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Law of God (תּוֹרָה [tôrâ], nom. direction, instruction, law, the law, H9368).

ANE It is a debated point whether תּוֹרָה is derived from יָרָה, throw, shoot (H3721) or יָרָה, instruct, teach (H3723). The latter appears more likely, although the matter is inconclusive. It may also be a loanword from Akk. *têrtu'm'*, direction, order, instruction. The Sam. form is *tura*. The root also appears to be related to Aram. אוֹרִיתָא and Eth. *'orit*. The Arab. loanword is *taurat*.

OT The nom. occurs approximately 220x in the OT, distributed as follows: Pent. (54x; 36x in Lev and Deut; 1x in Gen [Gen 26:5]); the historical books (63x; most often in 2 Chron [16x] and Neh [20x], 8x in Josh; 10x in 2 Kgs); Ps (36x; 24x in Ps 119; 3x in Ps 78; 2x in Ps 1:2); wisdom literature (12x in Prov; 1x in Job [Job 22:22]); prophetic literature (46x; 12x in Isa; 11x in Jer; 6x in Ezek; 4x in Dan; and 13x in the Minor Prophets [5x in Mal]). Its only other occurrence is Lam 2:9.

To begin to understand the theology of תּוֹרָה in the OT, it is helpful to outline the various ways in which the term is used in the OT. Generally speaking, תּוֹרָה designates some divine standard of conduct for God's people. The term is not limited to cultic or ceremonial matters, but also includes civil/social law, and eventually the narrative portions of the Pent. as well. At times, תּוֹרָה pertains to the words of prophets, and even includes the words of instruction from a father or mother to their child. An outline of the uses of תּוֹרָה in the OT is as follows.

1. *Cultic/ceremonial matters*. Cultic/ceremonial תּוֹרוֹת cover a fairly wide spectrum of regulations. They are divine commands that pertain to the manner in which one's proper relationship to the Lord is to be maintained.

(a) *Sacrifices and offerings*. The book of Leviticus especially describes in great detail the תּוֹרוֹת, laws, that regulate the offering of sacrifices. There are regulations for sin offerings (atonement for specific unintentional sins; Lev 6:24 [18]; 7:7; see Num 15:29). There are guilt offerings (for certain unintentional sins; Lev 7:1, 7), burnt offerings (atonement for sin and act of voluntary worship; 6:8 [2]; 7:37), grain offerings (expression of thankfulness for God's provisions; 6:14 [7]), and fellowship offerings (thanksgiving and fellowship with God; 7:11). The purpose of these regulations was to restore and ensure continued fellowship with Yahweh. According to Leviticus, the regulations were to be observed in the Tent of Meeting.

(b) *Sabbaths and feasts*. There were also specific regulations governing the celebration of Sabbaths and feasts. Neh 8:13 refers to the "words of the Law" in which Ezra found the Mosaic legislation for the observance of the Feast of Booths (H6109 a; v. 14; cf. Exod 23:16; Lev 23:34). Nehemiah also makes reference to the "just laws" that were given to Moses on Sinai concerning the Sabbath (—>).

(c) *Temple worship in general*. Ezek 43:11, 12 and 44:5 refer to the "law of the temple," which concerns the general design and regulations for temple worship found in Ezek 40-43 (gates and rooms in the temple). Related to this is the law referred to in Ezra 3:2 and Neh 10:34 [35] concerning the altar.

(d) *Clean vs. unclean*. The designation of certain facets of everyday life as clean or unclean was commanded by Yahweh to maintain the separateness of his chosen

people. Just what things were considered clean or unclean was outlined according to certain תּוֹרוֹת, particularly in Leviticus. There were regulations concerning food (Lev 11:46), purification after childbirth (12:7), contact with mildew (13:59), skin diseases (14:2, 32, 57), purification after a semen emission, a woman's monthly period, or sexual relations between a man and a ceremonially unclean woman (15:32-33). Num 19:2 speaks of a law pertaining to the "water of cleansing" (v. 21) for someone who has come in contact with a corpse. Related matters concern the regulations governing the cleansing of spoils of war (against the Midianites) by fire and the water of cleansing (31:21), and the "law of the Nazirite" regarding his separation from the rest of the Israelites (6:13, 21). (Clean and Unclean)

(e) *Passover and the consecration of the firstborn*. The regulations governing the celebration of the Passover (Exod 12) and the consecration of the firstborn (ch. 13) are referred to as תּוֹרָה in 12:49; 13:9; 2 Chron 30:16; Neh 10:36 [37]. (Passover)

(f) *Exclusion of foreigners*. Both Ezra and Nehemiah refer to a regulation that precludes a close association of Israelites with foreigners. Ezra 10:3 appears to appeal to a law that disallows marriage to foreigners. The precise identity of this law is uncertain (perhaps Deut 7:3), although the reference may be to the proper manner to divorce one's wife (24:1-4). Neh 13:3 more generally refers to the exclusion of foreigners from the assembly on the basis of the law in Deut 23:3-6.

(g) *Idolatry*. Jer 16:11 makes an explicit reference to the law governing the worship of other gods. Such an act is more commonly referred to as a breach of the covenant.

2. *Civil, social, and judicial matters*. Although one should exercise great caution in making the distinction between "sacred" and "secular" spheres in ancient Israel, it is helpful to juxtapose the cultic/ceremonial uses of תּוֹרָה above with its civil uses elsewhere in the OT. It should be kept in mind, however, that a rigid distinction between the two is difficult to maintain, since civil responsibilities in ancient Israel were as much under the aegis of God's law as were cultic regulations. The difference between the two was not in their sacredness, but in the spheres of life they covered. Cultic regulations pertained to the Israelites' relationship to God, whereas civil regulations pertained to communal or social concerns. Nevertheless, the latter were still dictated by the standards of God's rule over his people.

In Exod 18, Jethro advises Moses to choose seventy elders to help him administer day-to-day affairs. Moses was to teach these elders the proper regulations (תּוֹרוֹת) for settling disputes (v. 16) and other duties of daily life (v. 20). According to Deut 17:11, cases too difficult for the judges were to be brought before the Levites. Their decision was to be binding: "Act according to the law (הַתּוֹרָה) they teach you." The judges appointed by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 19:10) were to serve the Lord faithfully by properly administering whatever cases the people brought before them, including "bloodshed or other concerns of the law." Isa 51:4 juxtaposes the coming of law (תּוֹרָה) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט) as characteristic of the Servant's rule (cf. 2:3; 42:4). Habakkuk cries out to Yahweh about his apparent reluctance to punish the injustices committed in Judah: "The law is paralyzed" (Hab 1:4). In Mal 2:9, the priests are chided for their show of partiality in administrating matters of the law.

3. *Deuteronomy*. Throughout Deuteronomy and the deut. literature, תּוֹרָה, along with various other titles, seems to refer to the book of Deuteronomy, or at least to the legal material contained therein. For example, Deut 4:44 introduces the Mosaic legislation of the remainder of the book as הַתּוֹרָה (cf. 1:5 and 4:8). The various ways in which תּוֹרָה is used in the titles given to Deuteronomy are:

> "Law" (Deut 1:5; 4:8, 44; 17:18, 19; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58; 29:29 [28]; 31:12; 32:46; 31:11; Josh 1:7; 22:5; 2 Kgs 17:13 [?]; 23:24 [pl., 17:34, 37]);
> "Book of the Law" (Deut 28:61; 29:21 [20]; 30:10; 31:26; Josh 1:8; 8:34; 2 Kgs 22:8);
> "Book of the Law of Moses" (Josh 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kgs 14:6);
> "Law of Moses" (Josh 8:32; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 23:25);
> "Book of the Law of God" (Josh 24:26);
> "Law of the LORD" (2 Kgs 10:31 [see also Ps 1:2]).

Similar titles appear elsewhere in the OT, but there the exact referent is not as clear as in the deut. literature. For example, some titles include "Law" (2 Chron 15:3; 14:3 [4]; 34:19; Neh 8:2, 9); "Book of the Law" (2 Chron 17:9; 34:15; Neh 8:3); "Book of the Law of the LORD" (2 Chron 34:14; cf. Neh 9:3); "Law of the LORD" (2 Chron 12:1; 35:26); "Book of the Law of God" (Neh 8:8, 18). Although many of the titles are the same, the content of תּוֹרָה in Chronicles and Nehemiah is by no means necessarily identical to its content in Deuteronomy, Joshua, or Kings. In fact, it appears that by the

postexilic period, in which Chronicles and Nehemiah were composed, these titles designated more than simply the contents of Deuteronomy. For example, Neh 10:34 [35] calls for the proper maintenance of wood on the altar "as it is written in the Law." Although the exact referent for this law is not entirely clear, it likely stems from Lev 6:12-13 and not from Deuteronomy. Whether these titles refer to the Pent., however, or to the legal material in the Pent., or something else is difficult to judge.

4. *Human instructions for godly living*. Once again, although the dichotomy between "sacred" and "secular" in ancient Israel is difficult to substantiate, one particular use of תּוֹרָה found throughout Proverbs is neither cultic nor judicial in nature. The son is admonished to listen to the תּוֹרָה of his father (Prov 3:1; 4:2; 6:23; 7:2) and of his mother (1:8; 6:20). Other passages seem to refer to the teaching of the wise teacher (13:14; 28:4, 7, 9; 29:18). In 31:26, the teaching of the noble wife is in view. The context of these passages suggests that the contents of תּוֹרָה pertains to wise, godly instruction aimed at encouraging wise conduct. Similarly, Ps 78:1 begins with the psalmist urging his people to listen to his teaching. Such uses of תּוֹרָה give us a glimpse at the diversity the term enjoys in the OT.

5. *Other*. In addition to these four fairly well-defined categories, there is a host of uses of תּוֹרָה that do not lend themselves easily to such categorization. Rather than artificially reduce the diversity of the term תּוֹרָה in the OT to fit under these headings, it is perhaps wiser to mention separately some of the other ways in which תּוֹרָה is used.

A curious passage is Gen 26:5, where Abraham is said to obey, among other things, God's תּוֹרוֹת (see the similar use of צָוָה, command, in 18:19). Genesis,

however, does not specify precisely what these laws are, a fact that might suggest that either 26:5 presents a post-Mosaic picture of Abraham or that these laws are general divine norms that have nothing to do with Mosaic legislation. Other uses of תּוֹרָה include: a reference to the stone tablets (Exod 24:12); regulations concerning the gathering of manna (16:4, 28); test for an unfaithful wife (Num 5:30); the manner in which God deals with people (2 Sam 7:19). Also, as mentioned above, many of the uses of תּוֹרָה simply defy clear categorization (see also Jer 9:12; 26:4; 44:10; Lam 2:9). Not every mention of תּוֹרָה means the same thing. Hence, when תּוֹרָה is used without further specification, it is often difficult to say with certainty precisely what the content of this תּוֹרָה is. What appears to be certain, however, is that תּוֹרָה refers to an authority and standard that was recognized by the community as binding and at least generally of divine origin. This includes "human" instructions, such as Proverbs (Waltke, 65-78).

6. *Teachers of* תּוֹרָה. God's standard of conduct, whatever that might entail, was to be taught to the people. The task of teaching and proper execution of תּוֹרָה was entrusted to several groups of people, most notably the priests and scribes (2 Chron 15:3; Ezra 7:6, 10; Neh 8:7; Mal 2:6-8). In view of their high responsibility, it was incumbent on these individuals to perform their tasks with faithfulness and integrity. This was not always the case, and some harsh words are reserved for those who failed to execute their high office properly (Neh 9:34; Jer 2:8; 8:8; 18:18; Ezek 7:26; 22:26; Hos 4:6; 8:12; Zeph 3:4). God himself is also said to teach תּוֹרָה. For example, Ps 94:12: "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (see also Job 22:22). In Isa 8:16 and 20, the law referred to by the prophet is not only in his charge, but likely

also refers to the prophet's own words concerning the Assyrian crisis (see also Dan 9:10). Finally, as mentioned above, תּוֹרָה is also the teaching of fathers, mothers, and wise men imparted to their children and others.

7. *General attitude toward* תּוֹרָה *in the OT*. The OT's attitude toward תּוֹרָה is routinely positive. Any explicit negative statements likely concern abuses of תּוֹרָה (e.g., faithlessness) or pertain to cultic matters (one of several meanings of תּוֹרָה; see 1 Sam 15:22-23; Isa 1:11-20; Jer 7:21-22; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8). Aside from these minority negative evaluations, the general tenor of the OT regarding תּוֹרָה, however it is to be defined in each particular instance, is positive. The law is the psalmist's delight (Ps 1:2; 119:70, 77, 92, 174). It is an object of devotion (2 Chron 31:4) and of careful study and observance (Deut 6:25; 31:11-13; Josh 1:8; Neh 8:3, 13). It is a source of wonder (Ps 119:18) and grace (119:29). It is precious (119:72) and true (119:142). It is not only to be obeyed, but loved (119:97, 113, 163, 165). The prophet looks forward to the day when the law of God will become part of the very inner fabric of God's people: "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jer 31:33). It is to be taught to the children (Deut 31:13; cf. 11:19-21). This positive view of the law may be best understood in the context of covenant. The law is an expression of God's love for and commitment to his people. While enjoying a special relationship with Yahweh, the Israelites received the privilege of conducting their entire lives in accordance with his standards of conduct, which are themselves reflections of his character (VanGemeren, 24-35).

If one were to attempt to capture the essence of תּוֹרָה in the OT, "instruction" or "teaching," rather than "law" with its particular modern connotations, may be terms that

best do justice to the variety of uses. תּוֹרָה is instruction, whether cultic or civil, whether in the form of specific legal stipulations or less formal words of guidance from parent to child, whether a clearly defined corpus such as the book of Deuteronomy or תּוֹרוֹת that are less easy to define precisely.

Psalm 78 is a particularly important psalm in that it not only gives one striking example of the diversity of תּוֹרָה in the OT, but it also provides a clear bridge to one important way in which תּוֹרָה was understood in the postbiblical period and into the NT. In v. 1, the psalmist exhorts his readers to listen to his teaching, i.e., his תּוֹרָה. What is telling is what that teaching contains. He will speak "things of old" (v. 2), what has been handed down from the fathers for successive generations (vv. 3-4). תּוֹרָה, teaching, in v. 1b is parallel to מָשָׁל, proverb, in v. 2a, linked together chiastically by פִּי. The whole of Israel's history serves as a proverb that needs interpretation. Specifically, the contents of the psalmist's teaching is a recounting of the "deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" (v. 4). His purpose for recounting these mighty deeds is so that successive generations will be faithful to the Lord, and not rebellious as their fathers had been (vv. 5-9). What are those deeds? The psalmist recounts the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, their wilderness wandering, and their entrance into Canaan (vv. 9-55). He continues by reviewing Israel's rebelliousness even after they entered the Promised Land and established the monarchy and the eventual appointment of David as faithful shepherd of the people, a factor that might indicate the general time frame for this psalm's composition (vv. 56-72).

It is important to see that תּוֹרָה encompasses not only specific legal or moral instruction, but also a historical review of Israel's past, i.e., the narrative portions of the Pentateuch. In other words, Ps 78 suggests that the Pent. as a whole was seen as תּוֹרָה. The psalmist employs the past events and figures as a means to instruct his readers in what it means (and does not mean) to follow the Lord faithfully. The narrative portions of the Pent. have themselves become the content of instruction. Such an understanding of תּוֹרָה becomes common in, even characteristic of, the postbiblical period. The Pentateuch as a whole becomes a divine instruction book for godly living.

P-B תּוֹרָה is most often translated νόμος (G3795) in LXX. Postbiblical Judaism was certainly concerned to maintain a proper relationship to God by means of the observance of legal stipulations. The motivation for the development of the halakic tradition as a whole (esp. Mishnah and Talmud) was essentially for the purpose of ensuring that the holy decrees of a merciful and compassionate God would continue to be scrupulously observed in the face of a changing world, namely, the influence of Hellenism, political oppression culminating in the destruction of the temple, and the ensuing Diaspora. תּוֹרָה in this sense was a dominant focus of postbiblical Judaism. Such a view toward תּוֹרָה is found not only in the codification of this view in the major halakic literature, but throughout the DSS (1QpHab, 1QS, 1QH, CD). The scholarly literature on תּוֹרָה in the postbiblical period is certainly immense, and the understanding of the role of law in the intertestamental period has come under increasing scrutiny (see esp. essays by F. Thielman and D. J. Moo). A proper understanding of the general issues

involved, however, forms the necessary backdrop for the NT's, especially Paul's, evaluation of תּוֹרָה as a standard of legally binding stipulations.

As we have seen in Ps 78, תּוֹרָה means more than specifically legal (cultic and civil) or general moral instruction (Prov). It also encompasses the narrative portions of the Pent. As such, the Pent. as a whole, including people and events recorded therein, became the contents of instruction for God's people. How are God's people to act today? What ought they to do in order to live lives pleasing to the Lord? The answers are found not only in explicit commands or "laws," but in the very events and figures that dominate the pentateuchal narratives. The pentateuchal stories were retold in such a way as to maximize their moral content for the benefit of God's people. Events of the past were seen as *examples* of God's mighty deeds, deeds that can occur at any time and that carry with them a clear teaching about the nature of God and his dealings with his people. This didactic use of a pentateuchal event is seen also in Isaiah's use of the Exodus as a paradigm for the release from Babylon. Major figures of the past (Adam, Moses, the patriarchs, and others) were seen as *object lessons* for *present* moral conduct. As such, we see a tendency in postbiblical literature to portray these figures from the past in stark, black and white terms, i.e., devoid of any moral ambiguity.

The phenomenon of the "retold Bible," i.e., deriving instruction from the pentateuchal narratives, is common in postbiblical Judaism. Two of the many examples in the Pseudepigrapha include *Jubilees* and Ps-Philo's *Book of Biblical Antiquities*. In the Apocrypha we find Judith, Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Wisd 10:1-21 is a particularly helpful example, not only in helping to demonstrate the phenomenon of the retold Bible in postbiblical Judaism, but in forming the proper backdrop for examining

the same phenomenon in the NT. Wisd 10:1-21 gives a review of divine history from Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, and finally, and most thoroughly, Moses and the Exodus generation. The author's purpose for recounting these figures is not simply to give a history lesson, but to demonstrate God's faithful presence with his faithful people. Each figure provides a moral lesson for the readers, either for unrighteousness in the case of Cain, or righteousness in the case of the other seven. A glance at Wisd 10:1-21 and Sir 44-50 reveals the obvious similarities between the phenomenon of the retold Bible in postbiblical Judaism and several NT passages.

NT The G word used most often to refer to law, νόμος (G3795), is found throughout the Gospels, the Pauline corpus, Hebrews, and James. The relationship of the OT law to the message of the gospel, and by extension to the life of the Christian is a highly debated topic (see Strickland [ed.], *The Law*). This is due primarily to the recent (and continued) scholarly reevaluation of the meaning of "law" in intertestamental Judaism. The case has been made convincingly (perhaps the most influential work is that of E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*) that the post-Reformation presentation of a dead, legalistic Judaism in NT times is largely without support in the Jewish literature of the time. Rather, the God of intertestamental Judaism is presented in the literature of the time as gracious, loving, and forgiving. This raises several issues, not the least of which is the nature and accuracy of Paul's evaluation of his contemporaries (and, until his conversion, his comrades). It also challenges the church to reevaluate, perhaps not so much Paul's understanding of the law, but the viability of the Reformation paradigm of "justification by faith" (particularly Martin Luther), through which so much of subsequent Protestant theology has understood Paul.

What recent scholarship has shown is the complexity of issues that are involved in a proper understanding of the NT's relationship to the law. Any attempt here to sum up or give a bottom line for that relationship would merely serve as just one more example of reductionism. Nevertheless, although comprehensive statements are difficult to make, a reading of the NT does leave one with certain impressions about the interface between gospel and law.

1. The law is not a wholly negative entity in the NT. One cannot speak of a sweeping law/gospel dichotomy that puts the OT and NT economies at odds.

2. Jesus saw himself and his mission, in some sense, as the fulfillment of OT law (Matt 5:17).

3. Paul's view of the law is exceedingly complex and resists simplistic evaluation. Paul has both positive and negative statements to make about the role of the law for those who are "in Christ."

4. Paul's statements about the law should not be understood apart from the context in which Paul addressed those statements. Paul was not engaged in abstract theological speculation. He was rather a "pastor-theologian," addressing particular people with particular problems.

5. However positively or ambiguously the NT portrays the relationship between law and gospel, the coming of Christ inaugurated an era that rendered obsolete any soteriological scheme, including the OT, that proceeded apart from that event. There is, in other words, both continuity and discontinuity between the era before the coming of Christ and after his coming in terms of the relationship between law and gospel.

So much seems safe to say. The reader is referred to the bibliography, particularly the essay by F. Thielman, as a starting point to engage this issue in greater depth.

As was indicated above, תּוֹרָה, at least by the intertestamental period, came to include more than simply legal portions of the Pent. Certainly well before Jesus' day, "the Law" came to be shorthand for the entirety of the Pent. (Matt 5:17). That the content of the narrative portions of the Pent. were also drawn upon for their teaching value can be seen in several places in the NT, and their similarity to such OT passages as Ps 78 and intertestamental works as Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon are clear. The NT's use of the "retold Bible" genre can be seen most clearly in Acts 7:1-53; 13:13-22; Heb 11:1-40; 2 Peter 2:4-16 / Jude 5-16. What is of further interest here is not only the parallels between the NT and intertestamental literature with respect to the genre of the retold Bible, but the fact that in retelling the OT, the NT says some of the same things about the OT that are found only in the intertestamental sources and not in the OT.

Understanding תּוֹרָה in such a twofold sense (legal and narrative elements) and attempting to ground the NT uses of תּוֹרָה in the cultural and literary milieu in which the NT writers wrote, give one pause to consider the great complexities of the issue and challenge the participants in the discussion to exercise caution in their own evaluations.

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