

THE JEWISH PHYLACTERIES

Our Lord Jesus referred to a custom amongst the Jews of his day which still prevails—of binding the phylactery upon their foreheads and their arms, while making void the law of God through their traditions. The eighth verse is the foundation for this custom. It says, 'Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.'

A phylactery is a little square leather box attached to a leather strap about a yard long. In the cubical leather box are placed parchments containing four passages of Scripture in four columns. (*Exodus 13:1-16; Deut 6:4, 11, 13-21.*) These the Jews at times fastened upon the head, the box coming above and between the eyes; or again they fastened the box at the inside of the elbow, and wrapped the strap about the arm, holding the end in the hand. Poor Jews! they grasped with fervency an outward form, but, as the Lord pointed out, they missed the real kernel of the Law, namely, love out of a pure heart for God and for their neighbour. The wealthy and infidel Jews have of course abandoned this custom, but it is still in vogue amongst the most earnest or orthodox, who usually spend one hour in prayer every day and in putting on and off the phylactery.

There is a lesson for us in this failure of Natural Israel to catch the spirit of the divine command. Our Lord said that while they thus made an outward show their hearts had vicious thoughts, unloving, unkind thoughts, and hence they were merely drawing nigh to God with their lips in a formal manner and were not acceptable. We Spiritual Israelites do well to remember that, while we do not use the same outward forms, we might bow the knee and pray long and much and yet be far from acceptable to the Lord unless we allow his spirit of grace and truth to enter into our hearts and there produce that transformation which he tells us is alone pleasing and acceptable to him—a transformation which will make us less selfish, more generous, less proud, more humble, less children of this world, more the children of the Kingdom, seekers less of the things of this present time and more of the Kingdom of God and of the righteousness which it represents and will in due time enforce.

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—Zion's Watch Tower, September 1st, 1907.—



But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel;
After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts,
and write it in their hearts; and will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
(Jeremiah 31:33)

