

119

MINISTRIES

“The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”

Tallit and Kippah

Sometimes 119 receives questions about the tallit and the kippah. Why are these items used? Is it scriptural to wear them? And, should we be wearing them if we want to obey God? In this teaching, we will address these questions concerning the tallit and the kippah.

The Tallit

Let’s start with the tallit. The tallit is a four-cornered cloth that has tassels, called *tzitzit*, tied onto its corners. There are two forms of the tallit: one is the tallit gadol, or large tallit, which Jews cover themselves with when they pray at synagogue. The other form is the tallit katan, or small tallit, which Jews wear underneath their regular clothes during the day. The purpose of the tallit is to fulfill the command to wear tzitzit (*Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim 8:11), which is found in Numbers 15:

Numbers 15:37-40

The LORD [YHWH] said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels [tzitzit] on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD [YHWH], to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.

When this command was given, it was not unusual to have clothing with tassels or fringes on the corners. Many ancient cultures, from the Egyptians (Bertman, Stephen. “Tasseled Garments in the Ancient East Mediterranean.” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, vol. 24, no. 4, The American Schools of Oriental Research, 1961, pp. 119–28), to the Assyrians (Kim, Moon-Ja (2010) “A study on the Assyrian Costume” *Fashion Business* Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 1-19), to the Greeks (Homer, *Iliad* 2.446), wore clothing with corners that were decorated with fringes or tassels. It was a fairly simple matter to add a cord of

blue to these clothes in order to obey God's command from Numbers 15. However, later, when clothing styles changed, and fringed and four-cornered garments were not as common, Jews started using the tallit as a way to keep the command to wear *tzitzit* (*Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim 23:1).

Here at 119, we do believe that we should keep the command to wear *tzitzit*. To learn more about the *tzitzit*, see our teachings, [Berean Bridges: Tzitzits](#), [Should Women Wear Tzitzits?](#), [Tzitzit FAQ's](#), and [Parashah Points: Shelach](#). The traditional Jewish method of keeping this command, by wearing the tallit katan with *tzitzit* attached, is a fine way of keeping it. There are two things, however, that we wish to point out.

First the Scriptures do not command us to wear the tallit itself. They do command us to wear the *tzitzit*, the tassels with the blue thread. Numbers 15:38 says to attach the *tzitzit* to a "garment." The Hebrew word translated as garment is not *tallit*, but it is *begeh*, which can be any article of clothing (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon #899; Strong's Concordance H899). In fact, the word *tallit* is never used anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. So, *tzitzit* can be attached to one's shirt, pants, coat, or another piece of clothing. We don't think it is necessary to use a tallit. The second thing to note is that, in many Jewish synagogues, they do not permit Gentiles to wear a tallit. In one of their rulings, The Central Council of American Rabbis declared:

"for a Gentile to don a talit at a public worship service, something he or she need not do in order to take part in that event, is to identify physically as one of us... he or she should not wear a talit at our synagogue services."

- CCAR Responsa Committee, 5765.5 "May a Non-Jew Wear a Talit?" (www.ccarnet.org)

So, if you are not Jewish and do decide to wear a tallit, you should be aware of the Jewish standards concerning the tallit if you ever attend a synagogue.

The Kippah

The kippah is a small circular hat that Jewish boys and men wear on their heads. The reason that the kippah is worn is to remind these men that God is above them. The Talmud states:

Cover your head so that the fear of Heaven will be upon you, and pray for Divine mercy.

- *Shabbat* 156b:6

There is no command in the Torah to wear a kippah. The priests, the sons of Aaron, were commanded to wear turbans (Exodus 28:4, 36-38), but the common people were not commanded to wear turbans, or any other kind of headwear. Jewish teaching admits that the kippah is not part of the Torah, and that it originated as an optional tradition. As Baruch Davidson of Chabad.org explains:

The tradition to wear a kippah is not derived from any biblical passage. Rather, it is a custom which evolved as a sign of our recognition that there is Someone "above" us who watches our every act...

In Talmudic times, the practice of wearing a headcovering was reserved for men of great stature. In later generations, though, it became the accepted custom for all Jewish men to wear a kippah

at all times, and especially during prayer. As with all Jewish customs, once they become a universally accepted Jewish practice, they become halachically obligatory.”

- Baruch S. Davidson, “Why Do We Wear a Kippah?”, www.chabad.org

Jay Stein, a Conservative Rabbi, corroborates this view. He said:

In Talmudic times it was not a widespread practice to cover one’s head. Covering one’s head was an act of extreme piety, not a norm for everyone.

- Rabbi Jay M. Stein, “Non Jews and Kippah in the Synagogue” OH 91:3, 2009 (www.rabinnicalassembly.org)

There is additional evidence that indicates that the kippah was not worn until later in Jewish history. The Talmud itself refers to covering the head as a custom, not as something commanded by Scripture (*Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim 91:3; *Shabbat* 156b:6). Also, among the limited pieces of historical art that depict ancient Israelites, none of them show a man wearing a kippah. The men’s heads are depicted either uncovered, or wearing other hats that were common at the time (see Jonathan Lipnick, “What Did Ancient Israelites Look Like?”, Israel Institute of Biblical Studies, March 18, 2015, <https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com>).

Another thing to note is that the Scriptural symbology for covering the head is different from the symbology behind the kippah. The kippah is worn as a reminder of a man’s devotion to God (Rabbi Yisroel Cotlar, “Can I Cover My Head With a Kippah?” www.chabad.org). But, in the Scriptures, covering the head is something that a man does when he is ashamed or in distress (Jeremiah 14:2-4; 2 Samuel 15:20), and possibly something that a woman does to show that she is under her husband’s authority (Numbers 5:16-22; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16). So, the symbology that justifies the kippah does not seem to come from the Scriptures.

Now, to be clear, we don’t think it is shameful or wrong to wear a kippah. Sometimes, people point out that Paul instructs men not to cover their heads in 1 Corinthians 11:4. However, Paul is not referring to the kippah in this passage; so far as we can tell, the kippah didn’t even exist at the time 1 Corinthians was written. For more on this, and on the general Biblical symbology of covering the head, we recommend our teaching, “[Head Coverings \(1 Corinthians 11\)](#)”. We also want to be very clear that the kippah is not commanded. It is not required by the Torah, or by any of the Scriptures; in fact, it is not mentioned in them at all.

There is one other thing to note: unlike the tallit, the kippah is considered acceptable for a Gentile to wear in a synagogue. In fact, in many cases, the synagogue actually requires Gentiles to wear it while they are inside (Rabbi Jay M. Stein, “Non Jews and Kippah in the Synagogue” OH 91:3, 2009, www.rabinnicalassembly.org). So, in the synagogue, for a Gentile to wear a tallit is often considered disrespectful, but for him to wear a kippah is considered respectful and proper.

Conclusion

To recap, the Bible commands that people should wear tzitzit, fringes with a blue thread, in order to remember God’s commandments. The traditional Jewish way of wearing tzitzit is to wear a tallit with tzitzit attached. However, this tradition developed much later; it is one way, but not the only way, of

wearing tzitzit. Concerning the kippah, there is no Biblical command to wear it, or to otherwise cover one's head. Wearing the tallit and kippah are Jewish traditions, not commandments from God.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

EMAIL: Info@119ministries.com

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/119Ministries

WEBSITE: www.TestEverything.net & www.ExaminaloTodo.net

TWITTER: [www.twitter.com/119Ministries#](https://twitter.com/119Ministries#)