

Is All Scripture Equal?

by John D Steed

At first this probably sounds like a strange question to ask. It may seem to be an attack on the value of the Scriptures or an attempt to discredit portions of Scripture. I assure you however that this is not the purpose of the question. I am not about dispute the inspiration or validity of certain books or texts as many critics have done. I accept all the Scriptures as we have them, Hebrew and Messianic - "Old" and "New" as having been selected through the guidance of the Spirit for the purpose of instructing us in the way of salvation and right living. It is however my belief that within the Scriptures there is an internal order of authority. Or to put it in the terminology of George Orwell, "some sections of Scripture are more equal than others." When we recognise this, the process of understanding, interpretation, and application of Scripture is greatly simplified.

Protestants have quoted 2Timothy 3:16 - "All Scripture is given by inspiration of (Elohim). and is profitable for- doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (KJV) - as proof of the inspired and infallible nature of all Scripture. At the same time they have often claimed (though not always) that the law (Torah) is abolished, they have labelled the Hebrew Scriptures as "Old" and thus made the greater part of Scripture of historical value only. A source of instructive stories to tell children! Of course they have generally maintained that their doctrine is based "on the Bible and the Bible only." Though in reality they have taken the letters of Sha'ul, misunderstood them, and then used them almost exclusively as the source of their teachings.

In this Protestant understanding there are many problems, but the ones I would like to draw to your attention here are:

- (1) 2Tim. 3:16 (quoted above) has been misapplied;
- (2) there has often been a misunderstanding of the word "inspired"
- (3) the fact that there is an internal "weighting" of Scripture, created by the continuing, ongoing, revelation of YHWH, has been overlooked.

(1) Tim. 3:16 says "all Scripture is inspired" so the question we must ask is "What is the Scripture that Sha'ul is referring to?" Scripture in the English language simply means *writing*, as does also the Greek word here used *graphe*. Now to say all writing is inspired of Elohim is of course nonsense. Sha'ul obviously had particular writings in mind when he wrote this. The context shows this to be the case. The previous verses, 2Tim. 3:14-14. make it clear what 'writing' Sha'ul is speaking of: "But you, stay in what you have learned and trusted, having known from whom you have learned, and that from a babe

you have known the Set-apart Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for deliverance through belief in Messiah Yahushua." The "Set-apart Scriptures which Timothy would have known as child are without doubt the Hebrew Scriptures - the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms, etc. However much you or I might believe in the inspiration of the Messianic Writings, to use this text to support that view is to misquote Sha'ul. For it clearly his original intention to speak of the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures only. The Messianic Scriptures as we know them did not exist then - after all Sha'ul hasn't even finished writing to Timothy yet!

While I do not disagree with some of the thoughts behind the misuse of this text, i.e. inspiration of Scripture, it must be noted that it has been misused. 2Tim. 3:16 is an argument in support of the value of the Scriptures that have been called "Old" - by the "New." On what basis then can we say that the Messianic Scriptures are inspired? This is a judgement we must make on the basis of the principles laid down in the Torah as we shall see shortly.

(2) The word inspired has regularly been misunderstood. Properly it means "in-breathed" being a clear reference to the action of the Spirit (or Breath) of YHWH in the life of the writers involved. Hence 2Tim. 3:16 is better translated "All Scripture is Elohim breathed." And of course this is once again a reference to the Spirit. It is actually most instructive for us to stop and consider the process of speech. Sound is formed by air, propelled by the lungs, moving through the voice-box, this is then shaped into intelligent speech by the mouth and tongue. In the process of prophecy, the human prophet is the mouth, Elohim the lung the motive force, and the Ruach HaKodesh the breath. This is fine, we see clear evidence of the power of the Spirit in the writings of the prophets of old, in the teachings and life of Yahushua, in the lives of the apostles, and as Yahushua continues to give the Spirit to those who ask, the actions of both you and I should also be inspired. Where the problem arises is when people confuse the terms "inspired" and "infallible." Infallible essentially means that one is unable to err. Infallibility is something that in this age of sin belongs solely to Elohim. A message given by YHWH is infallible, but the writer, being human is not. To illustrate what I mean here: when - a prophet speaks simply as the mouthpiece of YHWH "Thus saith YHWH" then we should (after testing) accept his message as without error, but when this same prophet express his own opinions, observations, etc., then error is possible. The Papacy has for centuries claimed infallibility, and this is something that Protestantism has stood against. But unfortunately in the minds of some, infallibility has been awarded to the writers of Scripture, making them the predecessors of the Popes!

(3) Those of you who have the "Scriptures" translation will have undoubtedly noticed the changed order in the Hebrew Scriptures. Also you will have

noticed the division of the books into three segments: Torah - the Teaching or instruction given to Yisra'el from YHWH by the mouth of Mosheh; the Nevi'im (Prophets) - the writings of the prophets; and the Kethuvim (Writings) - containing history, songs, prayers, etc., essentially the human response to YHWH's revelation. The first letters of the Hebrew names of these three sections form the acronym TaNaKh.

In this three fold division of books we see a natural order of authority emerge. The Torah, being the record of the earliest revelations by YHWH of Himself to mankind, giving basic instruction in the Way of righteousness, lays down the essential, fundamental principles of our relationship to YHWH, to our fellow mankind, to the world around us. Indeed it sets the standard for the actual process of revelation. We find in the Torah the rules by which we are to assess the prophets which YHWH said he would said (5Mosh. 18:15) 5Mosh. 18:18-22 tells us how to know a true prophet -

"I shall raise up for them a prophet like you out of the midst of their brothers. And I shall put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall be, the man that does not listen to My words which he speaks in My Name, require it of him But the prophet who presumes to speak ,word in My Name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other mighty ones, even that prophet shall die. And when you say in your heart, 'how do we know the word which YHWH has not spoken?' when the prophet speaks in the Name of YHWH and the word is not, or comes not, that is the word which YHWH has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him."

We see that a true prophet must: be an Yisra'elite, speak the words of YHWH (Who does not change!); speak only in the Name of YHWH; and his predictions must occur (The message must be infallible!). Having this guide we can quickly identify the true from the false. If they teach idolatry or some such doctrine that s against the word that YHWH has already spoken we know to reject them However if they teach the Way of righteousness that has been revealed in the Torah, and their predictions are accurate, than we can accept them and obey their instructions.

Therefore the Torah is the standard by which we assess and interpret the revelations we find in the writings of the Prophets. Having done so, we can use the combined authority of the Torah and Nevi'im to judge the Kethuvim, the Writings, which as I said earlier is really a record of how Yisra'el responded to the revelation contained in the Torah and Prophets - a mirror you might say. Within however the books of Torah and Prophets we must obviously give greater- weight to the material which was: (1) spoken by YHWH to the whole nation (and written by His finger) - the Ten Words; (2) spoken by the

prophets as the mouthpiece of YHWH Elohim speaking in first person through the prophet. This order of authority means that we would not regard a statement in the Kethuvim - something in Koheleth for example as being "law" unless we found a corresponding statement in the Torah. If there was any apparent conflict between statements in the Nevi 'im or Kethuvim and the Torah, the Torah would have the upper hand and be used to interpret the other sections.

When we come to the Messianic Scriptures we should follow the same rule. The new revelation must measure to the standard of the original. However we could apply a similar three fold division here to that which we find in the Tanakh. The four evangels, the record of Yahushua's life, Yahushua being the last of the prophets of Yisra'el in likeness of Mosheh. can he seen as the completion of the Torah (See Matt. 5:17). The book of Revelation, being the prophetic work of Yahushua, as the completion of the prophetic works. The remainder of the "New Testament" is once again the record of human response to YHWH's revelation - Yahushua - and so are comparative to the Kethuvim.

Actually in the letters of the apostles we find a style of writing previously not encountered in the Scriptures. In these writings, particularly Sha'ul's, we find argument - a point of view is put forward by the author- and is supported by reasoning and appeal to higher authority. Sometimes this higher authority is Yahushua, but more often it is quotation from the Tanakh! This means that we are able to go back to the Torah and Prophets and independently check the authors opinion or indeed check if our understanding of what the author is saying is correct!

Understanding this order of authority means that even though the revelation of YHWH has been an ongoing process, we cannot be misled and lose the path, for we can look back at each step, sighting along the guideposts, and ensure that we are indeed on the "narrow way."