305743 - Question about the distortion to which the Torah was subjected

the question

I was watching a discussion about comparative religion, and a question was asked to which I did not understand the answer. That question was: did the followers of Sayyiduna Musa distort or alter the Torah? How long after his time was the Torah altered? Was the Torah written on pages or was it an orally transmitted text? Has anything of the true Torah survived until the present?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The religious texts indicate that the Torah that Musa (peace be upon him) had was in written form. Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{Allah said: O Musa, I have chosen you above others, by giving you My messages and speaking to you. Hold fast to what I have given you, and be among those who are grateful.

And We inscribed for him in the Tablets all manner of admonition and an explanation of all things} [Al-A`raf 7:114-145].

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Then Allah, may He be Exalted, says that He “inscribed for him in the Tablets all manner of admonition and an explanation of all things.” It was said that the tablets were made of gemstones and that Allah, may He be Exalted, wrote for him admonitions and detailed rulings explaining what is lawful and what is prohibited. These tablets contained the Torah of which Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{And We gave Musa the Scripture, after We had destroyed the former generations, as enlightenment for the people} [Al-Qasas 28:44].

And it was said that He gave the tablets to Musa before the Torah. And Allah knows best.

End quote from *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (3/474).

This is also indicated by the hadith of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Adam and Musa debated. Musa said: O Adam, you are our father but you caused our doom and caused us to be expelled from Paradise. Adam said to him: You are Musa, Allah chose you to speak to and wrote (the Torah) for you with His own hand. Are you blaming me for something that Allah decreed for me forty years before He created me? Thus Adam got the better of Musa, Adam got the better of Musa” – [he said it three times]. Narrated by al-Bukhari (6614) and Muslim (2652). According to another report narrated by Muslim, “[Allah] wrote the Torah for you with His own hand.” It was also narrated by Abu Dawud (4701) and Ibn Majah (80) and others as: “[Allah] inscribed the Torah for you with His own hand.”

Another indication that these tablets were the Torah is the meaning [of the verse in which] Allah, may He be Exalted, has told us that He, may He be Exalted, wrote on the tablets for him and explained all things to him. This means that there is no need for any other book, so the tablets were the Torah itself.

Secondly:

The alteration and distortion to which the Torah was subjected began at an early stage, after the death of Musa (peace be upon him), and continued throughout the following centuries. That happened in two ways:

(1)

The scholars and historians are agreed that after the death of Musa (peace be upon him) and the Israelites’ entering Palestine, they were attacked by many enemies one after another, who killed

them, destroyed their houses, burned their books and destroyed their place of worship, as they were attacked by the king of Egypt, then later on they were attacked many times by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans and others. There were also some apostates among the Israelite kings who used to transgress against the Torah, burning it and destroying it.

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) discussed all of this in his book *Al-Fasl* (1/287-299).

This led to an interruption in the sound transmission of the Torah, and the Israelites continued to rewrite it many times after they had lost it due to these conquests and destruction. This rewriting cannot be trusted in terms of accuracy or soundness.

The first compilation of the Torah that is mentioned after these events was done after the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon. They say that the one who rewrote it after its loss was a person called Ezra.

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

… Until Ezra, the priest and scribe, dictated it to them from memory, and they affirmed that he found it with them, but there were many problems in the text, so he corrected it, and they thought that that was sufficient. Ezra's writing of the Torah occurred more than seventy years after the destruction of Bayt al-Maqdis (the Temple), but their books indicate that Ezra did not write it for them or correct it until forty years after their return to Bayt al-Maqdis, after seventy years of exile, at which time there was no prophet among them at all.

From that time, the Torah was in circulation and copies were made of it, but its re-emergence was also weak.

However, it remained in circulation until Antiochus, the king who built Antioch, put an idol in the Temple and the Israelites began to worship it…

Then some people who were descendants of Harun (Aaron) took charge of their affairs after two hundred years, and the offering of sacrifices ceased. At that time, copies of the Torah that are in their hands now became widely circulated, and their rabbis introduced prayers that they did not do

before, to replace the offering of sacrifices, and they made a new religion for them.

End quote from *Al-Fasl* (1/298).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The evidence of the majority, who believe that not all the words found in these books, that are in circulation among the People of the Book, are revelation from Allah, and that they were not subjected to alteration, and they say that there were alterations to some of their phrases… They say that the Torah and Gospel that exist now among the People of the Book were not mass-transmitted from Musa and `Isa (peace be upon them).

As for the Torah, its transmission first ceased with the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of the Israelites from that land. Then they stated that the one who dictated it to them after that was one man, whose name was Ezra, and they claimed that he was a prophet. But some of the scholars say that he was not a prophet, and that it was checked against an ancient manuscript that was discovered.

And it was said that a manuscript was brought that was discovered in North Africa. All of this does not mean that everything in it was mass-transmitted, and it does not rule out the possibility of mistakes occurring in some of it, as it usually happens in books of which the copying, checking and preserving is undertaken by only a few people, two or three.

End quote from *Al-Jawab as-Sahih* (2/395-396).

(2)

Alteration of the Torah text by rabbis who claimed to be followers of the Law of Musa (peace be upon him), but they wrote whatever they wanted and attributed it to Allah, may He be Exalted.

Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{So woe to those who write the “scripture” with their own hands, then say, “This is from Allah,” in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to

them for what they earn} [Al-Baqarah 2:79].

It was narrated that Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Why do you ask the People of the Book about anything while your Book (the Quran) which has been revealed to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is more recent? You read it pure and unaltered, and Allah has told you that the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) changed the Book of Allah and altered it; they wrote the scripture with their own hands and said: It is from Allah, in order to exchange it for a small price…

Narrated by al-Bukhari (7363).

Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin ash-Shinqiti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allah, and they were witnesses thereto} [Al-Ma’idah 5:44].

In this verse Allah, may He be Exalted, tells us that the rabbis and scholars were entrusted with the Scripture of Allah, meaning that they were requested to take care of it and preserve it, but the verse does not tell us whether they complied with that command and preserved it, or they did not comply with it and neglected it. But elsewhere it is explained that they did not comply with the command and they did not preserve that with which they had been entrusted; rather they distorted and altered it deliberately. For example, Allah says:

{Among the Jews are some who distort the meaning of [revealed] words } [An-Nisa’ 4:46]

{or those among the Jews who eagerly listen to lies and to those who have not even come to you. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words } [Al-Ma’idah 5:41]

{Say, "Who revealed the Scripture that Musa brought as light and guidance to the people? You [Jews] make it into pages, disclosing [some of] it and concealing much} [Al-An`am 6:91]

{So woe to those who write the “scripture” with their own hands, then say, “This is from Allah,” in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn} [Al-Baqarah 2:79].

{There are some among them who distort the Book with their tongues, so that you would think it is part of the Book, but it is not part of the Book} [Al `Imran 3:79].

And there are other (similar) verses.

End quote from *Adwa’ al-Bayan* (2 /120).

For more information, please see: *Dirasat fil-Yahudiyyah wal-Masihiyyah* by Dr. Muhammad Diya’ ar-Rahman al-A`zami (p. 194-214).

Thirdly:

What is definite is that the Torah that existed at the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) contained many sound texts, as is indicated by the some verses of Quran and hadith texts.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The correct view is that this Torah that is in the hands of the People of the Book contains some of the rulings of Allah, even though there have been some alterations and changes to some words and phrases, as is mentioned in the verse:

{ O Messenger, do not be saddened by those who rush into disbelief, those who say with their mouths: We believe, but have no faith in their hearts, or those among the Jews who eagerly listen to lies and to those who have not even come to you. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words…

But how is it that they ask you for judgement when they have the Torah which contains Allah’s judgement? } [Al-Ma’idah 5:41-43].

Thus it is known that the Torah that existed after the destruction of the Temple and the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, and after the sending of the Messiah, and after the sending of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) contains some of the rulings of Allah.

End quote from *Al-Jawab as-Sahih* (2/421-422).

As for the Torah that exists today, it is not far-fetched to say that some of the truth remains in it, because there is no proof to indicate that they distorted everything in it. But this truth that is believed to still be there is mixed with what it was subjected to of distortion, lies, addition and subtraction. Thus it is difficult to distinguish the truth that Allah revealed from the falsehood that they introduced into their books. This is how we understand the prohibition on neither believing nor disbelieving the People of the Book in what they tell us about their stories and their books, so that the Muslim will neither believe everything they say and thus accept the falsehood that they have introduced nor disbelieve everything that they say and thus reject what truth remains with them. Rather the Muslim believes in general terms in what Allah revealed to His Messengers, and he testifies to what he knows, which is that this Torah lost its credibility because of what it was subjected to of distortion and alteration with the passage of time, and he believes that the Quran is sufficient and we have no need to refer to the Torah, for the Quran supersedes the Books that came before it.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The verse {if a wrongdoer comes to you with any news, investigate [and verify the facts]} [al-Hujurat 49:6] includes news from any wrongdoer, even if he is a disbeliever; it is not permissible to reject his news except on the basis of evidence, just as it is not permissible to believe his news except on the basis of evidence. In *Sahih al-Bukhari* it is narrated that Abu Hurayrah said: The people of the Book used to recite the Torah in Hebrew and explain it in Arabic. Therefore the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If the People of the Book tell you something, do not believe them and do not disbelieve them, for either they may say something that is true then you disbelieve it, or they may say something that is false and you believe it. Rather say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God

and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.

This is what is indicated by the Quran and Sunnah, that we should refrain from commenting on matters that we are unsure whether they are true or false.

End quote from *Al-Jawab as-Sahih* (6/461-461).

And Allah knows best.