



Light of Torah

“But those who study the Torah give forth light wherever they may be. It is like one standing in the dark with a lamp in his hand” (Exodus Rabbah 36,3).

Christian scripture tools, inspired by Jewish tradition.

“What ought to emerge now is a new respect for the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament... Christians can learn a great deal from a Jewish exegesis practised for more than 2000 years.”

(Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001)

The Jewish tradition is a rich source of biblical insight and learning for Christians. Jewish approaches to the bible put us in touch with a tradition that was dear to the heart of Jesus, himself a Jew. These methods, honed over millennia via oral and written traditions, offer interpretative tools that are new to most Christians.

The *Light of Torah* movement offers biblical reflection tools for parishes and grassroots communities, inspired by traditional Jewish approaches to scripture.

The phrase ‘Archaeology of the Word’ describes this method well. Like an archaeologist digging into layers of soil to uncover hidden treasures, we dig gradually into God’s Word, sifting layers of text, examining this piece and that, and rejoicing when we discover precious insights.

Clues on the ‘surface’ of the text direct the reader to a spot to ‘dig’. Some examples that have fired the enquiries of the rabbis (and ours too!) are:

Repetition

In Exodus 18, reference to Jethro as Moses’ ‘father-in-law’ is repeated 13 times in just 27 verses. Why the constant repetition?

Use of numbers in the text

In the bible numbers are often symbolic. E.g., the number 3 can suggest the entry of divine power into the story. When we read, ‘*On the third day...*’ what might the text be saying?

Questions

Questions in the text are often meant to be answered by the reader. In Genesis 3:9, the Lord calls to Adam, ‘Where are you?’ How do I answer if the Lord asks, ‘*Where are you*’ (physically, spiritually...)?

Names

In Numbers 22 the name of the pagan sorcerer ‘*Balaam*’ may be derived from *bala* (‘to swallow’), and *am* (‘nation’). So he is the ‘one who swallows nations’, or perhaps *bli am*, ‘without a people’. How does this knowledge affect our grasp of the text as a whole?

Light of Torah offers a free weekly reflection sheet and other tools for exploring the Torah, the scriptures that Jesus knew and loved. Visit:

www.lightoftorah.net

Structure

“*May the Lord bless you and keep you...*” (Num. 6:24). Most English versions present Aaron’s blessing in poetic form. But even more clearly in the Hebrew we notice that the three poetic lines are of increasing length. What can we learn by pondering this structure?

Puzzling words, phrases

In the Crossing of the Red Sea, wouldn’t you expect God to tell Moses to split the sea *before* urging the Israelites to go forward into it? Why the puzzling word order in Exodus 14:15-16?

Rhythm

In Genesis 22, as Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son, there is a steady, almost robotic, rhythm underlying this terrifying activity. What can we make of this?

Times

‘*Abraham started-early in the morning*’ (Gen.22:3). Why the early start? Why might the time of day be noteworthy?

Absence

In the Sacrifice of Isaac (Gen.22), there is no mention of Sarah. Why is the wife of Abraham, the mother of Isaac, absent in a story with such drastic familial consequences?

References to other passages.

In Leviticus 11 we hear: ‘creatures that swarm’ ... ‘every creature’. Where have we heard such terms before? Genesis 1, the first creation account! Why would a passage from Leviticus about ancient dietary laws be reminding us of the creation of the world?