



Biblical Heritage Center's

Real Yeshua Handbook

Viewing His Words Through the Eyes of His Ancient Culture

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Speaking the words of the scrolls instead of reading the Bible

To speak about the books of the Bible is misleading on more than one account. Historically, the Hebrew Bible is a collection of scrolls, and scrolls cannot be simply equated with books. The difference between the two is not merely a matter of form; it affects the mode of writing, editorial strategies, and the way in which readers use the text.¹

The ancient world was a world without books. Reading and writing were restricted to a professional elite; the majority of the population was nonliterate. If we are to understand the making of the Hebrew Bible, we must familiarize ourselves with the scribal culture that produced it. They practiced their craft in a time in which there was neither a trade in books nor a reading public of any substance. Scribes wrote for scribes.²

Reading was an oral activity. In order for the message to reach its destination, however, the written text needed a voice. Texts were for the ears, rather than the eyes. Written documents were read aloud, either to an audience or to oneself. Silent reading was highly unusual. Even the student who read in solitude ãmutteredö his text.³

*This scroll of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate/utter in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*⁴

Students of the Bible first listened to their teachers speak the words of the scrolls. The teachers would then teach the students the meanings of the texts they read and ask their students questions. *Students were encouraged to ask their own questions.* But the key skill all students learned to develop was memory. Very few students owned scrolls, so they memorized texts taught by their teachers. When called upon to discuss those texts they first had to quote the portion they were discussing from memory.

¹ *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* by Karel Van Der Toorn © 2007 Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts; p. 23.

² *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*; pp. 1-2.

³ *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*; p. 12.

⁴ Joshua 1:8