

Men, True Worship, and

Beards



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Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. - John 17:17

Introduction

To the Torah observant Messianic believer there are many biblical subjects that need to be studied and observed. Our Savior has told us in Matthew 5:17-20 that he did not come to destroy the Torah, but rather to establish it. He emphasized that even the least of the commandments are important and that they should be observed.

With these thoughts in mind we will examine the commandments and scriptures that relate to men having beards. For many people this commandment falls into the category of one of the least commandments. We will seek to take a balanced approach looking at all the evidence and thereby make a proper decision on this important subject. With the true love of Yahweh in mind it shall be our goal to apply the precept of Deuteronomy 4:2, "*You shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your Elohim which I command you.*"

Yahweh's Commandment Examined

The commandment concerning beards is found in Leviticus chapter 19. It is important to note the context of this chapter as given in verses one and two. "*And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy; for I Yahweh your Elohim am holy.*"

These two verses set the stage for the commandments that follow. Obviously, these commandments deal with the subject of holiness and are therefore important for our spiritual well being. We must understand that even the "least commandments" are not to be broken or neglected as they develop an aspect of spirituality.

Let us now examine the commandment. Leviticus 19:27, "*You shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shall you mar the corners of your beard.*"

What Is Meant By Corner

This commandment deals with two physical attributes of a man, his hair and his beard. Obviously these are listed together because they are related. The key word that relates a man's hair and beard is the word corner which in the Hebrew is "pe'-ah."

This word is #6285 in the Hebrew Lexicon of the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. The following definition is given there—"pe'ah (pay-aw'); feminine of OT:#6311; properly, mouth in a figurative sense, i.e. direction, region, extremity: KJV - corner, end, quarter, side."

We see that both the head and the beard have corners. The question we must address is where is the corner? And, what direction, region, or extremity is being referred to in this commandment?

The scriptures reveal the answers to these questions by the meaning of the word corner as it comes to us from the Hebrew word "pe'-ah." In Leviticus 13:41 we read: "And he that hath his hair fallen off from the part of his head toward his face, he is forehead bald: yet is he clean."

The phrase "from the part of" is the Hebrew word "pe'ah." By the usage here, we can conclude that the corner of the head and beard is one and the same. That would be the area in front of the ear that we commonly refer to as the sideburn.

A receding hair line is a common form of baldness. With this type of baldness a man will many times loose the hair on the side of his head (*pe'ah*) as well as the hair above the forehead.

The Revised Standard Version renders this verse, “*And if a man's hair has fallen from his forehead and temples, he has baldness of the forehead but he is clean.*”

The phrase “forehead and temples” is the translation of the Hebrew word “*pe'ah*.” Again the context shows that the corners are in fact the temples of the head.

The *New American Standard Version* further substantiates that “*pe'ah*” means side or temple of the head. This translation reads: “*And if his head becomes bald at the front and sides, he is bald on the forehead; he is clean.*”

Our close examination of the Scriptures through various translations clearly reveals that the “*pe'ah*” is the side of the head (i.e. temples or the area of the cheek next to the ear).

We can throw more light on the meaning of the word corner by looking in the *Brown, Driver, and Briggs's Hebrew Lexicon*. Here we find the definition—“*pe'ah --a corner, an edge, a side, a quarter, an extremity a) corner b) a side.*”

Regarding Leviticus 19:27 *Kiel and Delitzch Commentary of the Old Testament* states: “*Verse 27, "Ye shall not round the border of your head:" i.e., not cut the hair in a circle from one temple to the other, as some of the Arab tribes did, according to Herodotus (3, 8), in honour of their [idol] Arota'l, whom he identifies with the Dionysos of the Greeks. In Jer 9:25; 25:23; 49:32, the persons who did this are called pee'aah (OT:6285) q^atsuwteey (OT:7112), round-cropped, from their peculiar tonsure. "Neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard," sc., by cutting it off (cf. Lev 21:5), which Pliny reports some of the Arabs to have done, . . . whereas the modern Arabs either wear a short moustache, or shave off the beard altogether (Niebuhr, Arab. p. 68).*”

Notice that the marring of the corner of the beard occurred as the result of cutting it off or shaving.

Adam Clarke's Commentary states the following concerning the corners of the beard: “*Lev 19:27, [The corners of thy beard.] Probably meaning the hair of the cheek that connects the hair of the head with the beard. This was no doubt cut in some peculiar manner, for the superstitious purposes mentioned above. Several of our own countrymen wear this said hair in a curious form; for what purposes they know best: we cannot say precisely that it is the ancient Egyptian custom revived. From the images and paintings which remain of the ancient Egyptians, we find that they were accustomed to shave the whole hair off their face, except merely that upon the chin, which last they cut off only in times of mourning.*”

Notice the supposition that the corners of the head and beard connect. Word usage bears out repeatedly that “*pe'ah*” is the hair on the cheek that connects the hair and the beard.

The following article was taken from *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, copyright 1986, page 59. “*BEARD: Among the ancient Hebrews and other oriental nations, the beard was considered a symbol of manhood and was carefully tended, trimmed (in later periods especially in honor of the Sabbath and festivals), and anointed. Its removal - except as a sign of mourning - was a disgrace (cf. II Sam. 10:4-5), though shaving was obligatory in certain purification ceremonies (cf. Lev. 14:9). The biblical injunction not to "mar the edges of your beard" in the fashion of pagan worshipers was interpreted by the rabbis as a prohibition against shaving in general, . . . The kabbalists, especially the followers of Isaac Luria, ascribed mystic significance to the beard, and would not even trim it.*”

Pay particular attention to the last sentence in this article. The kabbalists were the Jews who dealt in Jewish mysticism. Kabbala has to do with the “black arts.” It violates the principle of Deuteronomy 4:2 by adding to and diminishing from Torah. Further more, it has the effect of turning a man’s beard into something that could be construed as idolatrous. We must follow Yahshua’s admonition and not follow the traditions of men. This was the downfall of the religious establishment of his day.

Mark 7:5-9 *“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of Yahweh, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of Yahweh, that ye may keep your own tradition.”*

As those who worship Yahweh in spirit and truth, we must beware of and avoid the traditions of men. This is especially true when false interpretations can make something like a beard into an idol. Those who teach that it is a sin to trim the beard are following the traditions of men and are not properly teaching the commandment concerning beards.

Further usage of this word in the Bibles reveals that it does indeed stand for a specific area (ie. corner) that is located at a defined region. It does not apply to the whole. Consider Leviticus 19:9. *“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.”* “The corners of” is the translation of the Hebrew word *pe’ah*. Those who would apply the word corner to the whole beard would have to apply it to an entire field as well and would have to say that to harvest a field was to violate this law. Nothing could be further from the truth! The corners or outside borders of a field are not to be harvested whereas the rest of the field can be harvested. “Pe’ah” does not apply to the whole field.

That is not to say that it would be acceptable to shave off other areas of the beard. On the contrary, since a man is commanded to have a beard it would therefore stand to reason that he should not shave any portion of the beard and specifically that he not shave the corner (*pe’ah*) as was the custom of the Egyptians and other pagan peoples. It is Yahweh’s will that all adult male spiritual Israelites should have a beard.

Consistently throughout the scriptures the Hebrew word “*pe’-ah*” refers to a specific region and not to the whole of which it speaks. The Bible shows that the corner of the beard is in fact the area in front of the ear located between the hair of the head and the beard. There are literally dozens of passages in the Bible that through usage verify that the word corner (*pe’-ah*) means edge or corner and not the whole.

What It Means To Mar the Corner Of The Beard

Now that we have established that the corner refers to the area of the beard that lies between the hair of the head and the beard we will now examine the meaning of the word “mar.” In Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance Hebrew Lexicon “mar” is #7843, “shachath (shaw-khath’); a primitive root; to decay, i.e. (causatively) ruin (literally or figuratively):KJV - batter, cast off, corrupt (-er, thing), destroy (-er, -uction), lose, mar, perish, spill, spoiler, X utterly, waste (-r).”

This definition is further supported by the *Brown, Driver, and Briggs's Hebrew Lexicon* where the following definition is given: shachath – “to destroy, to corrupt, to go to ruin, to decay

a) (Niphal) to be marred, to be spoiled, to be corrupted, to be corrupt, to be injured, to be ruined, to be rotted

b) (Piel)

1) to spoil, to ruin

2) to pervert, to corrupt, to deal corruptly (morally)

c) (Hiphil)

1) to spoil, to ruin, to destroy

2) to pervert, to corrupt (morally)

3) destroyer (participle)

d) (Hophal) spoiled, ruined (participle)”

Once again the meaning of this word can best be discovered by observing how it is used and translated in various passages of scripture. The first uses of this word are found in Genesis chapter six. We will underline the English equivalents to #7843—*shachath*.

Gen 6:11-13: “The earth also was corrupt before Elohim, and the earth was filled with violence. And Elohim looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And Elohim said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”

In these instances “*shachath*” is revealed to mean corruption with the main result being destruction. The great flood literally destroyed the entire earth. It wiped out all life and the corruption with it.

This emphatic meaning of wiping out or destroying completely can once again be seen by looking at Genesis chapters 18 & 19. This passage describes the complete and total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Once again the English words translated from the Hebrew word “*shachath*” will be underlined.

Gen 18:28: “Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.”

Gen 18:31-32: “And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto Yahweh: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not Yahweh be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.”

Gen 19:13-14: “For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of Yahweh; and Yahweh hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for Yahweh will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.

Gen 19:29: And it came to pass, when Elohim destroyed the cities of the plain, that Elohim remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

In all the instances listed above, the true meaning of “*shachath*” is made clear and understandable. It means total and complete destruction.

What About Trimming The Beard?

To destroy only a portion of the cities (Genesis 18 &19) would not have expressed the strong meaning of this word. There is a huge difference between trimming ones beard and shaving off the beard or a portion of the beard. To trim the beard does not even slightly reflect the meaning of “*shachath*.”

Once again the usage of the word shows its meaning. Trimming does not in any way, shape, or form, reflect the powerful meaning of the Hebrew word “*shachath*.”

There are over 140 examples in the Hebrew scriptures where the meaning of this word is proven beyond any doubt to mean a total and complete corruption or destruction. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were completely annihilated. That in itself reveals the meaning of “*shachath*.”

Arriving At The True Meaning of Leviticus 19:27

Now that we have defined the important words of Leviticus 19:27 we are ready to conclude its true meaning. By examining how the words “*pe’ah*” and “*shachath*” are used in the Sacred Scriptures, the Word of Yahweh reveals the true answer.

Again, we will look at Leviticus 19:27, “*Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.*”

With what we have learned we can now translate this verse as follows: “Ye shall not round the hair located on the temple area of your heads, neither shalt thou destroy or shave off the cheek area of your beard”

By plugging in the proper meanings of these words we find that the commandment teaches us not to shave off the cheek area of the beard in the manner of a “goatee.” Again, it goes without saying that an Israelite man is commanded to grow a beard and specifically that he should not shave off the area known as the corner.

What About Leviticus 21:5?

Another commandment which deals with the subject of beards is found in Leviticus 21:5. There we read: “*They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.*”

This commandment applies specifically to the holy priesthood (Leviticus 21:1). By applying 1 Peter 2, this passage could be construed to apply to Yahweh’s spiritual priesthood.

1 Peter 2:5 & 9: “*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to Yahweh by Yahshua Messiah. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*”

If we apply this commandment in the spiritual sense it gives support to the fact that all adult male true worshipers are to allow their facial hair to grow and are commanded not to shave off a portion of their beard.

In Leviticus 21:5 the phrase “the corner of” is the Hebrew word “pe’ah.” Once again evidence is presented to show that a man must not shave off his beard or specifically the area of the cheek next to the ear.

Scriptural Precedence for Having A Beard

Because it was part of Israelite life for a man to have a beard the Bible has only a few references to beards. However, those mentioned are significant and set precedence for a man having a beard.

The Bible refers to the following people as having beards:

Aaron the High Priest> Psalm 133

King David> 1 Samuel 21:13

Ezra the scribe> Ezra 9:3

Yahshua the Messiah> Isaiah 50:6

These are all significant people. The most notable of them is our Savior Yahshua the Messiah. We can learn something important about beards by looking at Isaiah 50:6.

“I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”

In this prophetic passage we learn that Yahshua not only had a beard but that it was long enough to be ripped out by those who tortured him to death. Yahshua is our example, 1Peter 2:21. As such, we must follow his example. Therefore, a male true worshipers beard should be long enough to grab with the hands. This would set the standard for how short a man’s beard can be. How long a man’s beard could be would be left up to nature and his own prerogative. Again, be reminded that a man’s beard should not be turned into something pertaining to mysticism or idolatry.

Another example of a notable man with a beard was Amasa. Sadly, he met with death at the hand of Joab when Joab grabbed him by the beard and stabbed him. We see this in 2 Samuel 20:9-10, *“And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab’s hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.”*

The plucking of or shaving off of the beard was a sign of mourning. This can be seen in Ezra 9:3, Isaiah 15:2, Jeremiah 48:37 and Ezekiel 5:1.

Notably Mephibosheth the son of King Saul mourned David’s departure from Jerusalem during the Absalom rebellion by not grooming his beard. *“And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace.”* We can conclude from this verse that an unkempt beard was a sign of grief.

Finally, we can note how David’s servants were shamed by having half of their beards cut off, 2 Samuel 10:4-5 & 1 Chronicles 19:4-5. David’s men were told to stay at Jericho until their beards had grown.

Conclusion

After examining all the evidence, we can conclude that Yahweh has commanded all adult male true worshipers to allow their beard to grow. This of course is dependent upon a man's natural ability to grow a beard since this ability varies from individual man to man. In no case should a man be shaving off any portion of his beard, especially the area on the cheek next to the ear. The length of a man's beard will vary due to natural reasons (i.e. some can grow a very long and thick beard while others can only grow a short thin beard). A man may choose to have a long beard or he may choose to trim his beard to a shorter length. To follow Yahshua's example, a man's beard should be no shorter than that which can be grabbed by the hand.

May Almighty Yahweh bless all those who seek to keep his Torah Law with love and dedication to Him and His Son Yahshua the Messiah. "For this is the love of Yahweh, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3)

(All Bible quotations are from the KJV unless other wise noted. Textual changes such as the insertion of the Sacred Names Yahweh and Yahshua have been made to harmonize with sound biblical doctrine.)

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