

NO BEARDS? NO WAY!

Almost inevitably when a man tells his friend that he believes in the Torah, that friend responds with something like, "If you're following Torah then why do you shave? God told the Israelites that they weren't allowed to cut their beards." If I've heard this once, I've heard it a thousand times. The passage that seems to be in question is in this week's Torah portion, so let's unpack it a bit and see if, in fact, men are not allowed to trim their beards.



Leviticus 21:5 *"They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh."*

It sure appears from this text that the priests are not allowed to shave. And today's Orthodox Jews no doubt reinforce this belief. But before we actually put this back into its original context, take a closer look at even the English. It says they are not supposed to make any bald **PLACE** on their heads, shave the **EDGES** of their beard, or make any **CUTTINGS** on their flesh. Anyone over the age of 10 could most likely come to the conclusion that this passage is not talking about

normal shaving. Most people don't cut just one place on their head or shave just a corner of it, much less cut themselves on purpose. There's something else going on here...

If we put this entire passage back in the text, we can see that it's about the priests not coming in contact with someone that has died. They are not allowed to mourn for the dead if they are not close family (Lev. 21:1-4). Then immediately Yahweh makes this strange command. If we put it back into its original context we can easily see that He's telling them not to follow the pagan mourning practices for the dead. Taking a look at all the rest of the scriptures on this topic confirms this for us:

Leviticus 19:27-28 *"You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. ²⁸ You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you. I am Yahweh."*

Deuteronomy 14:1 *"You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead."*

Ironically, contrary to what is seen in Judaism today, the priests are actually commanded to trim their beards and to be clean cut.

Ezekiel 44:20 *"They [the priests] shall neither shave their heads, nor let their hair grow long, but they shall keep their hair well trimmed."*

Case closed. The presumption that the Torah teaches that men must not shave is a fable and a gross misrepresentation of the truth. In fact, Yahweh is simply telling His people that they are not to get tattoos for the dead or engage in any other pagan practice that was forbidden in mourning or remembering them. It's clear from the above scriptures that there was some sort of cultural mourning practice that included shaving part of the head as well as the beard and making cuts on oneself for the deceased. This is the context of Leviticus 21:5. And incredibly, the command was that men should **NOT** let their hair grow out of control, but should keep it trimmed and presentable. Not too long and not too short. **Juuuuuust right.**

Shalom!

Jim Staley

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