Bridging Tradition and the Academy

View PDF



Rabbi Hayyim Angel is National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and teaches Tanakh at Yeshiva University. This article appeared in Jewish Bible Quarterly 50:1 (2022), pp. 19–35 and is reprinted in issue 44 of Conversations.)

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
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
.
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 Hathalot (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.