

Yarmulke: Men's Headcovering

The Jews today customarily wear a small beanie-type headcovering in their worship. Some Jewish or Messianic groups have also adopted this custom, which is contrary to Paul's writings. Ignoring 1 Corinthians chapter 11, some writers actually wrench from Scripture the opposite of what Yahweh intended. Their interpretation sets truth aside to accept or establish a false doctrine. Let us examine 1 Corinthians chapter eleven to learn the heart of the matter. Female worshipers are told to wear a veil and men in worship are admonished to be bareheaded.

We know that Jews will not allow anyone to come into the synagogue unless the visitor wears a skullcap known as a *yarmulke* or *kepah*. A man cannot visit the Wailing Wall at Jerusalem without a headcovering. Today in Israel's holy places or shrines all visiting males must wear a covering on their heads. So pervasive is this practice that attendants will place a small round paper cap on a male visitor's uncovered head.

We will examine an article which attempts to justify a man's wearing a covering on his head. By quoting certain verses wrenched from Scripture, supposed proof is established. Known among Bible students as "proof-texting," most of the verses thus supplied have no relevance to the issue at hand. We will examine the remarks of at least one author and show the error of his conclusions.

High Priests and Mourning

Given as an example that David wore a *yarmulke* in worship, is 2 Samuel 15:30: *And David sent up by the ascent of [Mount] Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot; and all the people that [were] with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.* This allegedly proves that King David always worshiped Yahweh with his head covered.

Examining the context of the verse, however, we learn that King David is caught in the midst of an upheaval, with his son Absalom trying to usurp his father's throne. Note verse 31, *And [one] told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O Yahweh, I pray You, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."*

Now notice verse 32, *And it came to pass that [when] David was come to the top [of the mount], where he worshiped Elohim, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with coat rent, and earth upon his head.* This corroborates the statement that David was in severe consternation and shame because of Ahithophel's treachery, and is humbling himself, at the point of mourning.

Jeremiah 14:4 gives another example of shame and contrition leading to covering, *Because of the ground which is cracked, since there is no rain upon the land, the farmers are ashamed, they cover their heads.*

Going barefoot is also a sign of mourning. Because David was grieving and in shame he covered his head and went barefoot—not a normal worship practice.

The high priest wore a mitre, and his assistants were also to wear a headdress while doing Yahweh's service, Exodus 28:39-41. These verses instruct the making of the coat of fine linen,

the mitre of fine linen, and the girdle of needlework. Aaron's sons were also to have coats and girdles and bonnets for glory and beauty.

Some scholars say that the anointing of Aaron's sons was not necessarily to have them officiate at that time but to prepare them to take over whenever Aaron was unable to continue his office as the high priest. We, however, are not high priests—Yahshua is the high priest. Were He a Levite, He might wear the mitre in Heaven. His, however, is of the Melchizedek order as we are, not of the Levitical (Heb. 5:6).

Proponents of men's headcoverings erroneously maintain that men were not to remove their covering even for the dead. They cite Leviticus 10:6, where Moses commanded Aaron and the priests not to uncover their heads after Yahweh had destroyed Aaron's two sons for burning unauthorized fire on the altar. The reason was that these two sons, Nadab and Abihu, were negligent in their duties as priests.

Verse 6 reads: *And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, "Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest you die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which Yahweh has kindled."*

Interestingly, the NIV reads, "Do not let your hair become unkempt," instead of "uncover not your heads." (Do not dishevel your hair, Tanakh marginal reading). Here is an extreme matter of shame and disgrace for the Aaronic priesthood. Eleazar and Ithamar were not to show sorrow for the blatant disregard of Yahweh's commands by Nadab and Abihu. Furthermore, the priestly headgear is not the same as the *yarmulke*.

Wisdom Like a Crown

Proponents have tried to equate the *yarmulke* with an ornament of grace in Proverbs 1:9. The pericope must begin at verse 7, *The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge [but] fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of your father and forsake not the law of your mother. For they shall be an ornament of grace unto your head and chains about your neck.*

This has nothing to do with the *yarmulke* being an ornament of grace. Grace here is unmerited kindness from Yahweh that comes with following the instructions of the father and advice by the mother. An ornament of grace adorns the obedient individual who submits to Yahweh. It is not a command to wear the *yarmulke* or the headdress, neither is it an admonition to wear chains around the neck. Proverbs 1:9 is extolling discipline and obedience.

Proverbs 4:7-9 is also quoted to imply that wisdom is represented by a headdress or *yarmulke*. *Wisdom is the principal thing; [therefore] get wisdom: and with all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you: she shall bring you to honor, when you do embrace her. She shall give to your head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to you.* The **Tanakh** reads, *She will adorn your head with a graceful wreath, crown you with a glorious diadem.*

Again, the meaning and sense is simply wisdom or a deeper understanding of Yahweh's Word gives us honor like a beautiful crown of glory upon our heads. Nothing to do with a *kepah*.

Verse 10 goes on to say, *My son, listen to me and do as I say and you will have a long, good life, Living Bible.* This has nothing to do with the *kepah* or the *yarmulke*. It simply shows that a

crown of LIFE will be given to those who overcome and obey Yahweh's words and make His Commandments come to life.

One writer says, "Isaiah likens Zion to the *kepah*, as a crown of glory and a royal diadem," and he cites Isaiah 62:3, *You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of Yahweh and a royal diadem in the palm of your Elohim, Tanakh*. The meaning has nothing to do with wearing a *yarmulke*! A *yarmulke* is not a substitute for a crown of glory. Rather, in Yahweh's eyes we are held aloft as an example for all to see as a splendid crown for the King of Kings. It is the reward that Yahshua gets for His people whom He has helped to overcome and who have become kings and priests in the Kingdom. Wearing a *yarmulke* has nothing to do with this honor. It is not a crown or badge. It is poetic language extolling obedience to Yahweh.

Of Women's Attire

"It is called a garment of praise in Isaiah 61:3," says a writer. The Hebrew word here translated garment is *maateh* and means a headcovering as used in Isaiah 3:20 and Ezekiel 44:18.

Actually, the word *maateh* is **Strong's Concordance** No. 4594 and is translated vestment. **Brown, Driver, Briggs Gesenius** translates *maateh* as "wrap, mantle." And in Isaiah 61:3, as a mantle of praise in the figurative sense. It does not mean headcovering, but apparel, clothing, raiment.

The writer contends, "It means 'a headcovering' as used in Isaiah 3:20." Isaiah 3:20 reads: *The bonnet, the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands and the tablets and the earrings*. There are two words the writer may have reference to. The word bonnett is No. 6287, *peer*; in Hebrew, a fancy headdress. The other is headband, No. 7196, *quishur*; or girdle.

Just why the author would bring in Isaiah 3:20 is difficult to comprehend. The context of verses 16 and 17 shows Yahweh is speaking here about the dress of women. It has nothing to do with men wearing a headcovering. *Therefore Yahweh will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and Yahweh will discover their secret parts. In that day Yahweh will take away the bravery of [their] tinkling ornaments [about their feet], and [their] cauls, and [their] round tires like the moon, the chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings*, Isaiah 3:17-20.

In vainly seeking any verse promoting headcoverings for men, the *yarmulke* proponents have seized on verses pertaining to women's attire and compounded their error.

Some *yarmulke* advocates attempt to gain support from Ezekiel 44:18, which reads: *They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads and they shall have linen breeches upon their loins. They shall not gird [themselves] with anything that causes sweat*.

Verse 15 shows that this refers to priests, the sons of Zadok. As we have noted before, the priests of the Levitical order were to wear something on their heads when they officiated in worship. How can one confuse the dress of women in Isaiah 3:20 with the priests in Ezekiel 44:18, while vainly attempting to build a case for the unbiblical *yarmulke* for men?

Appeals have also been made to Isaiah 61:10, which reads, *I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my Elohim; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks [himself] with ornaments and the bride adorns [herself] with jewels*.

Notice that the *kepah* is not mentioned here, but this pictures Yahshua's robe of righteousness that we are given as we follow Him and are obedient to Yahweh's commandments. No *yarmulke* here.

Nothing to Rejoice In

One author says, "Ezekiel was commanded by Yahweh to wear the tire (Hebrew, *peer*) upon his head and to command the children of Israel to do the same, Ezekiel 24:17 and 23." It is important that we note and include verse 16 of Ezekiel 24, which speaks about the death of Ezekiel's wife. Verse 16 reads, *Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with a stroke: yet neither shall you mourn nor weep, neither shall your tears run down.* Verse 17 continues, *Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of your head upon you and put your shoes upon your feet, and cover not [your] lips, and eat not the bread of men.*

It is quite obvious here that the man is not to mourn and not take off his "tire" (Hebrew *peer*, meaning a turban or fancy headdress). Ezekiel is to wear the headdress and not go barefoot as did King David when he was mourning. He was to put shoes upon his feet and he was not to cover his lips nor eat the bread of men. Again, this has to do with mourning and has nothing to do with worship of Yahweh.

Notice verse 23, which reads, *And your tires (fancy headdress, turban) [shall be] upon your heads and your shoes upon your feet: and you shall not mourn nor weep but shall pine away for your iniquities and mourn one toward another.* Yahweh is telling Israel that He will take away their strength and joy of their glory. The desire of their eyes and the things that they revel in will be removed because judgment is coming. It has nothing to do with wearing a *kepah* to worship Yahweh.

They Went Wearing Street Hats

The writer says, "King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and commanded all to bow down and worship it. But there were three Jews in his kingdom who would not worship the image, they worshiped only Yahweh. So, the king had them thrown down into a fiery furnace. They went to this fire trusting in Yahweh with their caps on their heads (Dan. 3:1, 21). And I believe they were praying all the way."

Interestingly, the word hat referred to in Daniel 3:21 is from the Hebrew *karbela* (No. 3737 in Strong's). It appears only in this verse and is translated hat. It involves casual clothing thrown on like a mantle; the Akkadian cognate is cap. It has nothing to do with worship either in the synagogue or in the Temple. It is an article of cap or turban, according to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. It is street clothing.

Most of the Scriptures *yarmulke* proponents' offers for proof simply are references to something on the head of priests. Many of them relate to those in mourning or in abject misery. Some of their references are to women's headdresses. Others are casual turbans worn by those walking about in the street. Some allegorically point to spiritual fruits. Most have nothing to do with the *kepah* or the *yarmulke*. Try as they will, there is no command for a male other than a Levitical priest to wear a headcovering in the Old Testament. Attempted "proof-texting" to uphold a *yarmulke* or *kepah* does not hold up.

Covering in the New Testament

One writer asks, “We are told by Paul to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). Let us suppose that a man is working in the oil fields where he has to wear a hard hat on his head and work about 10 hours a day. Would it be a sin to pray while working? The way most people explain Corinthians, it would be. Let us understand and get back to the old paths, which are the good ways.

The writer answers his own question. If we understand the verse to mean that a man is literally to pray without ceasing, he would not be working out in the oil fields while praying. Correctly understood, Paul tells us we should be in an attitude of prayerful reverence and close communion with Yahweh at all times. It does not mean that men should forever be on their knees praying with a *yarmulke* on their heads. Nothing of the kind.

Next, this writer notes, “In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul explains the headdress of men and women in praying or prophesying. As this article concerns men, we will not go into the women part of it. *‘But I would have you know that the head of every man is the Messiah; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of the Messiah is Yahweh,’* 1 Corinthians 11:3. We have three heads mentioned here; the head of man (Messiah), the head of woman (man), the head of Messiah (Yahweh).”

“Let us take up the next verse now. *‘Every man praying or prophesying, having his head (Messiah) covered dishonors his head (Messiah).’* We pray in the Name of our Head, which is the Messiah. If for any reason we do not do this, we are covering our Head (Messiah) and dishonoring Him.”

Notice how the author makes his own judgments. He says, “Whenever we do not pray in the Name of the Messiah, we are covering Him.” The Scripture does not use this terminology, saying that whenever we do not pray in the Name of Yahshua we are “covering Him.” It simply is not a Scriptural concept. It is a man-made notion to justify a man-made doctrine.

Let us continue, “In Paul’s day there were people who would try to hide the fact that they were believers in Yahshua if they were around Jews who did not believe in Him. Thus, they covered the fact that they believed in Him, and this dishonored Him, their Head.

“This is not talking about the head on your shoulders but the head Messiah, and we are not to cover that head when we pray. We are to pray in His Name showing all that He is our head.”

Obviously, the man is trying to build a case by inserting his own thoughts and projecting certain concepts into his private interpretation, making Yahweh’s Word of no effect. He attempts to make us believe that any time we pray to Yahweh and do not petition in the Name of His Son Yahshua the Messiah we are covering our Head, meaning the Messiah. He gives no Scripture to support his assertion that we “cover the Messiah” by not praying in His Name. Where does the Bible say that when we pray in the Savior Yahshua’s Name we are then uncovering Him and by not calling on His Name we are covering Him? There are none.

He goes on, “Now let us look at the next verse. *‘But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head (man) for that is even all one as if she were shaven,’* 1 Corinthians 11:5.

“So, Paul is saying that a man should have a covering on his physical head, the head on his shoulders (as well as) when the woman prays or prophesies or he is causing her to dishonor him (her head).”

Covered by Proxy?

Do you grasp the twisting of Scripture? He says that if the woman is praying, then the MAN must have a covering on his head or she is dishonoring the husband! This is not the meaning of the verse at all, but is a gross perversion of Scripture. If the woman prays with nothing on her head, how does the man's headcovering prevent her from dishonoring him?

The error continues: "If a man does not have a physical headcovering, it is the same as if his wife had her head shaved."

Obviously then, a man would not have to have on any headcovering if his wife were not in attendance either at the synagogue or meeting to worship Yahweh. So long as the man is alone he would not need a covering of any kind, according to this writer's reasoning. If the wife is praying (according to this perverted interpretation) and the HUSBAND DOES NOT COVER HIS HEAD, THEN IT IS as if SHE had shaved her head!

Paul says differently. He says that if the woman does not cover her own head (on her shoulders) it is as if she were shaven, which the NIV correctly says is a sign of a disgraceful act. The man's headcovering has nothing to do with the woman's head being shaved. It is her own head that is to be covered.

The writer continues: "And only women caught in adultery had their heads shaved. This has always been a custom among the Jews even today, for women caught in adultery, to shave their heads. Paul also shows this in verse 6, that the woman is to cover her physical head also. Man and woman both are to have a headdress on when they worship Yahweh. This shows that neither one is without each other in Yahweh, (I Cor. 11:11-12)."

The above conclusion of the writer totally misses the basic thrust of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul is clearly teaching that if the woman does not have a covering on her head she is less than pious. The context of I Corinthians 11:11-12 simply means that the man is not without the woman because all men are born from women. But woman was formed from man's rib. Yet, both man and woman are from Yahweh Who is the Creator of all life.

Let's Get to the Heart of the Matter

From his book, *What is a Jew*, Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer states in the section, "Do All Jews Wear Hats When They Pray? There is a tendency by all faiths to exalt customs into firmly established religious principle."

Leaders in Judaism themselves admit there is nothing in the Bible that teaches men to wear anything on their heads or even wear a prayer shawl.

Professor Jacob Z. Lauterbach has pointed out, "The custom of praying bareheaded or with covered head is not all a question of law. It is merely a matter of social propriety and decorum." This is true as far as the Old Testament is concerned, but Paul clearly makes it plain that in the New Testament, men are to have nothing on their heads, and women are to have their heads covered.

"Actually, there is no Biblical law or directive for covering the head. To cover one's head with a turban or skullcap (*yarmulke*) as a sign of humility, respect, or reverence has been a widespread custom among many people in the Orient, especially among the Hindus, Arabs, and Persians.

Jews having originated as an Eastern people (those who follow religious tradition) are careful to cover their heads, both when waking and sleeping.

“In ancient Jewish beliefs there is found stern disapproval of the uncovered head, whether it be of a man or woman. But the ‘sin’ is compounded by uncovering the head in a consecrated place, like the synagogue or the *Bet haMidrash* (House of Study) or when at prayer or while at Torah study. The pious man has always been exhorted to be on guard against carelessness in this matter. When his head is unavoidably bared, he is forbidden to pronounce the name of Yahweh, to recite the Shema, or to read from the Torah,” *The Book of Jewish Knowledge*, p. 191.

“Jewish custom has for ages required women to cover the hair as an evidence of their modesty before men, and required men to cover the head in order to show their humility and reverence before Yahweh.

“Bareheadedness was customary among men in biblical times, as shown in the story of Samson (Jgs. 13:16) and in that of Absalom (2 Sam. 14:26), and by the use of the name ‘crown’ for the long hair of the Nazarite (Num. 6:5).

“David Halevi of Ostrog (17th century) was the first to declare that the prohibition against uncovering the head was based on religious law, in opposition to the Christian mode of worship. He founded his decision on the Talmudic interpretation of Leviticus 18:3: ‘You shall not walk in their ordinances.’ The same view was taken by the physician Solomon Levi of Verona, Amsterdam, 1731. On the other hand, Elijah of Wilna, like Solomon Luria, holds that the prohibition is based merely on custom or propriety,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, pp. 530-532.

“The custom of praying bareheaded or with covered head is not all a question of law. It is merely a matter of social propriety and decorum.

“Like many old traditions, there has been a great deal of speculation about the origin of this practice. We know, of course, that the Jewish religion had its origin in the Near East. I have never encountered sunshine as bright and dazzling as I found in modern Jerusalem. Many centuries ago, too, Jews praying in the open court of the Temple of Jerusalem must have needed protection for their heads against the scorching sun.

“Another explanation is that in ancient times Jews lifted their prayer shawls over their heads during worship to cover their eyes. This removed all distraction from prayer and made it possible to attain the greatest concentration. The hat or skull cap is the symbolic descendant of the prayer shawl covering.

“We know from archeological remains that in ancient days, the people of Israel were often bareheaded. In the British Museum, I saw a bas-relief of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, portraying Jews who wore no headgear. The modern Orthodox practice, therefore, of keeping the head covered at all times does not go back to ancient Palestine. However, in the East the privileged classes wore some head ornament as a sign of their status and in time this custom spread to all groups,” *What Is a Jew?* Rabbi Mossis N. Kertzer, p. 93.

“Among modern Jews, the covering of the head as a symbol of reverence during worship has remained a religious symbol of significance. But the origin and development of this religious symbol is shrouded in uncertainty.

“Though covering one’s head was regarded during the Talmudic period as a sign of respect, there is scant evidence that Jews in the Temple court or in the early synagogue were required to wear any headgear.

“With the passage of time, the custom of covering the head during worship increasingly became mandatory. As the persecutions of the Church increased, the Jewish aversion to everything Christian deepened. The uncovering of the head became associated with Church etiquette and therefore became repugnant. To worship or even to go about with an uncovered head was regarded as imitation of the Christians and an act of irreverence to Yahweh. Conversely, the covering of one’s head became an act of Jewish piety. For convenience the skullcap, or *yarmulke*, was adopted,” *Jewish Worship*, Abraham Millgram, p. 351-352.

“Covering the head, not being bareheaded, is referred to in the Talmud and in the codes but neither made it a definite obligation. However, in the course of time, it became a symbol of the awareness and consciousness of the presence of (Yahweh) and a way of distinguishing Jews from non-Jews, and hence it was considered a requirement and obligation,” *A Basic Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 136.

Thus, attempting to defend the Jewish custom of wearing a head covering has no Biblical basis. Jewish authorities agree the head covering is later tradition and not based upon the Bible.

Paul tells us that women should wear a head covering, but men should not, 1Corinthians 11:1-15.

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