

TORAH AND THE NEW COVENANT

by Michael Rudolph

Meaning of *Torah*

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament defines “Torah” (הַר "AT - Strong's number 8451) as follows: ¹

“The word *tôrâ* means basically "teaching" whether it is the wise man instructing his son or God instructing Israel. The wise give insight into all aspects of life so that the young may know how to conduct themselves and to live a long blessed life (Prov 3:1f.). So too God, motivated by love, reveals to man basic insight into how to live with each other and how to approach God. Through the law God shows his interest in all aspects of man's life which is to be lived under his direction and care. Law of God stands parallel to word of the Lord to signify that law is the revelation of God's will (e.g. Isa 1:10). In this capacity it becomes the nation's wisdom and understanding so that others will marvel at the quality of Israel's distinctive life style (Deut 4:6). Thus there is a very similar understanding of the role of teaching with its results in the wisdom school, in the priestly instruction, and the role of the law with its results for all the people of the covenant.”

“Specifically law refers to any set of regulations; e.g., Exo 12 contains the law in regard to observing the Passover, Some other specific laws include those for the various offerings (Lev 7:37), for leprosy (Lev 14:57) and for jealousy (Num 5:29). In this light law is often considered to consist of statutes, ordinances, precepts, commandments, and testimonies.”

“The meaning of the word gains further perspective in the light of Deut. According to Deut 1:5 Moses sets about to explain the law; law here would encompass the moral law, both in its apodictic and casuistic formulation, and the ceremonial law. The genius of Deut is that it interprets the external law in the light of its desired effect on man's inner attitudes. In addition, the book of Deut itself shows that the law has a broad meaning to encompass history, regulations and their interpretation, and exhortations. It is not merely the listing of casuistic statements as is the case in Hammurabi's code. Later the word extended to include the first five books of the Bible in all their variety.”

In addition, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon gives “direction, instruction, law”² as the primary definitions of “*Torah*”, and the Encyclopaedia Judaica states:³

¹ R. Laird Harris, editor, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, TWOT No. 910, p. 404, Moody Press (Chicago, Illinois: 1980).

² Francis Brown, editor, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon, “*Torah*”, p. 435-436, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

“*Torah* is derived from the root *hry* which in the *hifil* conjugation means “to teach” (cf. Lev. 10:11). The meaning of the word is therefore “teaching,” “doctrine,” or “instructions”; the commonly accepted “law” gives a wrong impression. The word is used in different ways but the underlying idea of “teaching” is common to all.”

There are basically two ways in which “*Torah*” is used in the *Tanakh*. In its narrowest usage and in a minority of cases, “*Torah*” refers to parts of God’s legal code which provide instructions on specific matters. Examples of this usage are:

- “burnt offering...” (Leviticus 6:9ff)
- “grain offering...” (Leviticus 6:14ff)
- “sin offering...” (Leviticus 6:25ff)
- “trespass offering...” (Leviticus 7:1ff)
- “peace offering...” (Leviticus 7:11ff)
- “leprous plague...” (Leviticus 13:59ff)
- “jealousy...” (Numbers 5:29ff)

In most instances and in the majority of cases, though, “*Torah*” refers to God’s teaching – His universal and eternal standard for conduct and life. This is made clear in many verses of Scripture where *Torah* as teaching is distinguished from *Torah* as law by being in the presence of separate Hebrew words having to do with law. Examples of such accompanying words are:

hw" c . mi *mitzvah* (commandment – Strong’s 4687)⁴
hQ' xu *khukah* (statute or ordinance – Strong’s 2708)⁵
jP' v . mi *mishpat* (judgment – Strong’s 4941)⁶

The following translation examples contain the word “*Torah*” and one or more of the above words, showing that “*Torah*” is distinguishable from commandments, statutes, ordinances and judgments:

“*This is the ordinance of the Torah which the LORD has commanded, saying...*” (Numbers 19:2). Here, “*Torah*” cannot mean “ordinance.”

“*This is the ordinance of the Torah which the LORD commanded Moses:*” (Numbers 31:21). Here also, “*Torah*” cannot mean “ordinance.”

³ Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, Encyclopaedia Judaica, “Torah”, vol. 15, pp. 1235-36, Keter Publishing House Ltd. (Jerusalem: 1971).

⁴ A commandment is an order from, and enforceable by, a singular authority such as a king. Francis Brown, editor, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon, “*mitzvah*”, p. 846, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

⁵ A statute is a legislated directive, generally enforceable by a branch of government. An ordinance is similar, but at a lower level.

⁶ A judgment is law created by a decision made in a case in controversy or a specific situation.

*“..if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His **commandments** and His **statutes** which are written in this Book of the **Torah**..” (Deuteronomy 30:10). Here, “Torah” cannot mean either “commandment” or “statute.”*

*“If his sons forsake My **Torah** and do not walk in My **judgments**, if they break My **statutes** And do not keep My **commandments**..” (Psalms 89:30-31). Here, “Torah” cannot mean either “judgment”, “statute”, or “commandment.”*

Another way of distinguishing “Torah” (teaching) from “commandment,” “statute,” “ordinance,” and “judgment” is by its context. The following Scriptures are best understood when “Torah” means “teaching”:

Exodus 13:9: *“It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's **Torah** may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.”*

Exodus 16:4: *“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My **Torah** or not.’”*

Psalms 1:2: *“But his delight is in the **Torah** of the LORD, And in His **Torah** he meditates day and night.”*

Psalms 37:31: *“The **Torah** of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.”*

Psalms 40:8: *“I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your **Torah** is within my heart.”*

Proverbs 6:23: *“For the commandment is a lamp, And the **Torah** a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life.”*

Proverbs 7:2 : *“Keep my commands and live, And my **Torah** as the apple of your eye.”*

Proverbs 13:14 : *“The **Torah** of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.”*

Torah in the New Covenant

The New Covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34:⁷

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says

⁷ Translation: New King James Version.

*the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

Since in the Hebrew text of this Scripture, the word for "law" is תּוֹרָה (Torah), Jeremiah is quoting God as saying "**I will put My Torah in their minds, and write it on their hearts.**"

Handily, the above Scripture is repeated in the Greek New Covenant Scriptures, in Hebrews 8:8-12. There, the Greek word corresponding to "Torah" (verse 10) is "nomos" (Strong's No. 3551). This word is defined as "Torah" by Friberg's "New Testament Lexicon"⁸ as follows:

*"no,moj(ou(o` w. a basic mng. of what is assigned or proper law; (1) gener. any law in the judicial sphere (RO 7.1); (2) as rule governing one's conduct principle, law (RO 7.23); (3) more specif. in the NT, of the Mosaic system of legislation as revealing the divine will (**the Torah**) the law (of Moses) (LU 2.22); in an expanded sense, Jewish relig. laws developed fr. the Mosaic law (Jewish) law (JN 18.31; AC 23.29); (4) as the collection of writings considered sacred by the Jews; (a) in a narrower sense, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, as comprising the law (MT 12.5; GA 3.10b); (b) in a wider sense, the OT scriptures as a whole (MT 5.18; RO 3.19); (5) fig. as the Christian Gospel, the New Covenant, as furnishing a new principle to govern spiritual life law (RO 8.2a; HE 10.16)."*

A word related to "nomos", the Greek root word, "nomotheteo" (nomoqete, w - Strong's No. 3549), occurs in Hebrews 8:6 as nenomoqe, thtai. This word is translated "established" in the New King James Version:

*"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was **established** on better promises."*

Stern recognizes the equivalence of "nomotheteo" and "Torah" in his translation of Hebrews 8:6 in his "Jewish New Testament":⁹

*"But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as **Torah** on the basis of better promises."*

⁸ Timothy & Barbara Friberg, Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament, "no,moj", BibleWorks 4.0, Hermeneutica Bible Research Software (Big Fork, Montana: 1999).

⁹ David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament, 1st ed., p. 302, Jewish New Testament Publications (Clarksville, Maryland: 1991).

In support of Stern's thesis that "*nomotheteo*" and "*Torah*" are equivalent, consider that *nomotheteo* is also found in Exodus 24:12 of the Septuagint,¹⁰ and that very same word in the Hebrew text is *h'ha-Torah*.

Employing these definitions, one may confidently modify Hebrews 8:6 in the New King James Version to be rendered:

"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was given as Torah (based) on better promises."

Since the "better covenant" in Hebrews 8:6 is the "New Covenant" which is referred to in Jeremiah 31:31 and Hebrews 8:8, one must conclude that the New Covenant was given as *Torah*, and therefore is *Torah* (God's teaching).¹¹

What Makes the Pentateuch Torah?

Since "*Torah*" is God's teaching, there is a sense in which all Scripture is "*Torah*."

2 Timothy 3:16-17: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

Nevertheless, Yeshua himself recognized a distinction between the *Torah* of the *Pentateuch* and other classifications of Scripture:

Luke 24:44: "*Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law (nomos) of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.'*"

Why then, are the first five books of the Bible traditionally classified as "*Torah*",¹² whereas the remaining Hebrew Scriptures are not? It cannot be their inspiration, for by definition, all Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). No, the uniqueness of the *Pentateuch* is that it contains God's major covenants prior to Yeshua. The other books of the *Tanakh* expound on these covenants, teach about them, prophesy about them, and present their history, but they do not themselves contain the covenants.

The Gospels As Torah

This paper concludes that the New Covenant is a covenant of *Torah* – God's teaching written on our hearts. Now let us see if any of the New Covenant books are *Torah*

¹⁰ George Morrish, editor, A Concordance of the Septuagint, p. 166, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1988).

¹¹ 'According to MJ 8:6&N, the New Covenant itself "has been made Torah.'" David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary, 1st ed., p. 498, Jewish New Testament Publications (Clarksville, Maryland: 1992). See also, p.220 and p. 466.

¹² Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, p. 23, William Morrow and Company, Inc. (New York: 1991).

analogous to the *Pentateuch*. If the test for "*Pentateuchal*" *Torah* is whether a New Covenant book contains the Covenant itself – the "*Torah*" put in our minds and written on our hearts – then the Gospel books Mathew, Mark, Luke and John pass the test. In further support of this conclusion, consider the many similarities between the *Pentateuch* and the Gospels:

1. The *Pentateuch* contains the life of Moses, who was used by God to deliver the Sinai Covenant to Israel (Exodus 34:27).¹³ The Gospels collectively contain the life of Yeshua, who was used by God to deliver the New Covenant to Israel (Hebrews 8:6).
2. The *Pentateuch* contains the event in which Moses proclaims the blood of the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 24:8). The Gospels collectively contain the event in which Yeshua proclaims his blood of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28).
3. The *Pentateuch* contains the teachings and the commandments of the Sinai Covenant conveyed through Moses (Deuteronomy 4:13). The Gospels collectively contain the teachings and the commandments of the New Covenant conveyed through Yeshua (Matthew 5:1-7:29).
4. The *Pentateuch* contains the means by which men must atone for their sins through animal Sacrifice. The Gospels collectively contain the means by which men must be forgiven for their sins through Yeshua's sacrifice.
5. The *Pentateuch* initiates a new priesthood and the appointment of Aaron as High Priest. The Gospels collectively initiate a new priesthood and the appointment of Yeshua as High Priest (described in Hebrews 7:20-28).¹⁴
6. The *Pentateuch* contains shadows of things to come. The Gospels collectively contain the prophetic fulfillment of those shadows.
7. The *Pentateuch* ends with the death of Moses. The Gospels collectively end with the death and ascension of Yeshua.

Yeshua's life and blood are the substance of the New Covenant – its "*Torah*" (John 1:14, 14:6), and Yeshua's sacrificial death and resurrection mark both the New Covenant's beginning (John 19:30) and its fulfillment. It is in the Gospel books that we find this New Covenant substance, and therefore the New Covenant itself.

Conclusions

The Gospels are analogous to the *Pentateuch*, in the same way as the remaining New Covenant books are analogous to the *Nev'im* (Prophets) and the *Ketuvim* (Holy Writings). Because the Gospels (like the *Pentateuch*) contain their respective covenant, they, and

¹³ The *Pentateuch* also contains the lives of the patriarchs of earlier covenants.

¹⁴ Yeshua's priesthood begins with his resurrection.

not the other New Covenant books, are classifiable as "*Pentateuchal*" *Torah*, and may appropriately be included within the *Torah* portion of the Messianic Jewish service.

The Book of Acts, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation (like the Prophets and the Holy Writings of the *Tanakh*), support their respective Covenants through prophecy, wisdom, Godly truths and the presentation of history. Because of this supportive role, these books are classifiable as *Haftorah*, and may appropriately be included within the *Haftorah* portion of the Messianic Jewish service.

January 13, 2000