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Course: Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT

The Torah/Law in Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls

This week's reading centered on exploring how the Torah/Law is employed in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Paul. The Torah or the Law represented the first five books of the bible believed to have been written by Moses. For the purpose of this exploration, the Community Rules texts 1QS 5-8 were selected in conjunction with some parts of Paul's writing to the churches in Rome and Galatia (Romans 2-10; Galatians 3:1-14).

Given the history of the Torah as truths proceeding from God, it would be no wonder if a religious sect like that found in the Qumran would employ it in their doctrines and writing, and hence in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Torah is the primary sacred text of Judaism and also a foundational text for Christians. These first 5 books of Moses consist of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The word "Torah" means "teaching" or "instruction" and it provides a detailed account of Jewish history, beliefs, and practices. The Torah also contains the Ten Commandments and other laws that specified the Jewish ethical and ritual practices.

Apostle Paul being a Jew himself and a former Pharisee for that matter would no doubt have had extensive training in the Torah. There is serious consideration as to what extent he might have been influenced by the Qumran sect and their teachings, but his training in the Torah is a well-established belief. A cross examination of some of his writings reveal his extensive knowledge and application of the Torah in the formation of Christian doctrines.

In Romans chapter 3, Paul argued for the need of justification by faith by showing that the Torah could not give righteousness to either Jews or Gentiles. All had sinned and come short of the glory of God. In chapter 2 he had previously shown that even those who had not

seen the Torah had the laws of the Torah in their conscience and therefore had no excuse for their sins on the day of judgment. Thus though the Torah was holy, just and good (Romans 7:12), defined what sin was (Romans 7:7), exposed and convicted of sin (Romans 3:20), yet it could not give life, but rather brought death (Romans 7:10). Hence, the only means of justification was through faith in Jesus leading to a life of holiness (Romans 3:28).

A similar use of the Torah was adopted by Paul as he addressed the Christian Galatians in his letter to them. The main challenge with that church was that there were various Jewish teachers of the Torah telling them that they needed to become Jews first unless their Christianity was inauthentic, and thus the way to become Jewish was to adopt the whole teaching of the Torah and especially getting circumcised. Paul was greatly troubled and incensed by the degree of success among these Galatian Christians that he called it a bewitchment and that those who bewitched them with such doctrines be accursed.

In defense of the Christian faith to the Galatians, Paul made again made use of the Torah by arguing that, "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them'" (Galatians 3:10) - Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 27:26 to argue that no one can be justified by obedience to the Torah alone. For Paul, and just like to the Romans, the Galatians could not be justified by keeping the works of the law, and it would be foolish to go back into keeping the works of the law like a spiritual observance of the circumcision, after they have experienced that justification which is by faith in Jesus. The term "the works of the law" are often employed in Paul's argument showing his vast knowledge and application of the Torah in his doctrines for the Christian church.

The Community Rule text on the other hand, also known as the Manual of Discipline, was found in Cave 1 at Qumran along with other significant Dead Sea Scrolls. In this too are various instances of ideas or doctrines that may have been taken from or inspired by the Torah. For instance, it is said, "This shall be the rule for the congregation of Israel in their appointed times. Their appointed times for seeking the face of God shall be: The Sabbaths of each week, the new moon, the feasts and the fasts of the congregation" (1QS 5:5-7). The Torah is very strict on the observance of the weekly Sabbath and other holy days and feasts. It is very likely that these observances came into the Dead Sea Scrolls as a result of the reading of the Torah by the Qumran sect. Similarly, it is said, "And all those who freely devote themselves to His truth shall keep themselves from every evil deed and shall do what is good and right before Him according to what He has commanded through Moses and all His servants the prophets" (1QS 7:12-14). Again, the Torah specified what was right or wrong, clean and unclean, and so forth.

In conclusion, Abegg noted that the works of the law referred to in MMT (4QMMT) primarily concern acts that trespass the boundaries between the pure and impure in the temple precincts. The Hebrew phrase *Miqsat Maase Ha-Torah*, translated as "some of the works of the Torah," is used in the MMT (4QMMT) and has been connected to Paul's concept of works of the law which appears in Romans and Galatians. So there might be some close relation between Paul, the Dead Sea Scrolls and their application of the Torah.

References

Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "4QMMT, Paul, and the 'Works of the Law,'" *The Bible of Qumran*, 203-216