

Session Eleven

Battle lines: The Scriptures

Something is occurring in our time that is unprecedented: many believers are coming to a deep appreciation of Torah, the first five books of the Bible, which a great deal of the Church considers antiquated and irrelevant. People are coming together to form congregations and communities in which they can live out their faith in Yeshua in a Torah pursuant way. In doing so, they are reading the whole Bible, some of them for the first time, and finding out that the wisdom and instruction found in the Torah is a great delight. But they are also finding out that there are many questions for which they have no ready answers.

Moreover, many of these people have come to realize that the standard teaching they received from the Christian Church was in some cases incomplete, and in other cases simply wrong. They realize in a new way that the responsibility for knowing what the Bible teaches rests upon their own shoulders, and that they must take up the responsibility of being a “workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2Tim 2:15).

But while there is a renewed hunger to know the God of the Scriptures, and a commitment to know the Scriptures for themselves, there is also a vulnerability that they encounter. Having realized that former teachers had, in some cases, led them astray, they are left to wonder who they can trust. As such, they may be vulnerable to false teachers who seek to undermine their faith, and lead them into error, especially teachers who appear to have great knowledge and experience in matters relating to the Torah. Indeed, those who are part of what we might call the “Torah movement” know for certain that they are engaged in a battle for the truth.

In any battle, it is essential to be aware of the tactics of the enemy. And experience has proven that the enemy of our souls regularly attacks Torah communities in two essential areas: what we believe about the Bible, and what we believe about Yeshua. The first attack comes as the enemy attempts to sow seeds of doubt regarding the authority of Scripture. In the second attack, the enemy seeks to undermine the truth of Yeshua’s deity. Obviously, the two are related. If we begin to question the authority of Scripture, we having nothing left upon which to depend when it comes to seeking the truth about who the Messiah is, and what His work will accomplish.

The Authority of the Scriptures - the Written Revelation of God

The Torah is the foundation

- The first written revelation of God are the Ten Words (Ten Commandments)

Ex. 31:18 When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.

Deut. 9:10 “The LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the LORD had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.

- the emphasis of “written by the finger of God” is that the first writing of Scripture comes directly from God Himself.
 - this means that it is entirely without error
 - this means that it is authoritative in every way
- the Ten Words form the exemplar or standard against which the subsequent Scriptures align
 - after receiving the Ten Words written upon the tablets of stone, Moses wrote down the remainder of the Covenant (as God had given it to him)
 - this was read in the hearing of the people

Ex. 24:7 Then he [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!”

- here Moses takes the “book of the covenant” (סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית, *sefer hab'rit*) whereas the Ten Words are said to be written upon “tablets” (לוחות, *luchot*).
- the “book of the covenant” included more than just the Ten Words, meaning that Moses had written down what he had received from God upon the mountain

Ex. 24:3 Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!”

- the words that Moses had written included “all the ordinances” (literally “words,” כָּל-דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה, “all the words of Adonai”).
- thus, the additional words that Moses wrote in the Book of the Covenant were still considered to be “the words of Adonai.” They carried the same authority as the Ten Words written upon the tablets of stone.

- Moses composed the remainder of the Torah (Five Books of Moses) according to the command of God, but we are not told exactly how or when he did this

Ex. 34:27 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”

- the fact that the revelation of God given to Moses on Sinai constituted a covenant with the people of Israel, may help to suggest a scenario for the manner in which Moses composed the remainder of the Five Books
 - the Ten Words begin with “I am Adonai your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Commonly in treaties of the Ancient Near East, they begin with a description of the King who is making the covenant.
 - realizing that subsequent generations would need to know the story of the Exodus in order to understand the first of the Ten Words, Moses wrote that history
 - the history of the exodus required an explanation of how Israel came to Egypt in the first place, thus the Patriarchal narratives (Gen 12-50) were written.
 - the Patriarchal stories required an explanation of the choosing of Abraham in the first place, so the creation narrative and formation of the nations was added (Gen 1-11).
 - the need to construct the Tabernacle, set it up, and begin the service in the Tabernacle (including the priestly duties) required the writing of the remainder of Exodus and the laws contained in Leviticus.
 - to this was added the historical narratives of Israel’s journeys and their entrance into the Land (Numbers and Deuteronomy).
- Once the writings of Moses were established, they became the standard against which all subsequent writings were judged:

Deut 18:18 ‘I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you [Moses], and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 ‘It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 20 ‘But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ 21 “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ 22 “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if it will not be the word or does not happen, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

- the test of the prophet includes two aspects:
 - the thing spoken by a prophet is “not the word” (לא יהיה הדבר), meaning the matter (word) is not in concert with the word already given by God through Moses. This is reinforcement of the previous notice that speaking in the name of another god identifies the false prophet

- the thing spoken by the prophet “does not come” (וְלֹא יָבוֹא), meaning that something predicted by the prophet does not happen.
- the two tests of the prophet are therefore necessary
 - + his words can be received immediately if they align with the words given to Moses, meaning they do not contradict what God has already revealed, and therefore do not introduce anything contrary to the truth that God is the only God
 - + since the prophet may announce future events, one is not able to determine the prophet’s viability until such events occurred. If this were the only criteria, the status of the prophet could not be known for some time, especially if the events he prophesied were in the distant future.
- **Conclusion: the words of God, divinely inscribed upon the tablets, form the first exemplar. Moses’ subsequent words given to him by God, were in concert with the original Ten Words. From that point onward, all that would be received as the word of God would need to agree with the Torah. Anyone who came with a message that contradicted the Torah would be marked as a false prophet, or anyone who predicted events that did not come to pass.**

The Prophets & Writings agree with Moses

- By the time of the United Monarchy (the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon), the Torah had been compiled into a recognized canon. The term “the Torah of Adonai” could be spoken of as something everyone recognized: “the Torah of Adonai is perfect, restoring the soul” (Ps 19:7), as well as the “Torah of Moses”

1Kings 2:3 “Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn”

- the former prophets were writing around the time of the United Monarchy, and they had the written Torah as their guide. Thus, the Torah continued to be the touchstone for the people to judge the veracity of the prophets. Anything written that disagreed with Moses would not have been received.
- The later prophets then had the former prophets and the Torah of Moses as the measuring stick for their work.
- the Writings (the Psalms being the largest section) also conformed to what had been received from Moses and the Prophets. The fact that the Psalter, in its final compilation, begins with a “Torah Psalm” (Ps 1), indicates that the Psalms themselves conformed to the standard presented by Moses and the Prophets
- prior to the exile (587 BCE), the Torah and Prophets (up to that time) were recognized as a canon of Scripture
- by the 2nd Century BCE, all of the books of the Tanach were gathered together as the canon of Hebrew Scriptures

- in its original grouping, the Hebrew Scriptures consisted of 22 “books”
Torah – Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut (5 books)
Prophets – Joshua, Judges/Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah,
Jeremiah/Lamentations, Ezekiel, The Twelve, Job, Daniel
Ezra/Nehemiah, Chronicles, Ezra (13 books)
Writings – Psalms, Proverbs, Qohelet, Song of Songs (4 books)
- When Yeshua and His Apostles refer to the “Scriptures,” they are referencing the Hebrew Scriptures as they were known in the 1st Century
 - neither Yeshua or His Apostles ever quote the Apocryphal Writings as Scripture
 - Yeshua refers to the three part division of the Tanach as the inspired Scriptures:

Luke 24:44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Torah of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

- Tanach = Torah, Nevi'im (prophets), Ketuvim (writings)
- the Psalms, constituting the largest section of the Writings, is used to refer to the whole section
- **Conclusion: Yeshua and His Apostles received the Hebrew Scriptures as we now have them as the canon of divine Scripture**

Yeshua and His apostles taught that the Scriptures were the work of the Holy Spirit

Mark 12:36 “David himself said in the Holy Spirit, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet.”’ [quote from Ps 110]

- David did not write his words on his own: the Holy Spirit superintended his writing
- this was also the case with the prophets: Ezek. 2:2 “As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me.”
- thus, the Apostles teach us that the Scriptures (the Tanach in their day) were written under the superintending hand of the Spirit:

2Pet 1:20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. [ESV]

- why does Peter begin with emphasizing “first of all?”
- in the previous context, Peter is describing his experience with Yeshua on the mountain of transfiguration (2Pet 1:16–18)
 - he does not negate the value of this experience
 - v. 18 - “we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”
 - but then Peter goes on to write:

2Pet 1:19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

- even though the experience on the mountain was miraculous, Peter affirms that the written word of God (the prophetic word) is even more certain
- Peter therefore admonishes us to put the instructions contained in the Scriptures as more valid than our experiences, even those that may be miraculous
- this is because (“first of all,” v. 20) the words of Scripture are the very words of God

2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

- the Apostolic Scriptures were not yet written and gathered together as a received body of Scripture when Paul wrote this
- When Paul speaks of “all Scripture,” he’s referring to the canon of the Tanach
- the Scriptures are the means for equipping the “man of God” for “every good work”
- **Conclusion: the Scriptures gain their eternal value because they are the product of the Spirit of God, and thus are the very words of God**

The Apostolic Scriptures

- The Gospels were written by those who were eye witnesses of Yeshua
 - they were written at a time when many eyewitnesses of Yeshua were still alive
 - the Apostles could not have written spurious accounts without being challenged by those who had witnessed the events they describe
- Yeshua put His teachings on par with the Tanach:

Mark 13:31 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

Psa. 119:89 “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”

- only the Apostolic Scriptures contain the words of Yeshua
- had the Apostolic Scriptures not been written, the promise of Yeshua, that His words would not pass away, would have been unfulfilled and rendered Him a false prophet
- therefore, the Apostolic Scriptures are a necessary part of the Scriptures as a whole

- the words of Yeshua were already considered authoritative by the early Apostles:

1Tim. 5:18 For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”

Luke 10:7 “Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

- this saying of Paul links the words of the Torah (Deut 25:4) together with the words of Yeshua (Lk 10:7) and labels both as “Scripture”
- by the time of Paul’s writing (45-65 CE), the Apostolic Gospels (which were also in the process of being written) were being received as Scripture
- Paul’s epistles as well were being received as Scripture:

2Pet 3:15 “...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

The self-authenticating nature of Scripture

- since the Scriptures are “God-breathed” (inspired), they carry within them the innate spiritual quality of God’s word
- the communities of God’s people, throughout the ages, have recognized this innate quality of the Scripture through:
 - their ability to transform lives by the work of the Spirit
 - through the accurate prophetic accounts they contain
 - through their consistent message with the canon of Scripture already received
- the canonization process was a recognition of the self-authenticating nature of Scripture
 - no council or group of leaders decided what was, and what was not Scripture
 - the various councils simply affirmed what the Scriptures had already manifested, that is, the quality of being inspired by the Holy Spirit

Were the Scriptures corrupted in the process of copying manuscripts?

- none of the “originals” are extant today, only copies
- the Hebrew scribes were extremely articulate in their work of copying the sacred text
 - the Masoretic text was finalized 900–1050 CE
 - the Dead Sea Scrolls, dated to 200 BCE–50 CE, are the earliest copies of the Hebrew Scriptures
 - remarkable consistency is found between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text, proving beyond doubt the accuracy of the scribal traditions

- there are literally thousands of manuscripts, parts of manuscripts, and scraps of the Apostolic Scriptures
 - these agree nearly 80% of the time
 - of the remaining 20%, the majority of differences are in matters of spelling, grammar, and easily determined scribal errors (e.g., skipping a line, copying a word twice, etc.)
 - of the remaining differences between the manuscripts, only a small percentage constitute significant variants
 - even where there are clear choices of readings between the manuscripts, none of these would change any basic doctrine or belief. In any single instance where a text may be in question, other Scriptures confirm the consistent, biblical teaching.
 - it is evident that the Holy Spirit was not only instrumental in the initial writing of Scripture, but also in its ultimate preservation from generation to generation

Were the Apostolic Scriptures originally written in Hebrew?

- Some among Torah communities are claiming that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, and that the extant Greek, Syriac, and other manuscripts were corrupted when the Church forsook her Hebrew roots
 - if this were the case, we would find some evidence of Hebrew manuscripts of the Apostolic Scriptures
 - to date, only very late copies of a Hebrew Matthew have been found (14th Century and later)
 - the notion that the Greek manuscripts have been tampered with does not bear up under scrutiny. The Greek manuscripts contain many aspects of theology that were “embarrassing” to the later Christian Church, which one would have expected them to change if they had, in fact, tampered with the texts:
 - + the Jewishness of Yeshua: Matt 12:28 “...you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”
 - + the Jewishness of Paul: Acts 23:6, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees...”
 - + the humanity of Yeshua: Matt. 24:36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”
- There is every reason to believe that the majority of the Apostolic Writings were originally written in Greek
 - Greek was the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire
 - most of the communities to which the Apostles wrote were, in the majority, Gentile
 - even the Jewish communities of the 1st Century used Greek extensively
 - + until the followers of Yeshua became a driving force, the Lxx was regularly used in the synagogue
 - + Philo, a Jewish philosopher and writer, wrote all of his work in Greek
 - + Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote his works in Greek

- from a purely linguistic standpoint, the majority of the Apostolic Scriptures read as though they were originally written in Greek
 - + the fact that Semitisms are found does not require a Semitic original
 - + the majority of the time, the Greek text does not bear the marks of being a translation
- the result of speculating that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew is to undermine their authority
 - we all know that translations are inevitably biased by the translators
 - if all we have in the Apostolic Scriptures is a Greek translation of an original Hebrew, we cannot trust them
 - if such were the case, we are left without an accurate witness of the life of Yeshua, of His teachings, and of the subsequent Apostolic message
 - however, all of the data points clearly to the fact that most of the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Greek, and that the manuscripts that are left to us of the Apostolic Scriptures give accurate witness to the original writings
 - we believe that the God, Who inspired the original Scriptures, was also involved in maintaining their transmission through the centuries so that the word of God would be available to every generation
- **Conclusion: the claim that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic is pure speculation without any basis in historical or linguistic fact**

Summary & Conclusion

- Satan knows that the word of God is the primary source of truth for God's people. Therefore, he will do all in his power to undermine the authority of the Scriptures.
- the Torah, given directly by God to Moses on Sinai, constitutes the first written revelation of God, and stands as the foundation for all subsequent Scripture.
- God continued to give His divine revelation through prophets. The test of a true prophet was twofold: 1) his words did not contradict God's revelation already given in the Torah, and 2) when he prophesied of future events, they came to pass.
- by the time of the United Monarch (ca. 1000 BCE), the Torah and the former Prophets were recognized as the received word of God.
- by 200 BCE, the entire Tanach (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) was gathered together as the received word of God. In the 1st Century CE, Yeshua and His Apostles clearly affirm the Tanach as the inspired word of God.
- The teachings of Yeshua, and the writings of His Apostles were already circulating by the end of the 1st Century CE, and by the 2nd Century CE, had been recognized as inspired Scripture.
- Yeshua Himself put His own words on par with those of the Tanach when He affirmed that His words were eternal
- The Scriptures, being the product of human authors whose writings were superintended by the Holy

