

Bite Size Bible Study

Torah #92

By Pastor Lee

The word "Torah" in Hebrew is derived from the root ירה, which means 'to guide' or 'to teach'. Thus the meaning of the word is to teach or instruct. The commonly accepted word "law" gives us the wrong impression.

Was the Torah just given to Israel? Did Jesus end the Torah? Was the Torah given before Sinai? These questions have been debated to death with no consensus ever reached. I would like to throw my hat in the ring with a thought that I believe has relevance.

Was the Torah given to Israel at Mount Sinai, a new Torah from God; or a reminder of his Torah, which was given to mankind before Israel? It seems plausible that the Torah was given to Abram, Noah and even Adam. A close look at the book of Genesis reveals that the Torah did exist prior to Israel and that Adam, Noah and Abraham knew it.

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements (mishmeret), my commands (mitzvot), my decrees (hukah) and my Torah (teachings). (Genesis 26:4,5)

Even Abraham kept God's Torah over 400 years before Israel came to Mount Sinai. In the passage above, three words are used paralleling the word Torah, *mishmeret*, *mitzvot* and *hukah*. These are the same words used through the rest of scripture to describe the Torah of God. According to this passage, Abraham kept the same type of Torah that God gave Israel.

Exodus 20:13 teaches *You shall not murder*. This instruction is first recorded at Mount Sinai with the giving of the 10 commandments, but this command was broken in Genesis 4:8 *While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him*.

A person cannot be condemned for an action unless that person has been taught that it is wrong. If someone takes something from a store without paying for it, he should not be punished unless he has been taught that this is not acceptable behavior.

In order for God to punish Cain for taking the life of his brother, he had to have been taught at one point by either God or his father Adam (who would have had to have been instructed by God) that murder is a wrong.

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Gen 4:3-5 NIV

The Bible does not explain why God looked with favor on one but not the other. If God did not outline the requirements for the giving of offerings prior to this, he could not have held either of them accountable for their offerings. Therefore, Cain and Abel must have known what the requirements were for the offerings. We can assume that, since Cain was held accountable for his unacceptable sacrifice, the requirements were known prior to Mount Sinai but were not recorded in the book of Genesis.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work. (Exodus 20:8-10)

The Sabbath command is first found here, but it was observed prior to Mount Sinai. The Sabbath day of rest is recorded as being observed on two prior occasions. One occurrence is recorded in Exodus 16 where Israel observed the Sabbath day during their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai. The other is when God Himself rested from his work on the seventh day of creation (Genesis 2:2).

There are dozens of examples of the Torah teachings being followed (or not) in the times before being written down at Mt. Sinai. The conclusion must be that the Torah teachings must have been given to Adam and Eve in the beginning. Not eating from the tree of good and evil could not have been the only instructions God gave them.

They were created to be in the image of God and part of that image would include their character and mindset. It seems plausible that God explained His character and mindset to them prior to their rebellion.

If this reasoning is true then we have in the Torah a written record of the character and mindset of God. Therefore Jesus didn't end the Torah – it was an essential part of Him. The Torah is not obsolete but is as everlasting as God is. A study of the Torah is essential to our becoming more like God and restoring the image He created in us that was lost in rebellion. Not something to be followed in a legalistic way but in an effort to live more like our Creator.

Cornerstone Community Church

PO Box 654 Lemon Grove, CA 91945-0654 – www.cornerstonecommunityonline.org