

Bridging Tradition and the Academy

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Bridging Tradition and the Academy:

The Literary-Theological School in Orthodox Bible Study 1

Introduction

Traditional Judaism includes core beliefs in prophecy, the divine revelation of the Torah through Moses, and the existence of an Oral Law that accompanies the Written Torah. Although the precise parameters of these beliefs have been debated over the millennia, these general axioms form the heart and soul of Jewish religious encounter with the Torah. 2

Beginning in the seventeenth century with the philosophers Spinoza and Hobbes, and moving through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with Liberal Protestant critical Bible scholarship, these and other basic religious foundations came under attack by a host of studies and new assumptions. Simultaneously, critical Bible methodology brought with it fresh questions and tools that could enhance traditional Bible study. 3

Over the past two centuries, analysis of literary tools, comparative linguistics, and the discovery of a wealth of ancient texts and artifacts have contributed immensely to our understanding the rich tapestry and complexity of biblical texts. Much also has improved since the 1970s as a result of the literary revolution in biblical scholarship. After generations of dissecting the Torah and the rest of Tanakh, many scholars have recognized that these books can be analyzed effectively as unified texts. Every word is valuable. Passages have meaningful structures and are multilayered. Understanding the interplay between texts is vital. These assumptions were far more compatible with classical Orthodox Tanakh study.

Great Orthodox scholars of the previous generation such as the authors of the Da'at Mikra commentary series, Professor Nehama Leibowitz, and Rabbi Mordechai Breuer exemplified different aspects of how Orthodox scholarship could benefit from the information and methodology of academic Bible scholarship through the prism of traditional faith. Similarly, the prolific writings of leading contemporary rabbinic scholars such as Yoel BinNun, Elhanan Samet, and Shalom Carmy are intellectually and spiritually stimulating, as they benefit from the academy while working from the viewpoint of the yeshivah.

Shalom Carmy refers to this general methodology as the “literary-theological” approach to Tanakh. This methodology demands a finely tuned text reading, along with a focus on the religious significance of the passage. The premises of this approach include: (1) Oral Law and classical rabbinic commentary are central to the way we understand the revealed

word of God;

and (2) It is vital to study biblical passages in their literary and historical context.

4

Although each scholar has his or her own particular style, all advocates of this methodology are driven by several underlying core assumptions. Ezra Bick (Yeshivat Har

Etzion) enumerates the most important distinguishing principles of this school. Peshat (the

primary intent of the biblical text) is discoverable from a rigorous study of the text, as the Torah

was not given as an esoteric document to confuse people. There is an Oral Law, but that does not

diminish the pursuit of peshat. We attempt to learn in the manner of our classical commentators,

with the goal of uncovering the intended meaning of the text. In addition to attempting to

understand each word and verse locally, it is critical to consider the bigger picture, whether of a

passage, an entire book, or parallels between different parts of Tanakh. God revealed the Torah

to people, and therefore the Torah speaks in the language of people. 5 Since the Torah is divinely

revealed, every word must be taken with utmost seriousness. Since it is written in human

language, we may use literary tools that can expose dimensions of meaning in the text. There

also is value to the study of the historical context of Tanakh, comparative linguistics, and

archaeology. Since the Torah is a divine covenant with Israel, there is a religious obligation to

understand its intended meaning and messages and to apply them to our lives. 6

While Orthodox Tanakh scholarship is wedded to the primacy of classical rabbinic interpretation, scholars of each generation incorporate new trends into their thought. Since

Jewish tradition places a premium on scholarship, we should hear the truth from whoever says it.

Rambam stated this principle long ago, 7 and many of the greatest rabbinic figures before and

since have espoused this policy. 8 This article will consider some of the seminal

developments

since the mid-twentieth century in Orthodox Tanakh study, with an emphasis on the literary-theological school. 9

Leading Figures of the Past Generation

Da'at Mikra

Well aware of the impact that critical Bible scholarship had in academic circles and

beyond, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook inspired his student Moshe Seidel to embark on an

ambitious project. Under Seidel's leadership, a group of scholars convened in 1956 and

formulated the principles for a new verse-by-verse traditional commentary on the entire Tanakh.

In 1963, the first assignments were given out for individual biblical books. The first two volumes

of the series were published in 1970, and its final volume was published in 2003.

This

monumental project is entitled Da'at Mikra (literally, "Knowledge of Scripture"), and was

published by Mosad HaRav Kook in Jerusalem. The commentary incorporates the gamut of

traditional interpretation as well as contemporary research. 10

It also is worth noting that Professor Yehuda Elitzur (1911–1997), one of the original

editors of the Da'at Mikra series, was also the head of the Bible Department at Bar-Ilan

University. His prolific work highlights the inclusion of academic disciplines into Orthodox

Tanakh study. 11

Professor Nehama Leibowitz

One of the greatest Tanakh teachers of the twentieth century was Professor Nehama

Leibowitz (1905–1997). Through her Gilyonot (weekly parashah sheets) and

Iyyunim

(published, in English, as *Studies in the Weekly Parashah*), as well as her legendary devotion to teaching, she enlightened Jews from all backgrounds. Nehama (as she preferred to be called) incorporated contemporary scholarly methods into her studies on the Torah and projected them through the eyes of its classical rabbinic interpreters. Her close text analysis, coupled with a systematic presentation of traditional commentaries to develop compelling religious themes, has inspired generations of teachers and students. Nehama introduced the tools of academic scholarship to many Orthodox Jews, and simultaneously opened a window into the thinking of classical rabbinic commentary for many non-Orthodox Jews. 12

Rabbi Mordechai Breuer

One of the most creative and controversial figures in modern religious Tanakh study was

Mordechai Breuer (1921–2007). He posited that the proposed divisions of the Documentary

Hypothesis are essentially correct, and he agreed with the critics that no one person could have

composed the Torah. However, he disagreed with the critics most fundamentally by insisting that

no person wrote the Torah. God revealed it to Moses in its complex form so that the multiple

aspects of the infinite Torah could be presented in different sections. Since we are limited as

humans, we cannot simultaneously entertain these perspectives, so they appear to us as

contradictory. The complete truth emerges only when one takes all facets into account. He

named his approach the Theory of Aspects. In this manner, Breuer accepted the text analysis of

critical scholarship while rejecting its underlying beliefs and assumptions. 13

Although Breuer's commitment to the readings of the Documentary Hypothesis as

“science” detracted from his work, his fundamental premise, that the Torah presents aspects of truth in different places, has significantly influenced the next generation of scholars, 14 to whom we now turn.

Leading Contemporary Figures

Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun

One of the most influential Tanakh teachers today, Yoel Bin-Nun of Herzog College presents a more comprehensive approach to Tanakh than many of his colleagues, a result of his unusual ability to address historical-archaeological scholarship on a serious level. He combines expertise in Tanakh, rabbinics, parshanut, halakhah, history, archaeology, linguistics, and theology. He actively confronts academic Bible study by using its own tools of scholarship to respond to its challenges.

In his writings, Rabbi Breuer steered clear of historical criticism, concentrating exclusively on literary issues. 15 Rabbi Bin-Nun, in contrast, believes that these disciplines, when studied responsibly, combine harmoniously and deepen our understanding of Tanakh and other areas of Jewish thought. 16

Rabbi Elhanan Samet

Another exemplar of the literary-theological approach is Rabbi Elhanan Samet, who also teaches at Herzog College. Classical commentators and thinkers, ancient Near Eastern sources, and literary tools contribute to his analyses, but Rabbi Samet is careful to evaluate all of these elements against the biblical text itself. Rabbi Samet selectively uses both traditional and modern sources, including those who are non-Orthodox as well as, on occasion, non-

Jewish scholars. He places great emphasis on the overall structure of the passage, often identifying chiasms as well as imputing significance to the leitworten (lead words). One of Samet's hallmark literary techniques is to divide a passage—narrative, poetic, or legal—in half. He applies this principle to determine the “central pivot” of a passage which he maintains helps the reader ascertain the inner meaning of the text. 17

Rabbi Shalom Carmy

The leading exponent of the literary-theological approach in America is Shalom Carmy of Yeshiva University. A student of Rabbis Joseph Soloveitchik and Aharon Lichtenstein, Carmy has distinguished himself as a scholar of both Tanakh and Jewish thought. He has contributed substantially to the exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of the use of academic methodology within a religious framework. 18 The principles of his approach include the following:

1. We learn Tanakh as an intensely religious pursuit. Philology and history are important disciplines, but not ends in themselves; they are the means to the greater end of connecting to the living messages of the prophets and our tradition.
2. Our Sages and later rabbinic commentators guide our inquiry, both as great scholars and as our religious polestars.
3. Great pashtanim like Ibn Ezra and Radak have more in common with Hasidic writers than with non-Orthodox academic scholarship. Traditional commentators view Tanakh as the revealed word of God, with enduring religious value and relevance. This central axiom defines our outlook on every sacred word.
4. Rabbinic views have religious value even if they may not be the most likely

peshat reading of a biblical text.

5. We should draw on non-Orthodox academic scholarship when it contributes positively to the discussion.

6. Biblical books offer multiple perspectives on complex issues. Taken together, we can appreciate the depth of the issues they address and develop an increasingly refined religious worldview.

Other Figures

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, a student of Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, successfully pioneered the

dissemination of his teacher's methodology over the Internet. 19 Another of Rabbi Bin-Nun's

students, Rabbi Yaakov Medan, who currently is one of the Roshei Yeshivah at Yeshivat Har

Etzion, also has published widely on Tanakh. 20 Many others teach in Herzog College and other

schools, and publish in Megadim and other journals. Hundreds of articles are archived at the

Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion (<http://vbm.etzion.org.il/en>). While most of the best

work emanates from Israel, the literary-theological approach has made significant strides in

America too. 21

Entering the twenty-first century, the next generation of Orthodox scholars have taken

their place as leading educators. The most significant project to date is the Maggid Tanakh

Commentary Series. A work in progress, Maggid Press (connected to Koren) has published

collections of studies on the weekly Torah portion, 22 and has embarked on an in-depth

commentary series on the entire Tanakh. The commentary series largely features the younger

generation of scholars, including Amnon Bazak (Samuel), Yitzchak Etshalom

(Amos, forthcoming), Tova Ganzel (Ezekiel), Jonathan Grossman (Genesis), and Yael Ziegler (Ruth, Lamentations).

Jonathan Grossman stands out for his remarkably prolific output and his efforts to present literary analysis as a comprehensive commentary on the books of Genesis, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. Grossman's work bridges the best of traditional Tanakh learning with contemporary literary methodology. A faculty member at both Herzog College of Yeshivat Har Etzion and Bar-Ilan University, Grossman moves seamlessly between traditional and academic scholarship, demonstrating how both modern literary analysis and our classical commentators contribute to our understanding of the Torah. Most importantly, he remains focused on deriving the religious messages from the text. 23

Moshe Shamah (Sephardic Synagogue, Brooklyn) composed a commentary on the Torah, based on previously published online essays. Rabbi Shamah justifies the need for his commentary by noting the lack of adequate material written on the Torah focusing on peshat that accepts the axioms of tradition along with the compelling features of modern scholarship. He

addresses a wide range of issues, including linguistic elucidations of individual words; literary structures of passages; parallels between sections of the Torah; religious-philosophical issues; the relationship between the Written and Oral Law; surveys of parshanut; symbolic meanings of laws, narratives, and Midrashim; a consideration of the Torah in light of its ancient Near Eastern

setting; and poetic techniques. It is particularly valuable to have a commentary of this high caliber that can be read by scholars and laypeople alike. 24

Also noteworthy is the website, alhatorah.org, by Hillel Novetsky. The site contains many essays that survey approaches to a plethora of issues in Tanakh, editions of classical commentaries, and other learning tools that have brought online Tanakh education to a new level.

Archaeology, Realia

Archaeology was popular among early Zionist scholars and was used extensively in the Daat Mikra commentary series and by Professor Yehudah Elitzur (1911–1997). 25 Today, there is a heightened interest within the Orthodox world in quality scholarship of geography, archaeology, and realia. A growing body of literature addresses this gaping hole within the standard yeshivah education. Two particularly valuable recent contributions are Professor Yoel Elitzur's *Places in the Parasha: Biblical Geography and Its Meaning*, and the new series, *The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel*.

When learning Tanakh with the literary-theological method, certain elements become primary. Others lend themselves less to this type of analysis and religious exploration. To cite a familiar example, one learning the Book of Joshua likely will focus on the gripping narratives of chapters 1–12 and then skip to chapters 22–24. Joshua's role as leader and his relationship to Moses' leadership, the balance between God's intervention and human efforts, the reenactment

of the covenant, the thorny question of war against the Canaanites, and many other vital religious and human issues dominate the discussion. The lengthy city lists in chapters 13–21 would receive scant attention at best, perhaps a few scattered bullet points. Further, the classical commentators do not offer extensive help expanding the middle chapters, since they generally were unaware of the geography of the Land of Israel.

Now imagine an entire book about those city list chapters, written by an expert in both the text of Tanakh and contemporary historical and archaeological scholarship. Imagine that book teaching a rigorous methodology in a clear accessible way that enlightens our understanding of Tanakh and strengthens our religious connection to the Land of Israel. Such a book would fill a monumental void in our learning. Yoel Elitzur's new book, *Places in the Parasha*, helps to fill that void.

Elitzur is a researcher of the Hebrew language and biblical and historical geography, a member of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, and heads the Land of Israel Studies Department at Herzog College in Alon Shvut. He has made a remarkable contribution to religious Tanakh study by focusing on the oft-neglected biblical places and names. Elitzur combines pioneering academic research with careful text analysis, bringing both together with rigor and religious passion.

Elitzur has given us the opportunity to greatly enhance our understanding of many elements in Tanakh, rabbinic teachings, and even folk traditions. His volume enlightens our

learning, and will foster a more profound love of the Land of Israel through intimate knowledge of the settings for the eternal prophetic narratives in Tanakh. 26

Koren Publishers also has embarked on an impressive new project, a popular companion to the Torah presenting contemporary research on archaeology, flora and fauna, geology, the languages and realia of the ancient Near East, and other areas that elucidate aspects of the biblical text. It is presented in a similar engaging manner to the Hebrew series, *Olam HaTanakh*, and like that Hebrew work was composed by a team of scholars who specialize in a variety of fields of scholarship. There are brief articles and glossy photographs, maps, and illustrations that bring these areas to light. Unlike *Olam HaTanakh*, which also offers a running commentary on biblical books, *The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel* discusses specifically those background areas that may enhance our understanding of the text within its real-world setting. This series does not purport to offer original scholarship, but rather synthesizes contemporary academic scholarship in an accessible and Orthodox-friendly manner. As of this writing, they have published volumes on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Samuel, and the series ultimately is expected to cover the entire Tanakh. 27

Addressing the Religious Challenges of Critical Study of Tanakh
Orthodoxy has matured significantly in the past generation and has been increasingly willing to confront and benefit from developments in academic Bible study. The two most important books written recently are Amnon Bazak, *Until This Very Day: Fundamental Questions in Bible Study* (Maggid, 2020), and Joshua Berman, *Ani Maamin: Biblical Criticism, Historical Truth, and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (Maggid, 2020). Both scholars

are well-

versed in classical Jewish sources as well as the gamut of contemporary academic discourse.

As the revealed word of God, the study of Tanakh should lie at the heart of the learning

of religious Jews along with the Talmud and classical rabbinic thinkers. In Israel, particularly in

the Religious Zionist community, there has been a flourishing of serious Tanakh learning in

recent decades. Thankfully, some of this excitement has spilled over into America and beyond.

With every positive development, however, there are accompanying challenges.

Academic Bible study offers a wealth of valuable information and analytic tools.

However, it

also poses severe challenges to the very heart of traditional faith. The academic consensus asserts

that the Torah was composed by different people and schools, all from periods after Moses.

Many scholars doubt or deny the historicity of our foundational narratives. The presence of

ancient textual witnesses such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint lead many to claim that

these variant texts are sometimes more reliable than the Masoretic Text.

The ostensible conflicts between tradition and academic scholarship have led many

scholars, including several who identify with the Orthodox community, to conclude that

traditional faith is incompatible with good scholarship. This supposition has led some to reject

traditional belief outright, or to radically redefine faith to make it compatible with their scholarly

conclusions, or to reinterpret classical sources in an attempt to justify such radical paradigm

shifts as being within tradition. These positions have led to counter-reactions in some Orthodox

circles that adopt excessively dogmatic and restrictive positions to prohibit scholarly inquiry or

peshat learning altogether. Both sides may be motivated by a profound and

authentic religious
desire to connect to God and the Torah, but they distort aspects of tradition and
create dangerous
and unnecessary rifts between us.

In *Until This Very Day*, Rabbi Amnon Bazak—one of the bright stars at Yeshivat
Har
Etzion and its affiliated Herzog College—surveys classical sources and offers a
sophisticated
understanding of Tanakh and the axioms of our faith, while simultaneously being
fully open to

contemporary scholarship. Addressing the fact that many in the Orthodox world
disregard
contemporary scholarship, Bazak offers three reasons why such willful ignorance
is inexcusable:

1. These issues are widely publicized and available, and therefore rabbis and
religious educators must be able to address them intelligently.
2. Many of the questions from the academy are genuine and must be taken
seriously
on scholarly grounds.
3. We often stand to gain a better understanding of Tanakh with the aid of
contemporary scholarship.

Bazak's book is indispensable for all who engage with the critical issues of
learning

Tanakh, and particularly for rabbis and educators. 28

Bazak frames his book as focused on the challenges from the secular academy.
He

explores the following topics: (1) the authorship of the Torah and other biblical
books; (2) the
reliability of the Masoretic Text; (3) archaeology and the historicity of the
narratives in Tanakh
and comparative studies between Tanakh and ancient Near Eastern texts; (4) the
relationship
between peshat and derash; and (5) the sins of biblical heroes.

Bazak's central premise is that we must distinguish between facts and compelling
tools of

analysis, which must be considered in our learning; and the assumptions of scholars, which we reject when they conflict with traditional beliefs. He argues that nothing based on facts forces one to choose between traditional faith and good scholarship.

Joshua Berman (Bar-Ilan University) has written a much-needed book for those in the Orthodox community who have read popular works on Bible criticism but who lack the tools to evaluate the merits of various theories or the religious implications of these theories. Informed by decades of research into both traditional and academic methods, Berman is uniquely qualified to address the religious and academic issues in the first book-length study of its kind. 29

Berman's primary argument is that most purported faith-science conflicts arise from misunderstandings of the nature of academic truth. There are several influential academic Bible theories, such as the documentary hypothesis that posits multiple human authors of the Torah to account for the contradictions and redundancies in the Torah, or arguments that many narratives lack archaeological corroboration and therefore are fictional and irrelevant. Berman posits that these positions are based on anachronistic assumptions about literature, history, and law, rather than on the world of ideas in ancient Near Eastern texts and contexts. It is therefore critical from a purely scholarly perspective to abandon these assumptions, and to attempt to understand the Torah as a literary creation of the ancient world. By doing so, we also may better appreciate the revolutionary religious and moral developments the Hebrew Bible contributed to ancient Near Eastern culture and literature. These values transformed many areas of world culture.

Berman's book is vital for understanding the relationship between faith and

academic

Bible study, where we can benefit from those texts as useful tools in learning and appreciate the

staggering revolution of the Torah within its ancient context. We should not impose our modern

Western notions of history or Aristotelian consistency onto the Torah, nor should we impose our

modern sentiments of statutory law onto the Torah. By focusing on the Torah's eternal lessons,

by attuning ourselves to differences between narratives to refine our understanding of the

message of each passage, and by recognizing that the Written Law was never intended as a

comprehensive code of law but always required an Oral Law, we can maintain complete faith in

revelation without hiding from the many beneficial aspects of contemporary scholarship.

In this context, it is worth noting a growing number of efforts by committed and observant Jews who attempt to bridge tradition and scholarship in different ways. Their

Their

conclusions sometimes attempt to push the boundaries of traditional understandings of faith in

the revelation of the Torah and Tanakh, but these scholars clearly attempt to ascertain religious

meaning in Tanakh and live religiously committed lives. 30 A leading scholar of the previous

generation was Louis Jacobs, *Principles of Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1964,

reprinted 1988). A few significant contemporary contributions in this genre are the essays edited

by Tovah Ganzel, Yehudah Brandes & Chayuta Deutsch, *The Believer and the Modern Study of*

the Bible (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019); Norman Solomon, *Torah from Heaven: The*

Reconstruction of Faith (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012); and Benjamin

D. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (New Haven:

Yale University Press, 2015). 31 The website, TheTorah.com, similarly contains

many pertinent essays.

Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter

One other project of note is the monumental Mikraot Gedolot HaKeter, edited by Menahem Cohen (Bar-Ilan University). This series presents the biblical text based on the Aleppo Codex, and carefully edited critical editions of the classical medieval commentators. 32

Conclusion

The ideal learning framework espouses traditional beliefs, regards study as a means to a religious end, and defines issues carefully, while striving for intellectual openness and honesty. Reaching this synthesis is difficult, since it requires passionate commitment alongside an effort at detachment while learning, in order to refine knowledge and understanding.

The literary-theological approach in contemporary Orthodox Tanakh study is an outstanding paradigm of this outlook and methodology. It combines a commitment to God and Torah coupled with an unwavering sense of intellectual honesty and pursuit of scholarship to further religious development and experience through learning.

Finally, and most importantly, as Shalom Carmy regularly emphasizes, our primary focus must be the encounter of God's word in Tanakh, rather than the study of ancillary subjects such as history, linguistics, or literature for their own sake. Nor should we become overly distracted by the challenges of Bible Criticism:

To the extent that we take seriously some of the things noticed by the critics that were previously overlooked, or in the case of the great Jewish exegetes, were

noticed unsystematically, it is the task of contemporary Orthodox students to show how the Torah coheres in the light of our belief in Torah mi-Sinai. The goal of those engaged in this activity... is not primarily to refute the Documentary Hypothesis but rather to do justice to worthwhile questions within the larger framework of Torah study. 33

We are privileged to live in a generation where a growing number of scholars and educators employ the highest caliber scholarship in the pursuit of religious truth in Tanakh.

Notes

1 I thank Rabbis Shalom Carmy, Yitzchak Etshalom, and Moshe Sokolow for reviewing earlier

drafts of this essay and making valuable comments and suggestions.

2 Yoshi Fargeon surveys rabbinic sources that maintain that there are minor instances of post-

Mosaic authorship in the Torah. See his “Wisdom and Knowledge Will be Given to You,” in The

Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible, ed. Tova Ganzel, Yehudah Brandes, and Chayuta

Deutsch (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), pp. 42–62. See also Marc B. Shapiro, The

Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles Reappraised (Oxford: Littman

Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), pp. 91–121; Mordechai Breuer, “On Bible Criticism”

(Hebrew), Megadim 30 (1999), pp. 97–107.

3 See Yuval Cherlow, “Ask the Rabbi: ‘Biblical Criticism is Destroying My Faith!’,” in The

Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible, ed. Tova Ganzel et al., pp. 288–299.

4 Shalom Carmy, “A Room with a View, but a Room of Our Own,” in Modern Scholarship in the

Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations, ed. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Jason

Aronson Inc., 1996), pp. 1–38.

5 See, for example, Berakhot 31a, Yevamot 71a, and many others.

6 Torat Etzion: New Readings in Parashat HaShavua, Bereshit (Hebrew), ed. Ezra

Bick and

Yonatan Feintuch (Jerusalem: Maggid Press, 2014), pp. 11–18. For a review of that book and its

methodology, see Hayyim Angel, “From Etzion Comes Torah: Yeshivat Har Etzion Faculty on

the Book of Genesis,” in Angel, *The Keys to the Palace: Essays Exploring the Religious Value of*

Reading the Bible (New York: Kodesh Press, 2017), pp. 18–35.

7 Introduction to his commentary on *Pirkei Avot* (Shemonah Perakim).

8 See, for example, Ephraim E. Urbach, “The Pursuit of Truth as a Religious Obligation”

(Hebrew), in *ha-Mikra va-Anahnu*, ed. Uriel Simon (Ramat-Gan: Institute for Judaism and

Thought in Our Time, 1979), pp. 13–27; Uriel Simon, “The Pursuit of Truth that Is Required for

Fear of God and Love of Torah” (Hebrew), *ibid.*, pp. 28–41; Marvin Fox, “Judaism, Secularism,

and Textual Interpretation,” in *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice*, ed. Marvin Fox

(Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 3–26.

9 Some of this section is adapted from Hayyim Angel, “The Literary-Theological Study of

Tanakh,” in Angel, *Peshat Isn’t So Simple: Essays on Developing a Religious Methodology to*

Bible Study (New York: Kodesh Press, 2014), pp. 118–136.

10 After completing the series, two of its leading contributors and editors, Yehudah Kiel and

Amos Hakham, wrote a short book describing the history and goals of the series, *Epilogue to the*

Da’at Mikra Commentary (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 2003).

11 For a collection of Elitzur’s seminal essays, see Yehudah Elitzur, *Yisrael ve-ha-Mikra:*

Mehkarim Geografi’im Histori’im ve-Hagoti’im (Hebrew), ed. Yoel Elitzur and Amos Frisch

(Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1999).

12 For more on her work, see especially Yael Unterman, *Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible*

Scholar (Jerusalem: Urim, 2009); *Pirkei Nehama: Nehama Leibowitz Memorial Volume*

(Hebrew), ed. Moshe Ahrend, Ruth Ben-Meir, and Gavriel H. Cohn (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, The Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, Department for Torah and Culture in the Diaspora, 2001); Hayyim Angel, Review Essay: "Pirkei Nehama: Nehama Leibowitz Memorial Volume: The Paradox of Parshanut: Are Our Eyes on the Text, or on the Commentators?" in Angel, Peshat Isn't So Simple: Essays on Developing a Religious Methodology to Bible Study, pp. 36-57.

13 For analysis of Breuer's method, see Amnon Bazak, *Until This Very Day: Fundamental Questions in Bible Study* (Hebrew), ed. Yoshi Farajun (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2013), pp. 109-139; Shalom Carmy, "Concepts of Scripture in Mordechai Breuer," in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), pp. 267-279; Meir Ekstein, "Rabbi Mordechai Breuer and Modern Orthodox Biblical Commentary," *Tradition* 33:3 (Spring 1999), pp. 6-23. For a collection of Breuer's articles on his methodology, and important responses to his work, see *The Theory of Aspects of Rabbi Mordechai Breuer* (Hebrew), ed. Yosef Ofer (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2005). For case studies of Breuer's methodology, see especially Breuer's *Pirkei Mo'adot* (Jerusalem: Horev, 1989), *Pirkei Bereshit* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 1998), and *Pirkei Mikra'ot* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2009).

14 See especially Yoel Bin-Nun, "Teguvah le-Divrei Amos Hakham be-Inyan Torat ha-Te'udot ve-Shittat haBehinot" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 4 (Tishri 1987), p. 91; Shalom Carmy, "Concepts of Scripture in Mordechai Breuer," *op. cit.*

15 See the criticisms of Breuer's position by Shalom Carmy, "Introducing Rabbi Breuer," in

Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations, ed. Shalom Carmy, p.

157; and Shnayer Z. Leiman, "Response to Rabbi Breuer," pp. 181-187.

16 For fuller analysis of Bin-Nun's methodology, including citations to many of his published

articles through 2006, see Hayyim Angel, "Torat Hashem Temima: The Contributions of Rav

Yoel Bin-Nun to Religious Tanakh Study," in Angel, Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding

the Religious Significance in Tanakh (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation,

2009), pp. 30-47. Many of Bin-Nun's articles are archived at <https://www.yoel-binnun.com/>.

17 Iyyunim be-Parashot ha-Shavua (series 1, 2, and 3), ed. Ayal Fishler (Ma'aleh Adumim:

Ma'aliyot, 2002, 2004, 2012). For an overview of Rabbi Samet's methodology, see Hayyim

Angel, "Review of Rabbi Elhanan Samet, Iyyunim be-Parashot haShavua," in Angel, Through

an Opaque Lens, revised second edition (New York: Kodesh Press, 2013), pp. 6-18. See also

Samet's books, Pirkei Eliyahu (Ma'aleh Adumim: Ma'aliyot, 2003), Pirkei Elisha (Ma'aleh

Adumim: Ma'aliyot, 2007), Iyyunim be-Mizmorei Tehillim (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2012).

Many of his articles are archived in English translation at the Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat

Har Etzion, at <http://www.vbm-torah.org>.

18 Carmy gives an overview of his own methodology in "A Room with a View, but a Room of

Our Own," in Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations, ed.

Shalom Carmy, pp. 1-38. See also especially his "To Get the Better of Words: An Apology for

Yir'at Shamayim in Academic Jewish Studies," Torah U-Madda Journal 2 (1990), pp. 7-24;

"Always Connect," in Where the Yeshiva Meets the University: Traditional and Academic

Approaches to Tanakh Study, ed. Hayyim Angel, Conversations 15 (Winter 2013),

pp. 1–12. For

a bibliography of his published writings through 2012, see Rav Shalom Banayikh: Essays

Presented to Rabbi Shalom Carmy by Friends and Students in Celebration of Forty Years of

Teaching, ed. Hayyim Angel and Yitzchak Blau (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2012), pp. 403–414.

19 See his articles archived at the Tanach Study Center, at <http://www.tanach.org>

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20 See his books: David u-Bat Sheva: ha-Het, ha-Onesh, ve-ha-Tikkun (Alon Shevut: Tevunot,

2002); Daniel: Galut ve-Hitgalut (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2006); Tikvah mi-Ma'amakim: Iyyun

be-Megillat Rut (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2007); Ki Karov Elekha: Leshon Mikra u-Leshon

Hakhamim (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2014); Ha-Mikraot ha-Mithaddeshim: Iyyunim be-

Nevi'im u-Ketuvim (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2015); Ani Kohelet: Makhelat Kolot be-Demut Ahat

(with Yoel Bin-Nun) (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2017); Iyyov: Ben Hoshekh la-Or (Alon Shevut:

Tevunot, 2019). For a review of his work, see Yaakov Beasley, "The Methodology of Creativity:

A Review of Rav Yaakov Medan's Contribution to the Modern Study of Tanakh," Tradition

45:1 (Spring 2012), pp. 61–77.

21 In addition to the prolific writings of Shalom Carmy, see especially Yitzchak Etshalom,

Between the Lines of the Bible: Recapturing the Full Meaning of the Biblical Text (Brooklyn:

Yashar, 2006), two volumes; Nathaniel Helfgot, Mikra & Meaning: Studies in Bible and Its

Interpretation (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2012); Moshe Sokolow, Hatzi Nehamah: Studies in the

Weekly Parashah Based on the Lessons of Nehama Leibowitz (Jerusalem, New York: Urim,

Lambda, 2008); In The Company of Prophets: Reflections on Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings

(New York: Kodesh Press, 2021); Hayyim Angel, Through an Opaque Lens (New

York:

Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006); Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the

Religious Significance in Tanakh (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation,

2009); Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh (Jersey

City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011); Vision from the Prophet and Counsel

from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi'im and Ketuvim (New York: Orthodox Union, 2013); Peshat

Isn't So Simple: Essays on Developing a Religious Methodology to Bible Study (New York:

Kodesh Press, 2014); Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: Prophecy in an Age of Uncertainty

(Jerusalem: Maggid, 2016); The Keys to the Palace: Essays Exploring the Religious Value of

Reading the Bible (New York: Kodesh Press, 2017); Cornerstones: The Bible and Jewish

Ideology (New York: Kodesh Press, 2020); Psalms: A Companion Volume (New York: Kodesh

Press, 2022).

22 Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tanakh, ed. Ezra Bick and Yaakov Beasley (Jerusalem:

Maggid, Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2011).

23 Bereshit: Sipuran shel Hatalot (Yediot Aharonot, 2017); Avraham: Sipuro shel Massa

(Yediot Aharonot, 2014); Yaakov: Sipuro shel Mishpahah (Yediot Aharonot, 2019); Yosef:

Sipuram shel Halomot (Yediot Aharonot, 2021; Megillat Ruth: Gesharim u-Gevulot (Alon

Shevut: Tevunot, 2016); with Asael Abelman, Kohelet: Sedek shel Or (Maggid Books, 2023);

Esther: Megillat Setarim (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2013); Galui u-Mutzpan: Al Kamah mi-Darkhei

ha-Itzuv shel ha-Sippur Mikrai (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2015). For analysis of Grossman's first

volume on Genesis and his methodology, see Hayyim Angel, "Where Literary Analysis Leads to

the Fear of God,” Tradition 51:4 (Fall 2019), pp. 181–192.

24 Moshe Shamah, *Recalling the Covenant: A Contemporary Commentary on the Five Books of*

the Torah (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2011). See also Hayyim Angel, Review Essay: “Seeking the

Keys to the Palace Gates: Rabbi Moshe Shamah’s Commentary on the Torah,” in Angel, *Peshat*

Isn’t So Simple: Essays on Developing a Religious Methodology to Bible Study, pp. 137–154.

25 A notable exception was Nehama Leibowitz. Moshe Ahrend observes that Nehama drew on a

wide variety of sources, but generally avoided ancient Near Eastern sources.

Nehama appears to

have been concerned that whatever benefits might be derived from such inquiry could be

neutralized by the religious dangers inherent in considering a divine text in light of human-

authored parallels (“From My Work with Nehama, of Blessed Memory” [Hebrew], in *Pirkei*

Nehama: Nehama Leibowitz Memorial Volume, ed. Moshe Ahrend, Ruth Ben-Meir and Gavriel

H. Cohn [Jerusalem: Eliner Library, The Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, Department for Torah and Culture in the Diaspora, 2001], pp. 31–49). Moshe Sokolow relates

further that “when invited by Da’at Mikra to prepare their commentary on Bereishit, Nehama

declined. When I asked her why, she replied: Because I don’t know the ancient Near East! When

I pointed out that she always hastened to eschew ancient Near Eastern texts, she clarified: One

can understand Bereishit without the ancient Near East, but one cannot write a commentary on

Bereishit without it” (*Studies in the Weekly Parashah Based on the Lessons of Nehama Leibowitz*

[Jerusalem: Urim, 2008], pp. 274–275).

26 See further discussion and examples in Hayyim Angel, Foreword to Yoel Elitzur, *Places in the*

Parasha: Biblical Geography and Its Meaning (Jerusalem: Maggid Press, 2020), pp. xv–xxv.

Abridged in Tradition Online, at <https://traditiononline.org/review-places-in-the-parasha/>.

27 See my reviews at Tradition Online, at <https://traditiononline.org/11255-2/>; <https://traditiononline.org/review-tanakh-of-the-land-of-israel-samuel>; <https://traditiononline.org/traditions-2023-book-endorsements/>.

28 This section is adapted from Hayyim Angel, “Faith and Scholarship Can Walk Together: Rabbi Amnon Bazak on the Challenges of Academic Bible Study in Traditional Learning,” in Angel, *The Keys to the Palace: Essays Exploring the Religious Value of Reading the Bible*, pp. 58–75.

For further discussion and sources of several critical issues and their intersection with rabbinic tradition, see Moshe Sokolow, *Tanakh: An Owner’s Manual: Authorship, Canonization, Masoretic Text, Exegesis, Modern Scholarship and Pedagogy* (Brooklyn, NY: Ktav, 2015). See also the collection of essays in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996).

29 For further discussion, see Hayyim Angel, Review of Ani Maamin, *Tradition* 52:2 (Spring 2020), pp. 142–150. Many of Berman’s arguments in the first half of his book are summaries of his two earlier academic books published by Oxford University Press: *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (2017), and *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke from Ancient Political Thought* (2008). Because Ani Maamin is primarily addressed to the Orthodox community, Berman is careful to demonstrate the continuity of his ideas and methodology with classical rabbinic sources.

30 See the important discussion of Mordechai Breuer, “The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction,” in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. Shalom Carmy, pp. 159–180.

31 For further discussion, see Hayyim Angel, Review Essay: “When Blurring Peshat and Derash

Creates a New Theology: A Critique of 'Participatory Revelation,'" Tradition 54:4 (Fall 2022), pp. 134–145. Review of Benjamin D. Sommer, Revelation & Authority (2015), and The Revelation at Sinai: What Does 'Torah from Heaven' Mean? (2021). Edited by Yoram Hazony, Gil Student, and Alex Sztuden.

32 For further discussion, see Nathaniel Helfgot, " 'Mikra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter' (Bar-Ilan University), ed. Menahem Cohen," Ten Da'at 14 (2001), pp. 29–38.

33 Shalom Carmy, "A Peshat in the Dark: Reflections on the Age of Cary Grant," Tradition 43:1 (Spring 2010), pp. 4–5. For further discussions of the religious implications of this learning methodology, see, for example, the essays collected in Hi Sihati, My Constant Delight: Contemporary Religious Zionist Perspectives on Tanakh Study, ed. Yehoshua Reiss (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Maggid-Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2013); Nathaniel Helfgot, "Between Heaven and Earth: Curricula, Pedagogical Choices, Methodologies, and Values in the Study and Teaching of Tanakh," in Helfgot, Mikra & Meaning: Studies in Bible and Its Interpretation (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2012), pp. 1–53.