Who Is Your Shepherd?

Description

Who Is Your Shepherd?

The Torah of Yahweh in Jeremiahâ€™s Day and Today

by Trent Wilde

The New Moon Message
of the 10th Month
Dec. 17, 2020
Read PDF Version

The studies we held on Jeremiah back in 2018 are currently being edited and uploaded to YouTube.[1]You can watch our Jeremiah playlist at the following link: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw8ykUZG-bwe1SX0Awu0_e1BFzjHPHKFW This new moon, we get the blessing of having further light and clarity on the subject. I wonâ€™t be recapitulating our past studies, so I recommend that you keep on the lookout for our 2018 Jeremiah studies as they are published. Without further ado, letâ€™s get into it.

When reading a text, it is always important to keep in mind the time and place in which it was written. In this case, we are reading the words of Jeremiah, who lived in Judah in the 7th century BCE. Keep in mind what you know about what the world was like in that time and place. If you need to, lookup a basic biblical timeline to refresh your memory. To be clear, I am not focusing on time and place due to there being anything especially context-dependent in what we are about to read. Rather, it is because in order to benefit the most from what we read, we need to enter, as much as possible, into the world of the writing.

The first passage for us to consider is in Jeremiah 2. Jeremiah was told by Yahweh to proclaim a message to Jerusalem (Jer. 2:2) and also to all the families of Israel (Jer. 2:4). The basic idea Yahweh wanted them to know is that He remembered (and missed) the good old days when they used to be loyal and that He was anxious and troubled over their departure from Him. Here is part of what Yahweh said:

> 2:7 And I brought youâ™,â™, to the landâ™€ of plenty
>
> to eat her fruit and her goodness,
>
> but youâ™,â™, came in and youâ™,â™, defiled my landâ™€

and my inheritance youâ™‚â™‚ made into an abomination.

2:8 The priests did not say, â€˜Where is Yahweh?â€™

Those who seize control of the torah do not know me

and those who shepherd rebel against me

and the prophets prophesy by the baal

and follow after what has no value.

â€“ Jeremiah 2:7-82This is my own translation. A feature of the translation that I should explain is that I am using the classic male and female symbols to indicate grammatical number and gender. As you can see, I havenâ€™t included the symbols for every word, just for words where the number and/or gender isnâ€™t obvious in English and where it might matter. â™‚ = masculine singular | â™€ = feminine singular | â™‚â™‚ = masculine plural | â™€â™€ = feminine plural | â™€â™‚ = a plural word with a mixture of masculine and feminine elements.

I have formatted this translation to reflect the poetic structure of the original. The phrase â€œto eat her fruit and her goodnessâ€• parallels the phrase â€œand I brought you to the land of plenty.â€• And even more obviously, the phrase â€œand my inheritance you made into an abominationâ€• parallels â€œand you came in and you defiled my land.â€• More significantly, the phrase â€œthose who seize control of the torah do not know meâ€• parallels â€œthe priests did not say, â€˜Where is Yahweh?â€™â€• What Jeremiah is saying here is that the priests are those who had seized control of the torah and that they did not know Yahweh. For the priests to not say â€œWhere is Yahweh?â€• indicates that they were not seeking Yahweh, which is why they did not know Yahweh. So, how is it that these priests seized control of the torah? Weâ€™ll get to that in just a minute, but first, a little more on the structure.

The second half of verse 8 slightly changes the poetic structure. Verse 7 has one line followed by one parallel line and then another line followed by its own single-line parallel. The first part of verse 8 follows this same structure, there is a single line followed by one parallel line. But the second part of verse 8 has something different. There is one line followed by another line and its parallel. To be more explicit, the phrase â€œand follow after what has no valueâ€• directly parallels â€œand the prophets prophecy by the baal.â€• So what about the line â€œand those who shepherd rebel against meâ€•? This line is the center of verse 8. In addition to having two parallelisms â€“ one at the beginning and one at the end of the verse, verse 8 is also a chiasm. In case any of you donâ€™t know or donâ€™t remember, a chiasm is a mirror-like parallel structure. For example, the letters a-b-c-b-a form a chiasm. In Jeremiah 2:8, we have parallelism-center-parallelism. Often, the center of the parallelism is significant in that it delivers the central point of the whole structure. And in our case it certainly does just that. The central idea of the verse is that those who lead (the shepherds) have rebelled against Yahweh. Who are those who lead? Answer: the priests and the prophets. The priests are the subject of the first parallelism while the prophets are the subject of the second parallelism. But they are all rebellious shepherds.

Okay, so how is it that these priests seized control of the torah? What even is â€œthe torahâ€•? Well, â€œtorahâ€• is just a Hebrew word that means â€œteaching.â€• One could, then, translate the phrase as â€œthose who seize control of the teaching.â€• This would mean that the priests acted as speech-police, controlling who could teach what. This very well may be a large part of what Yahweh, through Jeremiah, was saying. Yet, there is more to it than that. Consider this passage:

8:8 How can youâ™‚â™‚ say, â€œWe are wise

and the torahâ™€ of Yahweh is with usâ€•?

Indeed behold: the lying pen of the scribes has made itâ™€ into a lie!

8:9 The â€œwiseâ€• shall be put to shame;

they will be shattered and captured.

Behold, they have rejected the word of Yahweh,

so what is wisdom to them?

â€“ Jeremiah 8:8-9

Here, Jeremiah speaks of the torah of Yahweh as something written. But this written torah of Yahweh was evidently not a genuine torah/teaching of Yahweh â€“ it had been made into a lie by the scribes who produced it. There are a few questions that should follow from what we are learning here in Jeremiah. Questions like this:

What was this written torah?

Does it still exist?

What did it say that Jeremiah declared to be a lie and not part of the genuine torah/teaching of Yahweh?

In regard to this last question, we already learned the answer back in 2018. There are several passages throughout Jeremiahâ€™s writings that indicate, and even plainly state, that even though his contemporaries regarded animal sacrifice to have been commanded by Yahweh, Jeremiah did not regard this to be what Yahweh wanted. For example, Jeremiah 6 has this to say:

6:19 Listen! You,â™€ the land,â™€ Look!

I am bringing disaster to the people.

This is the fruit of their thoughts.

For unto my words they have not given ear,

and my torah,â™€ they have rejected it.â™€

6:20 For what is this to me?

Frankincense comes from Sheba

and good cane from a land far off.

Yourâ™,â™, burnt offerings are no delight

and yourâ™,â™, sacrifices are not pleasing to me.

â€“ Jeremiah 6:19-20

These two verses are not two isolated statements that have nothing to do with each other. They convey one logical chain of ideas; namely, that the Judahites had rejected the genuine torah of Yahweh and were instead offering burnt offerings and sacrifices, thinking Yahweh delighted in them â€“ that He wanted them. These sacrifices and offerings were part of the false torah spoken of in Jer. 8:8.

As you know, Jeremiah 7 brings this out even more clearly. Jeremiah goes into the temple (at the instruction of Yahweh) and tells the people (at the instruction of Yahweh) that Yahweh was not dwelling there and that the phrase â€œThis is the temple of Yahwehâ€• was a lie. He then goes on to rebuke them (at the instruction of Yahweh) for shedding innocent blood in that place. And there is no mistaking, either by those present, or by us, that the innocent blood shed in the temple was that of the sacrificial victims. Finally, to top it all off with a monument to clarity, Jeremiah said,

> 7:21 This is what Yahweh of hosts, the elohimâ™,â™€ of Israel says, â€œAdd yourâ™,â™, burnt offerings onto yourâ™,â™, sacrifices and youâ™,â™, eat flesh!
> 7:22 For I did not speak to your ancestors,â™,â™€ nor did I command themâ™,â™, in the day that I brought themâ™,â™, from the land of Egypt on the matter of burnt offering and sacrifice.
> â€“ Jeremiah 7:21-22

As we discussed back in 2018, the burnt offerings were not eaten, but were entirely consumed by fire up on the altar as â€œfoodâ€• for God (Lev. 21:6). Here, in Jeremiah 7:21, Yahweh is saying, â€œIâ€™m not going to eat this! Since you are eating sacrifices, add it to your sacrifices and you eat it!â€• Since He had already rebuked them for shedding innocent blood in the temple and told them He doesnâ€™t delight in sacrifices, as we already covered, He obviously wasnâ€™t telling them it was a good thing for them to eat sacrifices. They were already doing it and refusing to listen to Him, so He was saying He isnâ€™t going to have any part in it. And then, He unequivocally says that He did not speak to their ancestors, or give them commands regarding burnt offerings and sacrifices when they came up out of Egypt! Clearly, the people thought exactly that â€“ they thought that Yahweh had indeed commanded them to perform animal sacrifices when they came up out of Egypt, just as you and I and most Jews and Christians and Muslims for the past 3000 or so years have thought. But this is what Jeremiah is saying is not part of the true torah/teaching of Yahweh.

Also, even though verse 22 specifies that Yahweh didnâ€™t give commands regarding animal sacrifice during the exodus experience, it is only specifying that time since that is when people believed Yahweh to have given those commands. But the fact that Yahweh had Jeremiah deliver this message at all indicates that Yahweh was rejecting the idea that He had commanded them to offer animal sacrifices at any time. If Yahweh had commanded it at another time, the people could have replied to Jeremiah by saying, â€œOkay fine, Yahweh didnâ€™t command that we offer sacrifices when He brought us up from Egypt â€“ he commanded us to sacrifice when the monarchy started [or whenever â€“ fill in the blank].â€• If Yahweh had commanded them to offer animal sacrifice at some other time, it would undermine the whole argument that He and Jeremiah were making. The priests and the people pointed to what They believed Yahweh said during the exodus experience as the foundation and justification for their actions. Yahweh and Jeremiah were making the point that their actions were not justified and had no foundation; they werenâ€™t trying to merely correct the accuracy of the Judahitesâ€™ perception of exactly when and where the foundation and justification of their actions was to be found. Besides, Jeremiah and Yahweh pointed to no other time and place. Jeremiah 7 simply doesnâ€™t say anything like, â€œI didnâ€™t command you to sacrifice during the exodus, I commanded it during another experience.â€• No! Instead, what we find is Yahweh, through Jeremiah, rejecting animal sacrifice and denying its foundations.

In our past studies, we discussed more of what Jeremiah had to say against sacrifice. But we donâ€™t need to go through all that again in order to see that Jeremiah recognized that there was a fraudulent written torah of Yahweh circulating in his day and that people consequently believed that Yahweh had commanded them to offer animal sacrifices, and that He had done so when Israel came up out of Egypt. Furthermore, by the fact that the priests had seized control of the torah (Jer. 2:8), it is evident that this written torah was produced either by them or under their direction. This is a fair amount of detailed information regarding this written torah that Jeremiah and Yahweh rejected.

So now we return to our questions about the identity of this written torah. Again, whatever it is, it is a written text (or texts) that was produced by a priestly source that promoted animal sacrifice along with the idea that Yahweh commanded sacrifice, and that this was done when Israel came up from Egypt. Do we know of any text that meets this description? In fact, we do! The document known as â€œthe P sourceâ€• in the Pentateuch fits that description to a T.[3]See *The Mosaic Torah* The P source is indeed a priestly text (hence â€œPâ€•), it promotes animal sacrifice, it says that Yahweh gave many detailed commands regarding burnt offerings and sacrifices, and it says that He did so when He brought Israel up out of Egypt. If Jeremiah had a single document in mind as this false written torah, it was almost

certainly P. If he had multiple documents in mind, P was almost certainly included. And if this false written torah included anything beyond P, all indications are that it was very much like P.

So what do we learn from this? What we learn is that over 2600 years ago, Jeremiah was sent by Yahweh to correct the lies being promoted by the false shepherds of his day. False prophets and priests were leading the people to believe that Yahweh wanted them to sacrifice animals. And some of those shepherds, priestly scribes in particular, had seized control of the torah, not just in the sense of restricting who could teach what, but also by producing a written torah of Yahweh, falsely so-called. This written text turned the torah/teaching of Yahweh into a lie by making Him out to command animal sacrifice. The way that it did this was to depict Yahweh speaking about and commanding burnt offerings and sacrifices at the time of the exodus. We know of at least one text that fits this description, it is the text known as â€œthe P sourceâ€• and it survives today embedded within the first five books of the Bible â€“ the Pentateuch. This text was, at minimum, among the texts so strongly rejected by Jeremiah and by Yahweh.

The fact that this text has not only survived, but has been enshrined at the base of the canons of Judaism and Christianity reveals that the same lies fed to the people by their shepherds in Jeremiahâ€™s day are still being fed to flocks in churches and synagogues by the shepherds of today. Jeremiahâ€™s contemporaries rejected his message (Jer. 6:10). In fact, when he delivered his message against animal sacrifice, they wanted to kill him (Jer. 26:7-8). Itâ€™s easy to see how his sympathy for sacrificial lambs transformed into empathy â€“ even identity (Jer. 11:19). Evidently, they didnâ€™t allow him back into the temple after that (Jer. 36:5). It is a sad thing when people are led by their uninspired shepherds to persecute the messenger sent with the remedy they need to save them from their shepherdsâ€™ lies.

Let a line be drawn in the sand â€“ whose side shall we be on? The side of those who slay the innocent? The side of the false shepherds and their false torah? Or, shall we be on the side of Jeremiah the prophet â€“ the side of Yahweh? By whom shall we be shepherded?

3:14 â€˜Return,â™,â™, turnable children!â€™ â€“ the declaration of Yahweh.

â€˜For I have possessed youâ™,â™,

and I will take you,â™,â™, one from a city and two from a clan,

and I will bring youâ™,â™, to Zion.

3:15 And I will give to youâ™,â™, those who shepherd according to my heart

and they will feed youâ™,â™, knowledge

and cause youâ™,â™, to have insight.
â€“ Jeremiah 3:14-15

Yes, this speaks of a time when those who shepherd their sheep by feeding them the lies we have been uncovering will be replaced by those who shepherd the sheep by feeding them knowledge and causing them to have insight. The fact that we are seeing through these very lies and gaining a knowledge and understanding of these very truths shows that this passage is already starting to be fulfilled.

23:1 â€œWoe to those who shepherd, who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!â€• â€“ the declaration of Yahweh.

23:2 Therefore, this is what Yahweh the elohim of Israel says, concerning the shepherds who are shepherding my people,

â€œYou are scattering my flock

and driving them away!

And you have not attended to them.

Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds.â€•

â€“ the declaration of Yahweh.

23:3 â€œAnd I, I will gather the remnant of my flock

from all the lands where I had driven them

and I will bring them back upon their pasture

and they will be fruitful and increase.

23:4 And I will raise up over them shepherds who will shepherd them

and they will not fear again,
nor will they be dismayed,
and they will not be missing.â€•

â€“ the declaration of Yahweh.

23:5 â€œBehold, days are comingâ€¦ â€• â€“ the declaration of Yahweh â€œâ€¦
when I will raise for David a righteous Branch,

and a king will reign and prosper

and he will do justice and righteousness in the land.

23:6 In his days, Judah will be delivered

and Israel will dwell in confidence.

And this is the name which he will be called:

Yahweh our righteousness.

â€“ Jeremiah 23:1-6

50:19 â€œAnd I will return Israel to his pasture,

and he will feed at Carmel and Bashan

and in the hill of Ephraim and at Gilead

and his life will be satisfied.

50:20 In those days and at that timeâ€¦â€• â€“ the declaration of Yahweh
â€œâ€¦ the iniquity of Israel will be sought,

and there will be none,

and the sin of Judah,

and it will not be found,

for I forgive those whom I retain.â€•

â€“ Jeremiah 50:19-20

- 1
  You can watch our Jeremiah playlist at the following link: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw8ykUZG-bwe1SX0Awu0_e1BFzjHPHKFW
- 2
  This is my own translation. A feature of the translation that I should explain is that I am using the classic male and female symbols to indicate grammatical number and gender. As you can see, I havenâ€™t included the symbols for every word, just for words where the number and/or gender isnâ€™t obvious in English and where it might matter. â™‚ = masculine singular | â™€ = feminine singular | â™‚â™‚ = masculine plural | â™€â™€ = feminine plural | â™€â™‚ = a plural word with a mixture of masculine and feminine elements.
- 3
  See *The Mosaic Torah*