

Restore!

The Law of the Fringe

By Douglas A. Wheeler, Ph.D., Th.D.

The Law of the Fringe was a religious belief among the Jewish at the time of the Jesus. It was closely associated with the concept of the *tzitzit*. This concept begins with the command in Numbers 15: 37 when God told Moses to instruct the children of Israel to construct fringes on the borders of their garments. The purpose of these fringes, which were connected to the *tallith*, or prayer shawl, was to cause them to remember all of the commandments of the Lord and to do them diligently. It was also a reminder to them not to seek after their own hearts and after their own eyes.

The fringes and the prayer shawl have great symbolic and numerical meaning. The word *tzitzit* (*Font not available*) has the numerical value of 600. There are five knots and eight strands, which total 13. Therefore, the numerical value of the *tzitzit*, the knots, and the strands is 613. This is the number of positive and negative Torah laws. The wrappings between the knots numerically spell out, "Jehovah is One," or the Shema. (For a more in-depth study of the knots and wrappings of the *tallith*, along with its symbolism, please see *Restore*, Autumn, 1995.)

It is the actual construction of the fringes or the *tzitzit* that becomes central to this study and is important to the second part of the command that "Ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes." Part of the greatest education that we can have as believers is learning to live our lives by faith and not after our own hearts and eyes. Understanding how these fringes were constructed will give us beautiful insight into the depth of relationship that the Lord desires to have with His people.

Details of the Fringes

The construction of the fringes was begun by taking four strands of thread and weaving them into a string. Four separate strings or strands were made in this manner. According to the Code of Jewish Law, "If one does not take four separate strings, but takes one long string, folds it into four, puts it through the aperture, makes a knot, and thereafter cuts the strings, it is invalid." Said another way, four strands must be put through the aperture thus doubling them to make eight. It was not permitted to take a single strand and cut it into four pieces and then put those four through the aperture creating the eight strands. Once the four strands are put through the aperture, two knots are made. Then the longest strand, called the *shamesh*, or helper strand, is used to make the wrappings. Again, according to the Code of Jewish Law, "The strands of the *tzitzit* are to be twisted, and if any strand becomes untwisted, it is considered as cut off and nonexistent."

Why was so much detail given to the construction of the *tzitzit*? The answer, again, is found in the command in Numbers 15:38-41, "*And the Lord spoke 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 the Lord, 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 the commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God."

Spiritual Applications

The fringes were there not only to remind them to perform the commands, but also to remind them not to live their lives after their own hearts and after their own eyes. In other words, life was not to be lived by their own understanding and their own intelligence. Life was to be lived dependent upon God and not independently of Him. The kind of life that God wanted them to live was not only one of obedience but also one of trust and faith in Him.

To understand this concept in greater detail, consider a few other passages of Scripture. In Psalm 25:1-3 we read, "*Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause.*" The word translated "wait" in this passage is the Hebrew word **hw:q;** (*qavah*), and it means "to twist, to bind, like a rope; to be strong and robust from the idea of binding fast." What is the writer saying here? Is he saying that if you twist, tie, and bind your life with the life of the Lord you will not be ashamed and your enemies will not triumph over you? If we look at Isaiah 40:31, we can see this idea somewhat clearer. Isaiah writes, "*But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.*" Again, we see the word *wait*. It has the same meaning as in the previous verse. If you want to mount up with the wings of eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint, you must bind, wrap, and tie your life with the life of the Lord.

Do you see this in the *tzitzit*? Four threads twisted together to make a strand. Four strands inserted through the aperture which makes 8 strands. After the two knots are made, the longest strand, the *shamesh* (helper strand) is used to do the wrappings. The number *four* is important here. The number *three* represents the Godhead. The fourth strand is a representation of the believer who is twisting and binding his life with the life of the Lord. We all must wrap our lives with the life of the Lord. It is not possible for us to do this alone; it takes the Holy Spirit to help if we are going to accomplish this on a consistent basis. The Holy Spirit is indeed the *shamesh*. If we, as believers, are not wrapping and binding our lives with the life of the Lord, then we will have diminished effectiveness in our Christian lives. Strength comes as we wrap our lives in His.

It is fascinating to learn that even with all the detailed instruction on the construction of the *tzitzit* and how they were to be attached to the garment (*tallith*), one major instruction was left out. They were not told how tightly they had to wrap or intertwine the strands. They were told that if the strands became unwound, they were of no use or value and must be cut off as though they were nonexistent. We are told to wrap our lives with the Lord, to bind our lives with His. He does not tell us how tightly to bind our lives with Him but lets us individually make that decision. The *tallith*, or prayer shawl, is a picture of the Lord. The fringes are a picture of the believer's life in relationship to Him. Paul tells us that if we "do not want to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof," we must put on Christ. Can you see that it is the wrapping and binding of our lives to that of the Lord that keeps us from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh? This is how we can live our lives in cooperation with Him and not seek after our own heart and after our own eyes.

The Woman Who Touched the Fringe

With this understanding, we can now consider the story of the woman with the issue of blood found in Mark 5:25. This story should be studied in combination with the story of Jairus ((*Font not available*)–*Yair*). Yair was one of the rulers of the synagogue, whose daughter was ill, almost to the point of death (Mark 5:22). Yair saw Jesus, fell at His feet, and virtually begged Him to come and lay hands on his daughter so that she might

be healed. Jesus agreed to go with him, and the Scripture says that "much people followed him, and thronged him." There was in that crowd a woman who had suffered from an issue of blood for twelve years. She had been to many doctors, spending virtually all that she had, trying to find a cure. Rather than getting better, she grew worse. She was at a point of desperation. She reasoned in herself that if she could get to Jesus and touch the hem of His garment (the *tzitzit*) she would be cured. She wanted to touch the symbol of His authority.

There was a major problem here. This woman had an issue of blood. This meant that she was unclean. Consider the law on this matter. In Leviticus 15: 19-28 we read, "*And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And everything that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: everything also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sat upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water; and be unclean until even. And if it be on her bed, or on anything whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even . . . And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation: she shall be unclean . . . But if she be cleansed of her issue, then she shall number to herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean. And on the eighth day she shall take unto her two turtles, or two young pigeons, and bring them unto the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her before the Lord for the issue of her uncleanness.*"

What was really going on here was more than just a woman making a decision to seek healing at the hands of the Lord. This woman had an issue of blood that rendered her ceremonially unclean. She was to remain separated from people because if anyone touched her or if she touched anyone, she made them unclean as well. Simply put, if she made someone unclean due to her touch, she committed sin. In Jewish tradition there are three classes of uncleanness. An issue of blood was a class one uncleanness and very serious. Once she touched someone and made them unclean, that person would have to bathe, wash his clothes, and wait until evening before he was once again clean. If he was unclean due to her touch, it limited what he was allowed by law to do or whom he could, in turn, touch. This was a very serious act that this woman performed.

So the stage was set. Yair had convinced Jesus to go with him to heal his daughter who was sick to the point of death. Yair, as a ruler of the synagogue, certainly knew the law. He knew that at the moment this woman touched Jesus, He became unclean. How his heart must have sunk when he heard her confess "all the truth." Now Jesus would not be able to go to his daughter. He must go and bathe, wash His clothes, and wait until the evening before He could minister to her. Please do not make the mistake of thinking that these people would simply ignore this law. There is no way of telling all that was going through Yair's mind at this time. As far as the woman with the issue of blood is concerned, even though she received her healing, she tried to disappear. Why? Was it because she knew that what she had done was considered a sin? She certainly knew that her actions rendered Jesus unclean.

Jesus knew that something had happened at the moment that she touched Him. The Scripture says that He perceived that "virtue" had gone out of Him. We should consider this word *virtue* for just a moment. In Greek, the word for "virtue" is *dunamis* (*dunimis*), and it is defined as "power." We get our English word *dynamite* from this Greek word. In Hebrew, the word for virtue brings us a clearer definition or idea. The word for "virtue" in Hebrew is (*Font not available*) (*geburha*), and it is from the root (*Font not available*) (*gabar*), which it means, "strength, due to binding, twisting, hence a rope." When this woman with the issue of blood touched Jesus, He immediately felt strength or power leave Him. This is a particular strength that is produced by binding strands of cord together to make a rope. Does that sound familiar? Does it sound like the construction of the *tzitzit*? Jesus asked the question, "Who touched my clothes?" The passage further states that He "looked around to see her that had done this thing." She simply wanted to steal a miracle from Jesus. The "virtue" that left Him was the strength produced by relationship. What does this show? Does this show

that Jesus was just as interested in relationship as He was miracles?

"But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth." Again, why was she so fearful? Could it be that she knew that what she had done was against the command of God? What she had done was considered a sin. She had to have known that she made Jesus unclean. Jesus response was one of kindness and understanding. He said, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of the plague." He did not condemn her, but did He suffer the consequences of being made unclean? The remainder of the story provides the answer for us.

After Jesus' declaration to the woman, certain people from the home of Yair came to tell him not to trouble the Master any longer because his daughter had died. To these statements, Jesus responded by telling Yair, "Be not be afraid, only believe."

The Law of the Fringe

At this point it would be wise to point out a tradition among the Jewish people that could possibly be taking place in this story. Although it may only be speculation, it must, nevertheless, be mentioned and considered. This tradition is called the "Law of the Fringe" and had to do with the wearing of the *tzitzit* (fringes). According to the Code of Jewish Law, "severe is the punishment of the one who neglects the performance of the Divine Command in putting on the *tzitzit*." What is this "severe punishment?" We must look to the Talmud for the answer.

The Talmud, even though not written and codified until around 200 C.E., is comprised of the teachings of Mishnah (oral law). These oral traditions or oral laws may not have been written down at the time of Jesus, but they were certainly prominent at that time. (See *Judaism A-Z* by Yacov Newman). Talmud makes this statement concerning the wearing of the fringes: "The purpose of the fringe is described in the verse, 'That ye may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them' (Numbers 15:39), on which the Talmud remarks, 'This ordinance is equal to all precepts, because seeing leads to remembering and remembering to performing' (*Men.* 43b). An instance is quoted in the context of a man who was saved from acting immorally by the reminder he received from the fringe on his garment' (*ibid*, 44a). Hence it was taught: 'whoever is particular with this ordinance is worthy of receiving the presence of the *Shechinah*' (*ibid*, 43b)." The text does not read 'Ye may look upon them,' but 'look upon Him,' thus declaring that whoever fulfills the law of the fringe is accounted as though he had received the presence of the *Shechinah*, since the colour of the blue thread resembled the colour of the sea which is like that of the firmament and in turn is like that of the Throne of Glory.' " (*Sifre Num.* 115;34b). The meaning is that the understanding of the proper use of the fringe kept a person's life pure, and so brought him into closer communion with God. Here, too, we find a superstitious value attached to the religious rite as a protective force. The neglect of wearing the fringe, as well as the omission to fasten Mezuzah to the doorpost, caused death among one's children (*Shab.* 32b). Conversely, "Whoever scrupulously observed the law of the fringe was worthy that two thousand eight hundred servants should attend to him; Thus saith the Lord of hosts, in those days shall ten men of all the languages of the nations take hold of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you for we have heard that God is with you." (*Zechariah* 6:23).

There is no question that Yair, as ruler of the synagogue, was aware of this law of the fringe. Does that mean that he believed his daughter died because he did not wear the *tzitzit* or that he wore them in an improper manner? There is no way for us to know for sure. There certainly is that possibility. We know that at the moment that he was told of the death of his daughter, Jesus told him to not be afraid. It would seem that the time for fear is before death and not after it.

The Mystery at Yair's House

This story, however, gets deeper still. After telling Yair not to be afraid, only believe, Jesus did not allow anyone to follow beyond that point except for Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they arrived at the house of Yair, Jesus saw the people who had gathered around weeping and wailing greatly. He asked them, "*Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*" The passage then tells that they laughed him to scorn. Then it says, "*But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.*" Why was He able to go into the same room with the dead girl? The dead are considered to be unclean. If Jesus entered the room of this dead girl that would have made Him unclean. However, He was already considered unclean because the woman with the issue of blood had reached out her hand and touched Him. Then the passage tells us that "*He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha Cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.*" Let's pose a question here. If the statement "*talitha cumi*" really meant, "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise," why was it left untranslated in the text? Better stated, does "*talitha cumi*" really mean, "Damsel, I say unto thee arise," or is there something deeper here? Something was said in that room that was of such magnitude that Jesus instructed them to tell no man what was said or done. This verse needs to be examined in the light of the Hebrew language. Let's consider all of verse 41 in Hebrew (See box below):

<i>(Font not available, correct transliteration below:)</i>						
get up	tallitha (f)	(see below)	and	the girl	belonging	
hand (f)	grasp He		said		to	
		to you	say I	get up	young girl	is interpreted

The interpretation of this verse is: "He grasp hand belonging to the girl and said, *(Font not available)* We know that *(Font not available)* (*qumi*) means "to arise or get up." What are we going to do with the two words *(Font not available)* (*elyah tallitha*)? You will notice that these two words have been left basically untranslated in the verse above. This is because it is difficult to translate them into English. Yet, without a firm understanding of these two words, it is impossible to see clearly what was happening here. It is because of these two words that Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Once again, let us consider the feasibility of that statement. We have already seen that the people who were gathered around knew that the girl was dead. When He told them that the girl was not dead but only sleeping, they laughed Him to scorn. *They knew she was dead.* Obviously, when she came outside, people would know what had happened in that room. There would be no need for them to keep quiet because the sheer presence of the girl would reveal all. Therefore, we must conclude that this is not what Jesus was referring to. He must have instructed them to keep quiet about something else. What could it be? Could it have to do with these two words that have been left untranslated? What is contained in the words *elyah tallitha* that could have been so striking, so volatile that Jesus would instruct them not to speak of it to anyone?

Let's state the verse again so that we can understand what is happening with these two words. "He grasp hand belonging to the girl and said, *(Font not available)* This word was translated, "to her." Yet this is a very strange interpretation of this word. The normal way to express "to her" in Hebrew would be, *(Font not available)* (*shelah*) and not *(Font not available)* (*elyah*). Even if one chooses not to use the Hebrew word *shelah* to indicate "to her," *(Font not available)* (*othah*) could be used. *(Font not available)* (*eleyah*) could in very rare situations be used to mean "to her"; however, it would be indeed rare because of the structure of the word itself. It was considered a holy word. *(Font not available)* (*eleyah*) is a compound word. *(Font not available)* (*El*) is one of the names of God. We see this in such compound words as El-Shaddai (God the source, God the breast) or Bethel (house of God). *(Font not available)* is an abbreviated form of *(Font not*

available) the proper name of God (Yaweh). Therefore, (*Font not available*) (*eleyah*) is a combination of two of the names of God. In fact, these same four letters with only different vowel pointing means, God is Jehovah (*Font not available*). Considering the belief that the Jews held concerning the use of the name of God, (*Font not available*) (*eleyah*) would hardly be used to indicate, "to her."

The next word to be considered is (*Font not available*)(*tallitha*). We know by the interpretation that *tallitha* cannot mean girl, young girl or maiden (see Hebrew above). What is being said here? It cannot be as simple as, "Damsel, I say unto thee arise." Let's put these two words in the proper context. In other words, we will restate the verse with the direct translation. "He grasp hand belonging to the girl and said, 'God speaking to the female under the *tallith*, get up.' "

A Messianic Declaration?

Jesus was speaking as God. He was not speaking to the *tallith* but to the girl under the *tallith*. This is understood by the feminine ending on the word *tallith*. Could it be possible that Jesus was proclaiming himself to be God? There was a girl under a *tallith*. Was Jesus making reference to the fact that it was He who instructed Moses on its construction? Was Jesus also making the statement that He had perfectly performed the Law of the Fringe and was the person spoken of in Zechariah 8:23: "*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt [fringe] of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.*"? This is a Messianic passage of Scripture. Jesus was in fact, declaring Himself to be the Messiah. This is what He did not want those that were gathered around Him to reveal. This is not the first time that He told those around Him not to tell who He was.

We have another indication of this very idea when He told them to give the little girl something to eat. In Deuteronomy 8:2-3 we read, "*And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*" Was Jesus making reference to this verse when He gave instruction for the little girl to be fed, or was it that He knew she would be hungry? She had already been provided spiritual food, (raised from the dead), and now it was time to give her physical food.

It is my hope and prayer that you have benefitted from this study of the fringes, the woman with the issue of blood, Yair, the ruler of the synagogue, and his daughter whom Jesus raised from the dead.

The key question is: Are you wrapping your life with the Lord? If so, how tightly? The beautiful part about it is that we can wrap our lives with His within the framework of our own personality. This twisting, this binding, will aid you in living your life, not seeking after your own heart and your own eyes, but after His. Peace be unto you!

