

Tassel Hassle

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Abstract

Many of our modern Bible versions conceal the true nature of the tassels that Jesus wore on his garments. This is clearly shown by a detailed comparison of the translations employed in various Old and New Testament verses.

In the Torah books of Deuteronomy and Numbers, Yahweh commands his people to wear four tassels on the corners of their garments. This command was to be carried out throughout the generations (i.e., without ceasing, from generation to generation).

The Scripture specifies that each tassel must contain a cord of blue, but the colours of the other cords are not specified. The purpose of these tassels, again according to Scripture, is so that when the wearer looks upon them, he is to be reminded of all the commandments of Yahweh in his Torah Law, to do them.

The tassels are to remind the wearer not to follow after his own heart, but to do all of Yahweh's commandments and be holy to God. So, this is not a small thing, but is taken very seriously by all who keep the Law of Moses.

Yahweh said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels 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 Yahweh, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to where after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God. I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am Yahweh your God.
[Numbers 15:37-41 ESV, 'LORD' replaced with 'Yahweh']

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.	You shall make tassels on the four corners of the cloak with which you cover yourself.	You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself.	You must put four tassels on the hem of the cloak with which you cover yourself—on the front, back, and sides.

Table 1: Deuteronomy 22:12

In Table 1 on this page, you will see Deuteronomy 22:12 in four popular translations. Note that they have all translated the Hebrew word¹ as ‘tassels’.

Table 2 on the next page shows Numbers 15:38 in the same four major translations. Once again, you will see that the translators translate the Hebrew word² as ‘tassels’, except for the NRSV, which appears to believe a bit of variation relieves boredom, and used the word ‘fringes’ instead. We will see later on why the NRSV translators decided to do this.

Fast forward to the New Testament, which is a time populated by people who keep the Laws of Moses written in the Torah. Turning to Luke chapter eight (refer to Table 3 on page 4), we read the account of the woman who wanted to touch the garment of Jesus in order to be healed. The account as given in the NIV, NRSV, ESV and NLT, with verse 44 also given in the original Greek language. Notice the highlighted words. These are ‘edge’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’ and ‘fringe’, respectively; the Greek word is ‘kraspedou’, a grammatical form of ‘kraspedon’.³

In Mark chapter six (refer to Table 4 on page 5), we are told that wherever Jesus went, sick people were brought to him to be healed, and that all they needed to do was to touch the ‘edge’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’, or ‘kraspedon’ of his garment. Only one *kraspedon* would do: they did not need to touch two or more *kraspeda*.

¹The Hebrew word here is: גְּדִלִים (gedilim).

²The Hebrew word this time is: תְּצִי־תְצִי (tzit-tzit)

³Greek κρᾶσπέδου = kraspedou, and κρᾶσπέδον = kraspedon.

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
<p>Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel.</p>	<p>Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner.</p>	<p>Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner.</p>	<p>Give the following instructions to the people of Israel: Throughout the generations to come you must make tassels for the hems of your clothing and attach them with a blue cord.</p>

Table 2: Numbers 15:38

In Matthew 9, we read the account (Table 5 on page 6) of the woman with the haemorrhage. Once again, we are told the woman touched the ‘edge’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’, or ‘kraspedon’ of his garment.

In Matthew 14 (Table 6 on page 6), we have more sick people touching the ‘edge’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’, ‘fringe’, or ‘kraspedon’ of his garment.

Now we come to Matthew 23 (Table 7 on page 7), where we are being told about the villains of the plot, who are the scribes and the Pharisees. Verse five contains the words that Jesus said about these bad people. He said that one thing they liked to do was to big note themselves by making the ‘tassels’, ‘fringes’, ‘fringes’, ‘tassels’, or ‘kraspeda’ of their garments extra long, so that people would see how righteous they are in keeping the Law.

But the Greek word is the same as in all the other instances (it’s just plural instead of singular), yet half the translators now all of a sudden realise something they hadn’t before: that a *kraspedon* is a tassel signifying one’s adherence to the Law. It seems to be fine to admit this when we are talking about the villains, but when we are talking about the hero (Jesus), there would appear to be a marked reticence in associating him with utter faithfulness to the Torah Law. This naturally prompts one to ask, Why is this the case?

Recall that many people were healed by merely touching one of the four *kraspeda* (tassels) which Jesus wore on his garment. Also recall that the significance of the tassels, according to Scripture, is to remind oneself of the Law and

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
<p>And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.</p>	<p>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.</p>	<p>And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.</p>	<p>A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped.</p>

προσελθοῦσα ὀπισθεν ἤψατο τοῦ **κρασπέδου** τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ, καὶ παρὰ χρῆμα ἔστη ἡ ρύσις τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς.

Table 3: Luke 8:43-44

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
<p>And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.</p>	<p>And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.</p>	<p>And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.</p>	<p>Wherever he went—in villages, cities, or the countryside—they brought the sick out to the marketplaces. They begged him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of his robe, and all who touched him were healed.</p>

καὶ ὅπου ἂν εἰσεπορεύετο εἰς κώμας ἢ εἰς πόλεις ἢ εἰς ἀγροὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς ἐτίθεισαν τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας, καὶ παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν ἵνα κἄν τοῦ **κρασπέδου** τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ ἅψωνται· καὶ ὅσοι ἂν ἤψαντο αὐτοῦ ἐσώζοντο.

Table 4: Mark 6:56

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.	Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak,	And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment,	Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe,

Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ αἰμορροοῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη προσελθοῦσα ὀπισθεν ἤψατο τοῦ **κρασπέδου** τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ·

Table 5: Matthew 9:20

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.	and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.	and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.	They begged him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of his robe, and all who touched him were healed.

καὶ παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν ἵνα μόνον ἄψωνται τοῦ **κρασπέδου** τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ· καὶ ὅσοι ἤψαντο διεσώθησαν.

Table 6: Matthew 14:36

NIV	NRSV	ESV	NLT
Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;	They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.	They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,	Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels.

πάντα δὲ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν ποιοῦσιν πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· πλατύνουσι γὰρ τὰ φυλακτήρια αὐτῶν καὶ μεγαλύνουσι τὰ κράσπεδα,

Table 7: Mathew 23:5

one’s faithfulness to it.

This is how these four major translations—all in frequent use today—treat this serious topic:

1. The NIV is fine with using the word ‘tassels’ in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, when referring to Jesus, the NIV decides that ‘edge’ is the better word. However, when referring to the scribes and Pharisees (the “bad” people), once again ‘tassels’ becomes the better word.
2. The NRSV, in the Old Testament, knows that a *kraspedon* is a tassel (see Dt 22:12), but cleverly uses the vague and inappropriate word ‘fringe’ in Num 15:38 so that no one can point the finger when the same word is used throughout the New Testament to refer to these tassels. But was it clever or did they only succeed in tipping their hand?
3. The ESV likewise knows in the Old Testament that *kraspeda* are tassels, using this word in both places. When it comes to the tassels worn by Jesus, however, the appropriate word becomes the vague and inappropriate word, ‘fringe’. Consistently, the same vague word is also used for the tassels worn by the scribes and pharisees. According to the ESV, then, there

would appear to be a clear difference between Old Testament tassels and New Testament tassels.

4. The NLT translators know that *kraspeda* are tassels in the Old Testament, but they are not when Jesus is wearing them, where they become ‘fringes’ instead. However, when the scribes and Pharisees wear them in the New Testament, they revert to being ‘tassels’.

How would you ever know from reading these translations that the “fringe” worn by Jesus was the same thing as the ‘tassels’ referred to in Dt 22:12 and Num 15:38? You were not intended to know it.

I will leave it to the reader to ponder the significance of having people healed by the mere touch of the very symbol of Yahweh’s holy Torah Law, and why this fact is hidden from us in the translations we read every day. A little reflection should reveal that the answer is plain enough.

The Ancient Septuagint Translation

It is relevant and of interest to note the Septuagint⁴ translation of Deuteronomy 22:12 and Numbers 15:38, which are shown below.

στρεπτα ποιησεις σεαυτω επι των τεσσαρων **κρασπεδων**
των περιβολαιων σου α εαν περιβαλη εν αυτοις [Dt 22:12, LXX]

λαλησον τοις υιοις ισραηλ και ερεις προς αυτους και ποιησα-
τωςαν εαυτοις κρασπεδα επι τα πτερυγια των ιματιων αυτων εις
τας γενεας αυτων και επιθησετε επι τα **κρασπεδα** των πτερυ-
γιων κλωσμα υακινθινον [Num 15:38, LXX]

It is evident that the ancient Hebrew scholars also knew that *gedilim* and *tzit-tzit* were *kraspeda*, and that the same Greek word was employed by the New Testament writers.

⁴The Septuagint is the Ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, often abbreviated to: LXX, which is seventy in roman numerals, due to the fact that it is said that seventy Hebrew scholars worked on the translation.

Bible Versions

This text contains academic comparisons of several verses taken from four English language translations. These are as follows:

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- NRSV** New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
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- NLT** Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation.

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