

Notes on the Bibliology of Joshua

Joshua 1:1: “the LORD spake” (see also Jos 3:7, 4:1, 4:8, 4:15, 5:2, 5:6, 5:9, 5:15, 6:2, 7:10, 7:14, 8:1, 8, 18, 10:8, 11:6, 23, 13:1, 14:6, 10, 12, 23:14)

This phrase, and similar ones such as “the LORD said,” deal with the non-written revelation given to Joshua and to others. The Pentateuch, penned by Moses, was complete and in the possession of Israel (1:8). (It is possible that they also had the canonical book of Job, but this is not explicitly referred to in Joshua. This does not prove that they were not in possession of it; Psalm 90 had also already been written, and if written and later inscripturated sources were used for genealogical tables in 1 Chronicles, some of these were likely extant, but no reference to them appears in Joshua.) This non-written Word of God was in perfect accord with the written Word of God— indeed, what we have preserved of such oral revelation now is written revelation. The agreement between the two is manifest in Joshua 1:1-9:

1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, [even] to the children of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. 5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, [so] I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. 6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. 7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it [to] the right hand or [to] the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. 9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God [is] with thee whithersoever thou goest.

The instruction given to Joshua in v. 2 is in perfect agreement with the previously given oral and then written revelation of Numbers 27:12-23. Verse 3 is a reference to Deut 11:24 (cf. Josh 14:9); here Jehovah quotes the revelation He had earlier spoken and had by that time caused to be written in Deuteronomy. Verse four recalls the spoken and now inscripturated promises of Gen 15:18-21, Ex 23:31, and elsewhere. The fifth verse refers to Deu 7:24, 31:8. Verse 6 hearkens back to Deu 31:6-8, 23. Furthermore, the Lord refers to His oath, now inscripturated,

to the fathers of the nation that He would give them the land (Gen 12:1ff, 13:14-17, etc.); the Lord's oral revelation refers to His written record authoritatively. Verse seven notes that the revelation of the first five books was not just generically given; it was for "thee," for Joshua as an individual. A comparison with v. 8 indicates that "the law which Moses my servant commanded thee" refers to the "book of the law," the complete canon of Scripture to that point, and not to some other set of personal directions by Moses to Joshua. This inscripturated material was not to be varied from "to the right or to the left," but followed to its minute details. Joshua obeyed this command, according to Jos 11:15. Verse seven also refers to Deut 5:32, 28:14, and 29:9. Verse eight compares with De 30:14 and general references to obey the law, such as De 5:29ff. Verse nine refers to De 20:1, 31:7, 8, Gen 28:15. From the vast accumulation of references to previously given, and then written, revelation, the absolute consonance of genuine new material from Jehovah with written oracles is powerfully demonstrated (cf. Deut 18:15-22, 13:1-5). This is in accord with God's immutable nature.

References in oral communication that state the Lord "said" various items necessitate vowel points in the inscripturated text; Jehovah spoke words, not consonants alone. N sntnc cn b md f cnsnts nly, that is, no sentence can be made of consonants only. Consonants alone cannot be pronounced, and so cannot constitute a spoken, oral revelation. Moses commanded words (Jos 1:13). Joshua read "all the words of the law... according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation..." (Jos 8:34-35).¹ In English, the consonants "bt" could represent the

¹ One notes that Joshua 8:30-35 was a fulfillment of the command of Deuteronomy 27:1-8 to write all the words of the Pentateuch on stones in the land of Israel. The command in Deuteronomy 27:8 requires that Joshua wrote a copy of the Hebrew text with vowels. The verse reads, "And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly." (וְכָתַבְתָּ עַל-הָאֲבָנִים אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת בְּאֵר הַיָּטֵב:). One notes that the only other reference to writing plainly in Scripture is Habakkuk 2:2: "And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it" (וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתוּב הַזֶּה וּבְאֵר עַל-הַלְחָוֹת לְמַעַן יֵרֹדוּן קְרָא בּוֹ:). Why would not the way of making the Law "very plain" so that "he may run that readeth it" be by writing a pointed copy? Would the people be able to "write upon [the stones] all the words of [the] law" (Deuteronomy 27:3) so that they could "keep all the commandments" (27:1) in them with an unpointed copy? How would they know whether or not they were forbidden to boil goats in their mother's milk (הֶלֶב) or fat (הֶלֶב), for example (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21), since, without vowels, the two words are exactly the same (הֶלֶב), and there is nothing in the context of the texts that would prove the one or the other reading is correct? How could they obey this command, when written on the stones by Joshua?

A pro-vowel point interpretation of Deuteronomy 27:8 is also supported from the Targummim on Deuteronomy 27:8. Targum Neofiti reads, "And you shall write on the stones all the words of this Torah, written, inscribed [הַקִּיק, Peal passive participle, "being engraven"] and explained well [מְפָרֵשׁ, Pael passive participle, "being specified" + יֵאוּת, "rightly, properly"], so as to be read [מְתַקְרָא, Ithpeel participle from קָרָא, thus, "to call by name"] and translated into seventy languages" (יֵת כָּל פְּתֻגְמֵי אִוְרִיתָהּ הַדָּה כְּתִיב חֲתִיב הַקִּיק וּמְפָרֵשׁ וּמְתַקְרָא וּמְתַרְגֵּם בְּשִׁבְעִים לָשׁוֹן:). If the Torah was to be "engraven" and "specified" on the stones so that "all the words" would be able to be "called by name" and accurately translated into seventy languages, specific, vocalizable words, including vowels, would have been required. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Targum Yerushalmi I) on Deuteronomy 27:8 reads, "And you shall write on the stones all the words of this Torah, an engraved and distinct writing, read in one language and translated into seventy languages" (וּמְפָרֵשׁ מְתַקְרָא בְּחֵד לִישׁוֹן וּמְתַרְגֵּם בְּשִׁבְעִין לִישׁוֹן:). Here again the Targumic wording supports a vocalized text being engraved on the tablets. Compare also Targum Yerushalmi II, where Fragment Targum Paris reads לִישׁוֹן: and Fragment

“pointed” words bat, but, bet, beet, boat, and so on. Hebrew has at least as great a diversity of possible significances from consonants without vowels. Were the volumes of the Pentateuch entirely without vowels, there was no way that Joshua would have been able to read “all the words,” so that “there was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not,” apart from an additional divine miracle that enabled him to supply every set of vowels correctly; consonants alone could not be pronounced in the first place. Furthermore, since it is stated that “all the words...[were] written in the book of the law,” it is plain that full words, not consonants alone, were recorded. The book of Joshua was also written in full words, not simple consonants (Jos 24:26-27), as was the rest of the divine revelation given in Hebrew. This attests to the doctrine of verbal, not consonantal, inspiration for the Hebrew Old Testament.

Other terms for the Scripture in Joshua illuminate a variety of its facets. The word “commandment” appears eight times in the book, in 1:18, 8:8, 15:13, 17:4, 21:3, 22:3, 5, 9, translated from the Hebrew *peh* (פֶּה, Strong’s #06310), with the primary meaning of “mouth”—it appears so 340 times in the English OT, and only 37 times as “commandment”; the next most common definition, “edge,” (appearing 35 times), is related to the primary meaning, “mouth.” Apart from the places where it is translated “commandment,” the word appears in Joshua in the following places:

“This book of the law shall not depart of of thy *mouth*” (1:8)

“... neither shall any word proceed out of your *mouth*” (6:10)

“they utterly destroyed all that was in the city... with the *edge* of the sword.” (6:21)

“... they were all fallen on the *edge* of the sword... smote it with the *edge* of the sword” (8:24)

“... they gathered themselves together... with one *accord*” (9:2) [i. e., “with one mouth”]

“... the men... asked not counsel at the *mouth* of the LORD.” (9:14)

“... Roll great stones upon the *mouth* of the cave...” (10:18)

“...Open the *mouth* of the cave...” (10:22)

“... and laid great stones in the cave’s *mouth*” (10:27)

“... Joshua... smote it with the *edge* of the sword... he utterly destroyed... all the souls” (10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39, 11:11, 12, 14)

“... describe it *according* to the inheritance of them...” (18:4, Heb. “to/for the mouth of their inheritance, idiomatic)

“... smote it with the *edge* of the sword...” (19:47)

“... according the *word* of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked...” (19:50)

“...the children of Reuben... Gad... and... Manasseh... departed... according to the *word* of the LORD by the hand of Moses.” (22:9)

The use of *peh* in Joshua demonstrates that the Scriptures are indeed words that “proceed[] out of the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). The “commandment (Heb. *peh*) of the LORD” in 17:4 (cf. Num 36:2) deals with the daughters of Zelophehad, whom Jehovah had commanded Moses to give inheritance within Israel (Num 27:1ff., Num 36:1ff.). The commandments of the Scripture,

Targum Vatican reads : על אבנייא ית כל מילי שבה אורייתא הדא כתב חקיק ומפרש שבית מתקרי ומתורגם בשובעין לשון : ותכתבון מתקרי בחד לשון ומתורגם בשובעין לשון : ותכתבון על אבנייא ית כל מילי אורייתא הדא כתב חקיק ומפרש יאות (cf. also MS D).

given in words, are from the mouth of God, so the words are His words. The authoritative message is not concealed in a hidden meaning behind the words, for they are not the utterances of mere men, which must be spiritualized to discover divine truth. Nor do the words become authoritative when they “speak to you,” but they constitute God’s commands always and forever. By the time of Josh 17:4, the originally oral command had been converted to Scripture, so the “command” or “mouth” of the Lord was found in the written words, just as in the direct, presumably oral communication. See also 21:2 + Num 35:1ff. The phrase, the “word (*peh*) of the LORD by the hand of Moses” (22:9) also relates to originally oral commandments inscripturated in the Pentateuch (Num 32:28ff., Deut 3:12ff.). The humanly penned writings (“by the hand of Moses”) were the words from the mouth of the LORD (“the word (*peh*) of the LORD”).

The “book of the law of Moses” (Josh 8:31, cf. 1:8, 8:34, 23:6, 24:26) refers to the entirety of the Pentateuchal revelation. In chapter eight, when they “read all the words of the law” (v. 34), this is said to include “all that Moses commanded” (v. 35, cf. Deut 31:11-12). Although v. 34 speaks of the reading of “the blessings and the cursings,” this has a wider scope than Dt 27-30; blessings (Gen 1:22, 9:1, 12:2, etc.) and cursings (Gen 8:21, 12:3) span the books of Moses. The fact that this phrase is encompassed by “all the words of the law” and “all that is written in the book of the law” gives further support from the immediate context for the recitation of a much greater section of inspired writing than a few chapters in Deuteronomy. The quote in v. 31 relates to Ex 20:24-25, Deut 27:5-7, so it cannot prove, by itself, that the passage quoted is greater than portions of the fifth book of the Pentateuch, for one could argue that it referred to that alone.

When Israel is commanded to “do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses,” from which she is commanded to “turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left” in Josh 23:6, reference to the entirety of the five books of Moses is again natural. The strictures in 1:7-8 to “observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee,” and that “this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein,” would be exceedingly odd should they refer only to parts of the revelation already given. Certainly the promise of blessings from God if Deut 30:10 is fulfilled, namely, to “hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law...” cannot refer to anything less than the entirety of the inscripturated revelation; to begin to obey a part, to leave other parts undone, brought a curse (Deut 27:26), not divine favor. Moses is seen explicitly recording material in a variety of Pentateuchal settings (Ex 17:14, 24:7, De 31:24). It is said that “Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel” (Deut 31:9), and commanded them to read the entirety before all Israel every seven years (31:10-13). After “Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, [] Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, ‘Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.’ ” (Deut 31:24-26). This preservation of the Law in the tabernacle and among the elders must deal with the whole canon up to this

point in time. The rediscovery of the book of the Law in the days of Josiah (2 Ch 34:14-15) employs language consonant with that of Joshua to refer to the entirety of the Mosaic revelation; the division of the Scriptures into Law (the books of Moses) and Prophets (Mt 7:12, 22:40, Lu 16:16, Jn 1:45, Ac 13:15, Rom 3:21), or Law of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms (Lu 24:44) has its definitional seed within the book of the Law itself.

The fact that the “book of the law” in Joshua refers to the whole of the Pentateuch requires a number of conservative historical conclusions. The command in Joshua 1:8 to not depart from, meditate upon, and obey the book of the law, before the crossing of Jordan or the conquest of Canaan has begun, demonstrates that the whole book was penned by Moses. Redactional higher critical theories are nullified, and evangelical attempts to attribute only the body of the book to Moses, while leaving perceived difficult sections to later editors, require a rejection of the clear and literal sense of Scripture, alongside a rejection of the doctrine of verbal, plenary preservation (Ps 12:6-7, Mt 5:18, 24:35). Correct interpretation of words requires a correct understanding of the context; ultimately, every section of the Bible influences the interpretation of every other part, and the alteration of any of it reflects upon the understanding of all the rest. Furthermore, commands not to “add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it,” (Dt 4:2) are rendered senseless. Were the book of Joshua 1:8 anything less than the complete Pentateuch received by God’s people today, what he was to not let depart out of his mouth, meditate upon day and night, and observe to do everything in, was different in content and so different in meaning than God’s Word today, an anti-orthodox and unacceptable conclusion.

The immediate acceptance of the book of the law as it was given by Moses demonstrates that the idea of a canon of inspired writings did not need to wait for a church or rabbinical council to bestow God’s authority— the inscripturated words of the Lord were to be accepted, prized, studied, and loved from the moment they were given as much as they were for the centuries and millennia to follow. No evolutionary development of authority is found in Scripture, so such concepts must be rejected. Joshua 24:26 proves that this immediate acceptance of inspired writings as God’s Word did not apply to the books of Moses alone; having read, meditated upon, and attempted to observe Pentateuchal commands not to add or take away anything from God’s Word (Dt 4:2, 12:32), Josh 24:26 demonstrates that Joshua added the book that bears his name to the canon of Scripture in front of the whole nation and by the tabernacle sanctuary. The option that only certain sections of the current book were composed in Joshua’s day, and later editors compiled the whole (contrast Josh 6:25, 14:14), is unreasonable because of the inspired provisions against adding or diminishing a word from God-breathed words and larger grammatical and syntactical structures. Obviously Joshua would not add uninspired words to those that were in the book of the law; he must have added inspired material. Consequently, that he wrote the book that bears his name, which was accepted as a divinely inspired, authoritative writing by the nation and its spiritual leaders from the moment of its composition, is the necessary conclusion from the verse. This pattern of inspiration and immediate canonical recognition, set by the books of Moses and the first of the former Prophets, seen in later Old Testament times (cf. Jer 36), and demanded fifteen-hundred years later in the New Testament (1 Tim 5:18, 1 Cor 14:37, 2 Pe 3:16, Rev 22:18-19), constitutes the Scriptural

pattern of the saints recognizing and receiving the Word of God immediately after it is recorded (cf. Jn 17:8). No period of gradual acquisition of authority, or gradual composition by successive editors until an “inspired” product is pulled together, finds support in Scripture.

Many other Bibliological lessons may be learned from a study of the book of Joshua. One of the most important is, since God has provided such a rich revelation of Himself in God-breathed Scripture, that men should make application the command to Joshua to their own personal lives: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8).