because of its composition (it did not hold colors well as other fabrics). The other fabric used was wool. Wool comes from animals such as sheep, goats, etc. Wool has greater bulk than other fabrics so its good for retaining heat. During the Old Testament times, colored strings were made of wool because they held dyes better than linen.

The next thing we will look at is the cost of dyeing fabrics in ancient times.

# The cost of Dyeing fabrics

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Obtaining dye during biblical times was labor intensive and very costly. Gentiles and Jews coveted the dye which was as valuable (or more) than gold. Some sources say it was \$36,000 a pound in today's money. Most dyes were used by those of nobility or high rank. Wool dyed with tekhelet was worth up to twenty times its weight in gold!



The blue was taken from the Murex Trunculus snail and was so important it was imprinted on a number of Roman coins (the eagle has a Murex snail between its claws). High castes of Rome wore dyed garments to show their status within the State.

# Purpose of wearing Tzitzit?

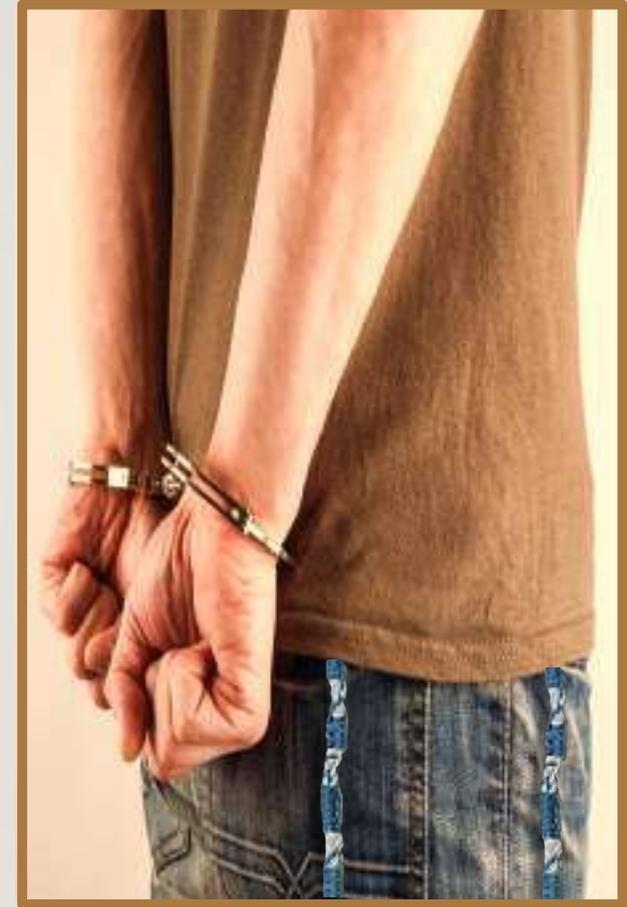
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**Remembering** – this relates the principle that when one sees (one who wears them and one who sees them) the Tzitzit they should remember to observe all the commandments of YHWH. It encompasses all the applicable commandments a person should observe during their day.

**A Sign** – it's a mark of being chosen and or grafted into Israel. It's a mark of holiness, citizenship and the wearer should walk according to the commandments of their king.

Wearing Tzitzit without keeping the other commandments is shameful and brings dishonor to the one who saved us. Don't wear Tzitzit and continue in sin.



# Purpose of wearing Tzitzit cont.

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**Responsibility** – Tzitzit not only raised a person in holiness, it granted privilege (access to the tabernacle) but more importantly it designated one’s responsibility to YHWH’s covenant. Following His commandments included responsibility to YHWH but also to the welfare of the people as a whole (our neighbors).

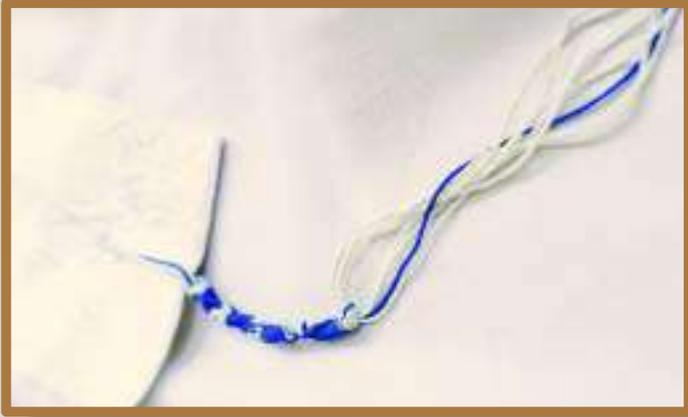


**Attitude** – our attitude should not one that desires power, control or that we are “holier than thou”. Rather our attitude should be one of commitment, determination and compassion as we observe the commandments of YHWH in a spirit of humility and joy. That results in personal fulfillment as we elevate the world around us as servants with compassion, the same compassion that YHWH showed us.



# Who wore Tzitzit during biblical times?

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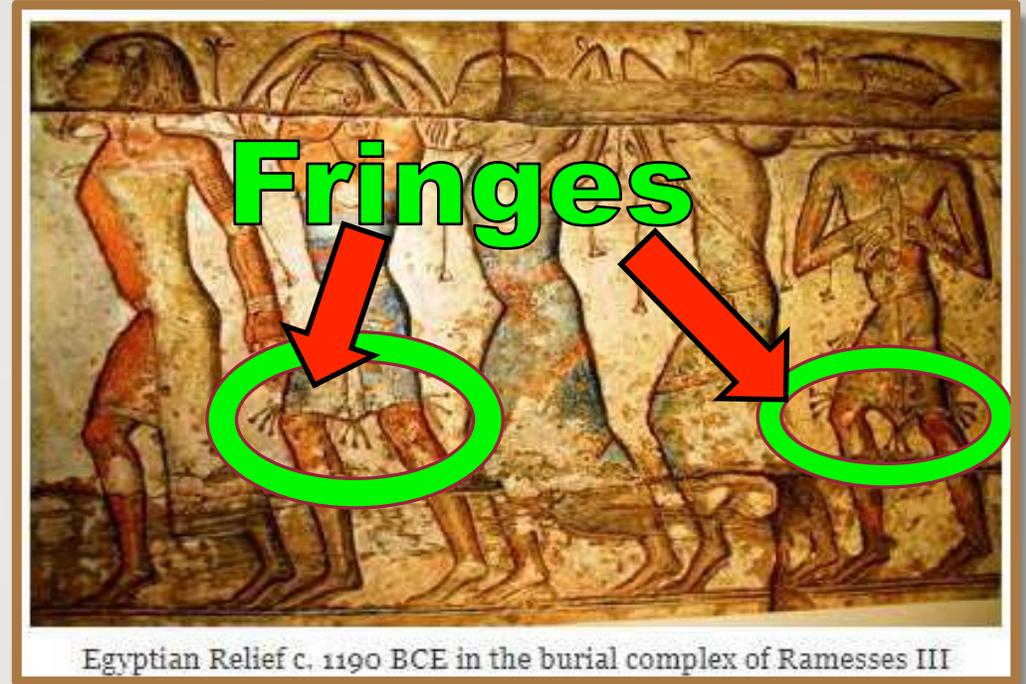


Tzitzit were worn by priests, kings, nobility and those of royal bloodlines. YHWH took the Hebrews and foreigners who were slaves of Egypt, delivered and elevated their positions to that of “priests and kings” (read Exodus 19:6, 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6 and Revelation 5:10).

YHWH stated He would be their God and they would be His people. In a sense He would be their “national” god. In pagan systems no commoner was allowed to worship or even go into the temple of national god/s. YHWH not only destroyed the gods of Egypt via the ten plagues but He also overturned the caste systems of the ancient world by choosing a people for Himself. So when YHWH gave the commandment for the people wear Tzitzit, it was a sign of royalty, authority and membership.

# Caste Systems, Fringes and Tzitzit

Many people think YHWH did something new when He gave the command to wear Tzitzit. However when we research the cultures during that time we see many cultures used fringes to identify royalty, nobility, bloodlines and status with their caste system/s. We see this in ancient Egypt when the Hebrews were slaves of Pharaoh.



In these caste systems slaves did not wear tassels/Tzitzit. That was reserved only for the Kings, Priests, etc. If a slave tried to wear the clothes or fringes of another caste, they would be sentenced to death. Slaves had no rights, days off or dyed garments (as colored dye was very expensive) during ancient times.

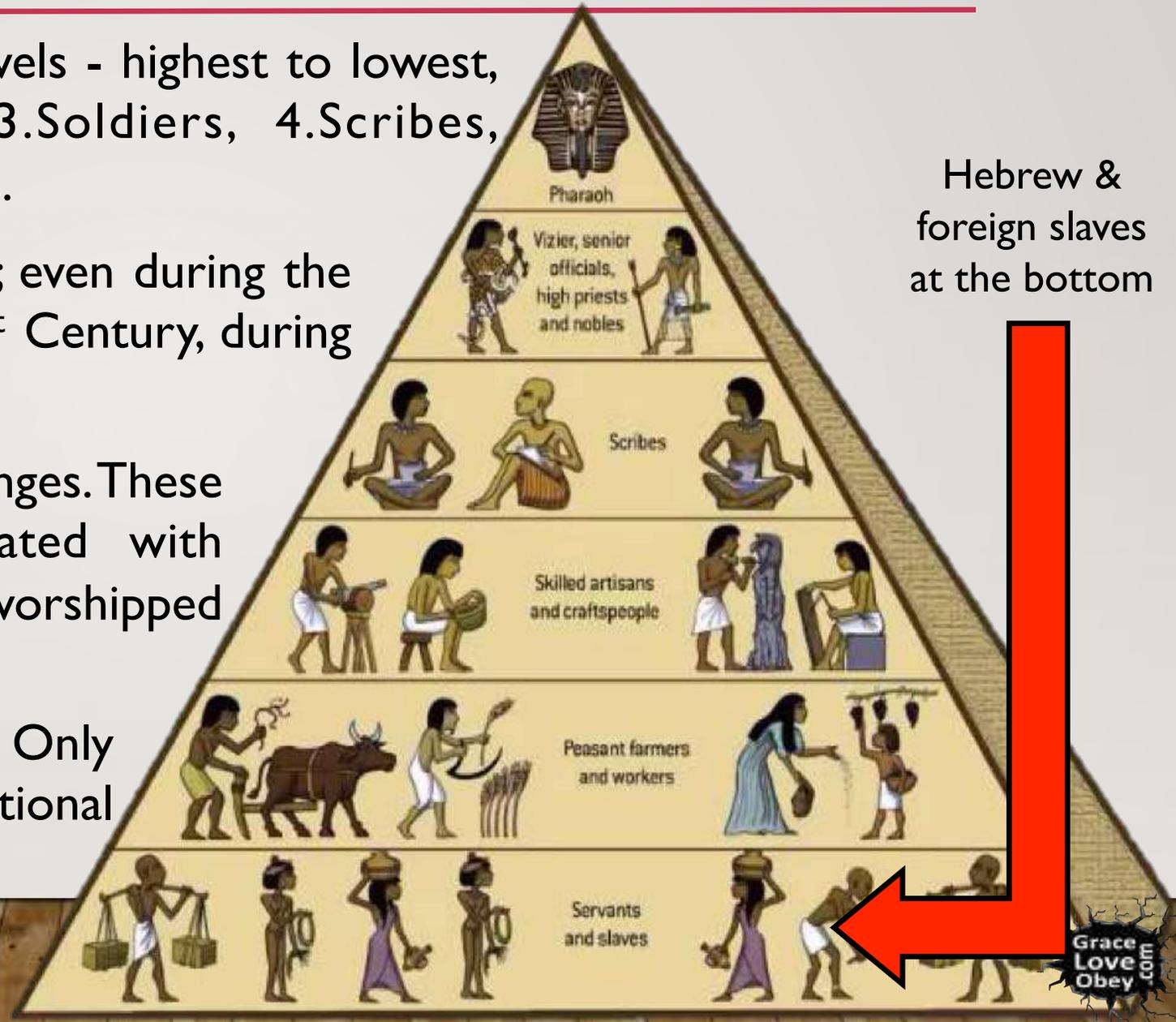
# Caste System of ancient Egypt

The Egyptian caste system had seven levels - highest to lowest, 1. Pharaoh/King, 2. Priests/Nobles, 3. Soldiers, 4. Scribes, 5. Merchants, 6. Farmers and then 7. Slaves.

We see similar caste systems in history; even during the times of Rome and in Judaism of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, during the time of Yeshua (Jesus).

Higher castes had dyed garments and fringes. These colored fringes were usually associated with national gods and those who served & worshipped them.

Slaves could not worship national god/s. Only high castes were allowed access to National god/s.



# Prosecution and Prohibition of Dyes

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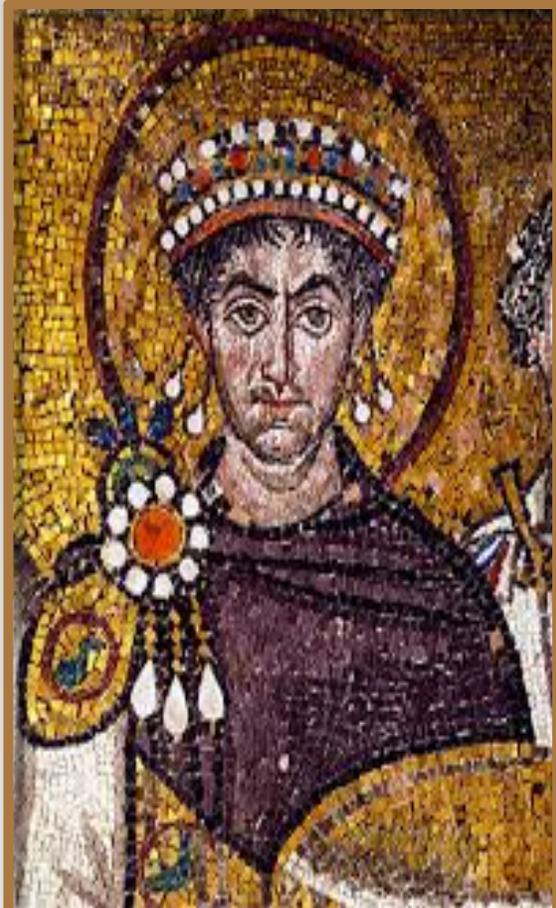
The wearing of blue, its source and process of making the blue dye was lost for a couple of reasons, Persecution and Prohibition. Throughout time we see restrictions of dyes from 100 BCE to the 8<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

- Caesar (100-44 BCE) & Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE) restricted use to only governing classes
- Nero (37-68 BCE) issued decree only the emperor had the right to wear purple or blue
- Constantine (337-362 CE) strictly enforced restrictions of the use of tekhelet
- Roman Edit (383 CE) that manufacture of purple and blue dyes as a state monopoly
- 639 CE - the Arab conquest of Israel ended the dye industry

The prohibition of the blue/tekhelet dyes combined with persecution of Jewish believers brought an end to the wearing of Tzitzit with tekhelet blue cords.

# Prosecution and Prohibition of Dyes cont.

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**Justinian I 482 -565 CE**

Most people don't know that the punishment for having blue and purple dye was severe. So much so under the Roman Emperor Justinian I, he declared no one except the emperor could wear blue and certain other colors...

“No private person shall have the right to dye either silk or wool with the colors called blatta (purple), oxyblatta (deep purple) or hyacinthine (blue), or sell it after it has been dyed. If anyone should sell wool dyed with the colors aforesaid, he is hereby notified that he will incur the risk of losing his property and his life”

Codex Justinianus 4:40:1

# Why are there white Tzitzit?

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With the combined persecution and prohibition, eventually the source and process of making the blue dye was lost. Orthodox Jews decided to not wear the blue thread. Another reason to wear only white Tzitzit stemmed from the fact there was also no temple. Later many Jews moved away from Israel during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century. Despite there being other blue dyes, the original source and process was deemed the only acceptable way to observe the commandment.

However, within our lifetime the source and process of the Tekhelet blue was re-discovered. In 1913 Rabbi Herzog found the Murex Trunculus and the dyeing process was completed by Rabbi Tavger in 1988. With that being said, many Orthodox and Messianic believers are incorporating the blue back into the Tzitzit and Tallit. We follow scripture which commands the wearing of the blue thread in our Tzitzit. Also note that scripture does not say the other threads have to be white (tradition).



# Wool and Linen Tzitzit: What is Shatnez?

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Shatnez is the woven clothing that contains both wool and linen. There are commands in Torah that forbid such mixing (ref. Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:9-11). However as we learned linen does not hold dyes well and in archeological finds of the 1<sup>st</sup> century we see Tzitzit made with wool and linen. With this in mind, we see an amount of shatnez in Tzitzit, greater amounts of shatnez in the sash of the priests and even more in the garments of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest.

Now I suggest any offering or sacrifice given in the Tabernacle/Temple required those who entered to have a certain level of holiness. Holiness that came from the wearing of Tzitzit for everyday people. I think this applied to the Hebrews and foreigners who came and gave offerings and sacrifices (yes foreigners could enter the Tabernacle and make sacrifices for sins of ignorance, thanksgiving offerings, etc.). This is plausible because YHWH calls us to be holy as He is holy and shatnez is seen in the other Tabernacle garments.

# Wool and Linen Tzitzit – Shatnez cont.

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During the Bar Kokhba Rebellion (132-136 CE) led by Simon Bar Kokhba (Bar Kokhba meaning “Son of a Star”) against the Roman Empire, we have archeological finds from the first century where Jewish believers were found with shatnez Tzitzit. So it is entirely possible that Yeshua, His disciples, Paul and other believers wore shatnez Tzitzit during those times.

Does this mean one must wear shatnez Tzitzit today? Personally we don’t think so. The commandment only requires a cord of blue and does not specify that the Tzitzit are to be shatnez (made of wool and linen). With that being said, we believe its okay to shatnez Tzitzit or Tzitzit that do not contain shatnez as dyes are very common in our world today.

Some people have a problem with this but our stance is that when the Messiah returns, He will clear up any misunderstands or confusion on this matter. Till then let us wear Tzitzit as scripture commands with the materials we have at our disposal today.

# Different ways to wear Tzitzit

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There are many ways to wear Tzitzit. Some wear them on their belt loops, others with belt attachments and some with clips. Others wear a more traditional garment like a Tallit Katan (normally used by Orthodox Jewish believers). Some tie them to T-shirts, blouses, etc.

Now there are many ways to attach Tzitzit to clothing and some may disagree on how, but in any event they are being worn in obedience to our King. To use them in another other fashion would demean everything that Tzitzit stand for and the One who commanded us to wear them.



# More info on Tzitzit

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The wearing of fringes showed people who's authority you had and or were submitted to. They were indicators of high rank, status and or royal bloodlines of the wearer. What's amazing is YHWH calls us to wear Tzitzit; He raised us up in holiness, to have a relationship with Him, to be on the same level as priests and kings. This was unheard of, an entire nation of people having fringes showing that all were nobility and high ranked. Jacob Milgrom, a leading expert on Tzitzit, stated that YHWH elevated all His people, that He “combined nobility with priesthood” so that all Israel was “not to rule man but to serve YHWH”.

However YHWH went a step further and declared all His people, those that followed Him and His covenant were better than His sons and daughters...

“To them I will give My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.” Isaiah 56:5

“And I (YHWH) will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty”” 2 Corinthians 6:18

# More info on Tzitzit cont.

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Scripture shows a purpose of wearing Tzitzit, is to remind us to obey the commandments of YHWH in everything we do... “that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them... that you may remember to do all My commandments, and be holy for your God”. Some teachers have said the ‘you’ in this passage is plural indicating as we live in a community of oneness, when you see the Tzitzit on others, it’s a reminder for you to obey the commandments and walk in holiness in everything we do (and visa versa).

The Tzitzit are a reminder to both the wearer and the one who sees them. The word for ‘look’ is the Hebrew word ra’ah meaning to see, to gaze intently at. The Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon also defines it as having an aspect of “respect for the majesty of YHWH”. It also has a meaning “to be pleased with what one sees”.

In summary not only are Tzitzit a reminder to obey the commandments, but to recognize who we are in the Kingdom of YHWH. We are not only citizens but better than sons and daughters; so our actions should reflect that fact. Tzitzit are also said to represent the throne of YHWH and that His throne will again be established on earth. We are ambassadors for the coming Messiah, who will reign from David’s throne. As we look at Tzitzit, we also look forward to the return of our Messiah and King, who will reign in the New Millennium.

# History of the Tallit – the prayer shawl

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(A) Originally an outer garment was worn by those in ancient biblical times. The garment was used to protect them from the elements. The Tallit is a garment which has Tzitzit tied to each of the four corners (B). Over time clothing changed as people moved to different climates & blended into different cultures. However the Tallit remained as a garment specifically used for times of prayer by Jewish and Messianic believers. Some claim the Tallit is a pagan item but history shows this is not the case.



# History of the Tallit – the prayer shawl

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The Tallit (modern Hebrew) or Tallis (Ashkenazic) is a fringed garment with Tzitzit. When the mixed multitude (Hebrews and foreigners) were delivered out of Egypt they did not have Tallits because they were slaves. The origin of the Tallit most likely came from the 'abayah' wore by Bedouins and other nomadic people during those times. It was only later that the Tallit we see today, emerged over time. It went from an item that protected the wearers from the elements to a garment worn during times of religious gatherings and daily prayer.

In the book “The Ancient Jewish Shroud of Turin by John Lupia, it shows the historical development of the Tallit and its design changes from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to 1,000 CE, to what we have today. The fact is there are cultural changes around the world but we must remember that it is ok as long as they do not take away from our call to obey the command to wear Tzitzit.



# History of the Tallit – the prayer shawl

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Some people claim the modern day Tallit is a ‘tradition of men’ and thus should not be worn. However nothing in scripture states that we cannot wear clothing from ancient biblical times. Others say it’s a pagan item of clothing but back during ancient times, everyone wore such an item (including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others) so they cannot be classified as pagan.

If we are not supposed to wear “pagan clothing” then we need to stop wearing pants as they were an invention of pagans. BTW pants were invented by the Persians as a gender neutral clothing item specifically made for horse riding. When people are dogmatic about such things it only creates division with the body.



# How a Tallit is used

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The Tallit today is generally used during times of religious services, holy convocations and times of prayer. Over time people have come up with specific ways and prayers when one puts on Tallit.

Before one puts on a Tallit they should inspect the Tzitzit to make sure they are in good condition. The following prayer, which is not a biblical command, is said...

Read from left to right:

“Ba-ruch a-tah Ado-nai El-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ha-olam A-sher Ki-de-sha-nu  
B'mitz-vo-tav V'tzi-va-nu L'hit-a-teif Ba-Tzi-tzit”

**English:** Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to wrap ourselves in Tzitzit.

Some Jews and believers will cover their face and or head with the Tallit, then say the blessing. Again there is no biblical command for this, but then again there is nothing saying one cannot say a prayer. Remember in the Apostolic writings we are told to pray in all things ref. Philippians 4:6.

# HOW TO NOT MISUSE AND ABUSE TZITZIT AND TALLIT

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The following pictures are only examples of what not to do with Tzitzit and or a Tallit.

# Don't misuse or abuse Tzitzit or Tallit

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Some people like the thought of having “Jewish” decorations in their home. However we need to remember anything which has Tzitzit on it, including a Tallit, is not to be used as a decoration for furniture.

**Do not use as a cover for an accent table.**

# Don't misuse or abuse Tzitzit or Tallit

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**Do not use a Tallit  
as a table cloth.**



# Don't misuse or abuse Tzitzit or Tallit

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**Do not use a Tallit  
as a shower curtain.**

# Don't misuse or abuse Tzitzit or Tallit

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**Do not use a Tallit  
as a chair cover.**



# Don't misuse or abuse Tzitzit or Tallit

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**Do not use a Tallit as a cover for a dresser.**

# Tzitzit and Tallit are for People

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God commanded that Tzitzit are for people to remember and do all His commandments, and to be holy to YHWH ref. Numbers 15:37-40.

They are meant for His chosen people, not for furniture decorations. They are meant for a royal people ref. 1 Peter 2:9, to elevate people in regards to holiness. Notice the people of YHWH were commanded to wear Tzitzit before the tabernacle was built. Moreover they are symbols of YHWH's authority and kingship over His set apart (holy) people. As His people, we are ambassadors of the King, who will be given a name better than sons and daughters ref. Isaiah 56:5 by YHWH (also read 2 Cor 6:18). Tzitzit were never used as decorations.

# Warning against misusing Tzitzit and Tallit

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Misusing them for anything other than people wearing them as commanded is not acceptable. Misusing Tzitzit and or a Tallit is taking something that is holy and meant only people is dishonoring to our Messiah and King! Taking Tzitzit and using it as a decoration is rejecting the holiness our King has bestowed upon us.

We are a royal people and when we misuse Tzitzit we are rejecting His authority and command. In a sense we are being idolatrous in that we are overruling the decisions made by the Most High. Remember Satan also rebelled and looks to change YHWH's ways and laws ref. Daniel 7:25.

# Questions and Answers

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**Question:** “Can I use a Tallit that has white Tzitzit as a decoration, wall hanging, furniture cover, etc.?”

**Answer:** The answer is no because Tzitzit were only worn by people to represent authority, identity, honor and status. Also by using a ‘man-made tradition’ it puts a bad light on the Tzitzit with the blue thread. For those who believe we should not condone the ‘traditions of men’ why would you want to use that as a decoration? We suggest following scripture which shows Tzitzit are only be worn by people. After all YHWH says to follow Him and His ways.

# Questions and Answers

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**Question:** “Can I put Tzitzit on my shoes, car, etc.?”

**Answer:** The answer is no because Tzitzit are to be worn on the corners of your garments and not shoes. If you put them on your shoes, it would be misusing them (yes someone actually made mini Tzitzit for their shoes).

We also don't recommend putting Tzitzit on your car for the same reasons as mentioned earlier in this teaching. They are meant for people and not things. To do otherwise would be to disgrace our Messiah and King.

# Women and Tzitzit

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The topic of women wearing Tzitzit has been long debated. Most Orthodox rabbis today say women should not wear Tzitzit because the command was given to the Sons (bene) of Israel. However the Hebrew word bene, which they say refers to sons, can also mean to a group of people consisting of men and women. We also need to consider the Sabbath, Feasts of YHWH and many other commandments are also given to the sons (bene) of Israel. So does that mean women are exempt from observing the Sabbath, Feasts and other commandments given by YHWH? I don't think so.

The Talmud shows that Rabbi Judah tied Tzitzit on all his women; his wife, daughters and female servants. He even said the prayer associated with donning Tzitzit. Later Rabbi Shimon ruled Tzitzit was a time based commandment (they should only be worn by men during certain times). Women were then exempt because men represented the entire family. Some Rabbis also say that its not specifically forbidden for women to wear Tzitzit but it is frowned upon.

# Women, Tzitzit & Male clothing

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Another traditional reason why women shouldn't wear Tzitzit is that it goes against the following commandment...

“A woman shall not wear men's clothing, neither shall a man put on women's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to YHWH your God.”

Deuteronomy 22:5

The simple answer is this... have someone make a Tallit Katan and or a Tzitzit blouse for women only, then there is no worry about breaking this commandment. With that being said, in Israel today there is a women's movement who wear 'a woman's garment with Tzitzit'. It is causing a big stir within Orthodox Judaism, but I don't see this slowing down.

Also at the time this commandment was given, one interpretation is that if a man wore woman's clothes it was in an act of worshipping a false god/s through temple prostitution. In other words YHWH was forbidding certain acts following Him in His kingdom (do not worship Me in their ways ref. Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and 12:4).

# Tzitzit and your local Assembly

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Since there are many ways to wear Tzitzit, on belts, belt loops, using a Tallit katan, an Orthodox approved garment, or attached in some other way to pants, shirts, etc. we also need to be flexible in our application. Some assemblies have ways of wearing Tzitzit and Tallit. If you belong to that assemble, then it is given that members will follow how they do things. Some Messianic assemblies have a more orthodox way of doing things for the reason of making Jews, who do not believe in Yeshua as the Messiah, to bring them to jealousy ref. Romans 11:4 & 11. When it comes to Hebrew Root assemblies, they are more flexible with how people wear Tzitzit.

If you have further questions on this, we suggest you meet with the leadership of your assembly and discuss the matter. Regardless of how people wear Tzitzit, we are glad to see more and more believers walk in the commandments of YHWH. It's a sign that the return of the Messiah is getting closer and closer.

# Why do people misuse Tzitzit or Tallit?

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**Ignorance:** some who have started observing Torah just don't know. We are all learning, growing and maturing in our walk. Many are zealous for the things of YHWH but they are might not be well versed in the scriptures. This could a reason for why they are misusing Tzitzit and or Tallits. In this case we need to educate people so they can better walk in YHWH's ways.

Then there are those who have been informed and still refuse to listen to reason, they are...

**Rebellious:** they don't care what YHWH's commands are in regards to Tzitzit. Thankfully there are not many but there are those who refuse instruction and keep misusing the holy things of YHWH.

Our suggestion is to research, learn, repent and ask forgiveness of things we are doing wrong, then start doing what is right in the eyes of YHWH and His word.

Whether in our home or in a public display, we need to remember to never misuse Tzitzit or any garment with Tzitzit as coverings for furniture, podiums or anything common item. We are called by Paul to bring Jewish believers who don't follow Yeshua the Messiah, to jealousy...

“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.” Romans 11:13-14

How can we create them to jealousy if we misuse Tzitzit by taking a holy item given expressly for people and casting it aside to cover some furniture? How can we be ambassadors of the King when we cast aside the one thing that He commanded us to wear? We must remember not only to keep the commandments of YHWH but also to not abuse the ones He gave us.

# Scriptural warnings

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“You shall observe to do therefore as YHWH your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which YHWH your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.” Deuteronomy 5:32-33

# Scriptural warnings

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“Beware lest you forget YHWH your God, in not keeping His commandments, and His ordinances, and His statutes, which I command you today... and you forget YHWH your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage... and lest you say ‘My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth.’ But you shall remember YHWH your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth; that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is today. It shall be, if you shall forget YHWH your God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. As the nations that YHWH makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you wouldn’t listen to YHWH your God’s voice.” Deuteronomy 8:11-20

# Scriptural warnings

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“Be diligent to present yourself by YHWH, a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth. But shun empty chatter, for it will go further in ungodliness, and those words will consume like gangrene... Now in a large house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are for honor, and some for dishonor. If anyone therefore purges himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, and suitable for the master’s use, prepared for every good work... Perhaps YHWH may give them repentance leading to a full knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the devil’s snare...” 2 Timothy 2:15-26

# Scriptural warnings

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The final example I want to leave with you is the account of Korah in Numbers 16:1-50.

After YHWH gave the command to wear Tzitzit, Korah and other princes of Israel rebelled against the positions YHWH assigned to Moses and Aaron. Korah said “all the people are holy” (his excuse for coveting a higher position) and “why do you exalt yourself above the assembly” (himself wanting to be exalted). This is encroachment – trying to attain or keep a position that they are not supposed to have. Those who claim to be Levites when they are not, are those who misuse holy things, etc.

# Tzitzit and your Local Assembly

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One thing we don't recommend is that believers misuse the ability to wear Tzitzit regardless of how you wear them, as a way to cause division within the body. Don't be dogmatic about it. Do not tell someone they are not a believer if they don't hold to your exact style or way of wearing Tzitzit. As we said before, we suggest you meet with the leadership of the Messianic/Hebrew Roots assembly and follow their recommendations.

Till then wear and use Tzitzit for the right reasons, to honor our Messiah and to be an ambassador of the King, and to be obedient for His command for you to be holy as He is holy.

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