No Fear Biblical Criticism

An Introduction for the Modern Orthodox Reader

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Introduction

Not too long ago Professor Yoram Hazony wrote an article critiquing the approach to Biblical Criticism taken by Open Orthodoxy — or at least by the Open Orthodox community he had spent a *shabbat* with. It's an excellent article; one that admits to being a product of the author's subjective experience, while still being bold enough to pose challenging questions. The main thrust of these questions, and of the article as a whole, was regarding the statement made by the Rabbi of the community that what set Open Orthodoxy apart was its willingness to confront challenging issues, such as Biblical Criticism, and to struggle with them honestly (presumably in contrast to the rest of the Jewish Community). Prof. Hazony's article paints a picture quite at odds with this statement, a picture where anything less than absolute acceptance of Biblical Criticism is completely unacceptable, wherein even questioning Biblical Criticism merits an immediate and condescending dismissal. The article concludes by comparing Open Orthodoxy to the Protestant Movement, which a century ago decided to accept Biblical Criticism, and has paid the price for it.

While Prof. Hazony does have some harsh words for the Open Orthodox community, he does also say that he is "willing to regard [it] as a positive force." He cannot abide the automatic acceptance of whatever opinions are popular amongst secular scholars, but he is fine with openly and honestly tackling challenges to Orthodoxy. While many people used his article as a springboard from which to offhandedly reject Biblical Criticism and Open Orthodoxy, Prof. Hazony was not proposing such an action. Instead, he was proposing nuance, both in relation to Open Orthodoxy, and in terms of how Orthodoxy may approach Biblical Criticism.

It is this approach that I would like to take in what I hope will be a series of short essays on the topic of Biblical Criticism, each dealing with different aspects of the topic. Most Jews either accept Biblical Criticism in its totality, or reject that self-same totality. Much of the goal of this series will be to show that both of these approaches are mistaken.

Biblical Criticism is not a monolithic structure. It has many complex pieces and approaches, and we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Many of its methods are similar to those used by the Medieval commentators of the Jewish Tradition.[1] Other parts of Biblical Criticism, though, are not only simply unacceptable from an Orthodox theological point of view, they are also questionable from points of view within the secular academic world. I will attempt to demonstrate this as well. Thus, I will attempt to point out not only what parts of Biblical Criticism are problematic for Orthodoxy, but also those parts that are in fact quite valuable.

And most of all, I will attempt to show that we have nothing to fear from Biblical Criticism.

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[1] See this article by R' Yaakov Elman (wherein he at one point discusses the Rishonim who make use of the concept of "Resumptive Repetition").

Critical Approaches & The Documentary Hypothesis

Perhaps the biggest issue people face when approaching Biblical Criticism is their misconceptions about what it really is. When most people hear the words "Biblical Criticism" they immediately think of the Documentary Hypothesis. Ultimately, however, the Documentary Hypothesis is only a small portion of the vast tapestry that is Biblical Criticism. In truth, Biblical Criticism is such a broad field that the best definition might be "Academic Approaches to the Bible." What this means is that Biblical Criticism includes many different approaches with many different interests.

Some of these approaches, like Form Criticism or Source Criticism — parent categories of the Documentary Hypothesis — are solely an attempt to determine what sources the human authors of the Tanakh used to compose the texts we see before us today. Such an approach is obviously anathema to a religious believer dedicated to the idea of a purely divine text. However, Biblical Criticism also includes Literary Criticism, which might be thought of as "the study of the Bible as Literature." While that same religious believer might take offense at calling the Torah "Literature," he or she presumably would not disagree with the literary critic about the incredible beauty and complexity of the Torah text, or the significance of every word.

With the above in mind, I will attempt to begin to explain a few of these different approaches, as well as how they relate to each other and the religious believer. While some approaches — like Archaeology or Patternism — will have to wait for a later installment, the Documentary Hypothesis will be given primary placement in this essay, as it is both the most famous aspect of Biblical Criticism, and possibly the most challenging to the religious believer.

A Brief Explanation Of The Documentary Hypothesis

The Documentary Hypothesis is the culmination of hundreds of years of Biblical Scholarship, starting from the first medieval scholars to ever questioned the Mosaic Authorship of the entire Torah.[2] It's first fully realized manifestation was the work of Julius Wellhausen. Wellhausen was the first to not only create a full picture of which parts of the Torah were assigned to which source, but also when in the history of the Israelites the different sources had been written.

He broke the text down into four basic sources, (J)awhist, (E)lokist, (P)riestly & (D)ueteronomist, and a (R)edactor who put them all together. Historically, these sources had been broken up based on the different names they used to refer to God, repetitive or contradictory stories, and varying writing styles. Wellhausen was the first to take these sources and figure out where, and how, they might fit historically. He placed the writing of J & E at the time of the split kingdoms of Judah and Israel, with J being written in Judah and E being

[2] Much of the information in this paragraph comes from Richard Elliot Friedman's "Who Wrote the Bible?", a clear and easy text explaining the development of the Documentary Hypothesis, and one which a clear-headed believer should not haven much trouble with.

written in Israel.[3] He placed the writing of D in the reign of King Yoshiyahu, and the writing of P in the time of Ezra, the Second Temple Period. However, this last placement of P has long been recognized to be based not only on faulty assumptions, but also on some underlying antisemitism, as P includes most of the ritual laws that people associate with Judaism. Thus, many people eventually began to place P earlier, at which point it becomes a matter of much debate amongst Bible scholars. Some even split P into P and H, the Priestly Source and Holiness Code, and suggest that while one was written earlier, the other was written very late.[4]

This, writ large, is the basic concept of the Documentary Hypothesis. Each of these sources may have had it's own development — it may have been written by a single person, or perhaps even a school of writers — but whatever the case may have been, these were the sources the Redactor combined to make the text we today call the Torah.

Dealing With The Documentary Hypothesis

While much of this was initially challenging to Orthodox Jewry, R' Mordechai Breuer developed what is known as "*Shitat HaBehinot*", or "The Method of the Aspects." According to this approach, all of the different voices and styles the Documentary Hypothesis scholars claimed they had found really do exist in the Torah. However, these disparate elements do not represent different human authors, but different aspects of the Divine Truth, which cannot be put simply into Human language without compromise or contradiction.

While there is certainly merit in this approach, the Documentary Hypothesis was to suffer much critique from within the world of Biblical Criticism itself — not only from literary critics, but also from within Source Criticism. In recent decades, advancements in the study of ancient languages and how they changed over time — the way scribal copying really used to work, and the like — has changed the face of Source Criticism to the point where a critic's ability to really identify sources with a high degree of accuracy has been called into question.[5] Thus, the whole practice of identifying source documents is considered by many Source Critics to be rather passé.[6] Further, harsh critiques have been leveled against Source Criticism in general, and the

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[3] This type of assignment is usually made on the assumption that the Biblical authors would only have written things that would benefit themselves, and thus a source that talks about Hebron must be from the Kingdom of Judah, which was originally based in Hebron. Simply put, this assumption is one of several options, and not necessarily the preferred one, as people, particularly religious people, are often motivated by something other than personal gain.

[4] Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus, Yale Anchor Bible Commentary, Vol. 1, Introduction.

[5] For more on this, see Professor Alan Brill's fantastic interviews with Professor David Carr and Professor Jacob Wright.

[6] This has also called into question some of R' Breuer's conclusions, and thus many religious academics have failed to embrace it. However, it should also be noted that this newer conception is largely based on the assumption that ancient Israelite society functioned just like the societies around it, something not necessarily conclusive.

Documentary Hypothesis in specific, by the rising trend of Literary Criticism, as will be discussed below.

For now, it is safe to say that the Documentary Hypothesis need not trouble the believer too much.

The Other Criticisms

Source Criticism, to reiterate, is the attempt to uncover the different sources that were combined to create the text as we have it today. This is done by a rather intensive dividing up of texts based on repetitions, contradictions, and supposed authorial styles. There is a similar approach called Form Criticism which attempts to find the original forms of these sources, namely, the original written or oral compositions that developed into the narratives of the Biblical text as we know it. This is done by determining the beginning and end of each unit of the Torah text, and then attempting to determine what "genre" the unit would fall under (examples: kingship myth, victory song, folktale, etc.). This genre can then be used to determine the meaning of the text, as well as it's *sitz im leben*, or the situation in the national life in which the text would have existed (example: a funeral, a coronation, a sacrificial procedure, etc.).

However, much as Source Critics are forever arguing over the correct divisions of the Torah text, so too Form Critics argue about the beginning and ends of units within the text. Moreover, there is little agreement among Form Critics regarding the number of genres in Biblical Literature, or what exactly those genres might be. These two fields struggle from an incredible amount of internal debate,[7] but perhaps their greatest critiques have come from the field of Literary Criticism.

Literary Criticism is an approach that eschews the whole practice of searching for the origins of the Biblical text, not because it's difficult or impractical, but because such an approach cannot tell you what the text means. Literary Criticism says that regardless of whether the author of the Torah may have been using varied sources or not, the text was composed with great intent. Therefore, the meaning of the text can be best assessed not by picking it apart, but by looking at it as a unified whole. In fact, such an approach says that even if the text is a combination of older sources, what matters is how they were put together, not what they were separately. Therefore, what appear to be seams uniting two texts will often unlock the greatness and meaning of the larger text.[8]

This approach was developed by thinking of Tanakh not as scripture, but as literature, and thus subject to Literary Theory. This type of analysis originally suffered due to comparing Tanakh to various forms of literature — such as Homer or Shakespeare — where the comparisons were totally artificial. However, as knowledge of the Ancient Near East and, more importantly, the

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[7] For more on the development of internal debates of Form Criticism, see Appendix II of Meir Weiss, "The Bible From Within".

[8] This was the "Holistic Method" of Moshe Greenberg, which is wonderfully and masterfully demonstrated in his analysis of Yehezkal's vision of Idolatry in the *Bet HaMikdash* in Yehezkal 8-11.

field of Literary Theory[9] improved, Literary Criticism became an approach that truly appreciates the incredible nature of the text of Tanakh. It is from this literary vantage point that many critiques have been launched against Source Criticism and Form Criticism.

One of the foundational concepts of Source Criticism is that a repetition means the combination of two sources. However, repetition often serves a purpose within a narrative, so assuming a combination of sources is far from necessary. An excellent example is pointed out by Professor Robert Alter in his seminal work, "The Art of the Biblical Narrative." When Yosef reveals himself to his brothers (Bereishit 45), he says, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" Then, a verse later, he repeats himself saying "I am your brother Yosef whom you sold to Egypt." Source critics split these two verses into two separate sources, but Alter argues that the repetition is obviously a function of the psychological and dramatic narrative, where the brothers are initially dumbfounded, and only after they draw closer and Yosef repeats himself, can they truly understand.[10] Professor Adele Berlin, in "Poetics and the Interpretation of the Biblical Narrative," argues that many such repetitions also come from switches between various perspectives, not from multiple sources. In the same chapter[11] she compares Form Critical analysis of Tanakh with Form Critical analysis of the Epic of Gilgamesh, and shows that even in the case of the Epic of Gilgamesh — where we have obvious and empirical development from primitive sources to more complex literary works — such development still cannot account for the literary complexity of the final composition. This applies all the more so in the case of Tanakh where there are no extant versions of primitive sources, and the text can really only be understood in terms of an author with full control over the text — not someone gingerly combining older sources.

All in all, Literary Criticism is actually a realm of Biblical Criticism where the religious believer can feel fairly at home.

Conclusion

The first mistake many make in approaching Biblical Criticism is believing that it is a monolithic entity. It is, rather, a large tapestry, and not all the different strands get along with one another. Moreover, even within each strand there is much disagreement. Biblical Criticism is not some big scary entity to be fear or adored, to be either entirely accepted or entirely rejected.

Hopefully, this essay has conveyed that one can examine Biblical Criticism critically, and see that we do not need to fear the elements we cannot accept, and perhaps also that there may be some elements we will want to embrace.

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[9] For a survey of the development of Literary Criticism, including the literary-critical sides of Form Criticism, see the First Introduction to "The Bible From Within."

[10] Robert Alter, "The Art of the Biblical Narrative", Chapter 8, "Narration and Knowledge".

[11] Her critiques can be found here.

Lower Criticism & Textual Emendations

Lower Criticism is the study of the various texts of Tanakh in order to determine how the text has changed over time (as opposed to Higher Criticism which is concerned with determining who wrote the Torah and the like). This is done by comparing the text that Jews use today,[12] referred to as the Masoretic Text, with the Dead Sea Scrolls,[13] the Septuagint,[14] the Vulgate,[15] the Peshitta,[16] the Torah of the Samaritans,[17] the Aramaic Targumim,[18] and quotations from the Talmud. Comparison of these texts reveals words or letters that differ between the texts, presumably due to change over time. Based on this, some Biblical Critics have attempted to sift through the different versions and correct the Masoretic Text that we use today, or even to find the original texts of the Torah and the rest of Tanakh.

Different Differences

Most of the texts that are compared to our Torah's text are translations, and thus comparison requires first translating the texts back into Hebrew, and then comparing them. At this point, the texts have been translated twice, so the accuracy of the text suffers somewhat, but is not beyond usefulness. While these texts have not revealed extreme differences — such as differing conceptions of God or the like — there are still differences.[19] While these could present a difficulty for an Orthodox Jew, they could also be dismissed as a function of translation errors, or as intentional mistranslations on the part of sectarians; i.e., perhaps the Qumran sects intentionally changed their Torah to fit their own views. What presents more difficulty, though, are the differences between the Tanakh text as we have it today, and the way Tanakh is quoted in the Talmud.

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[12] The oldest version of our text that exists today is known as the Aleppo Codex, written in the 10th century, and was used by *Rambam* as the basis for his *Hilkhot Sefer Torah*. For more, see here.

[13] Tanakh texts from the Second Temple Period found hidden in caves in the Israeli desert area of Qumran, by the Dead Sea, thought to be written by jews of varying sects and then hidden from the Romans. For more, see here.

[14] An early Greek translation discussed in *Masekhet Megillah* 9a-b. Of the fifteen deliberate mis-translations recorded there, only two are found in the Septuagint as we have it today. For more, see here.

[15] An 4th-century Latin translation used by the Catholic Church. For more, see here.

[16] An early Syriac translation that is likely from the second century. For more, see here.

[17] The Samaritans were brought to Israel and settled in Samaria during the First Temple Period. They have their own traditions and a Torah that are similar to that of Rabbinic Judaism. For more, see here.

[18] The most famous of these Aramaic translations are the *Targum Onkelos* on the Torah and the *Targum Yonatan* on *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*. For more, see here.

[19] Kaiser, Walter (2001). The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable & Relevant?. InterVarsity Press. p. 48.

There are often differences in the quotations from Tanakh that the Talmud uses, and the text of Tanakh that we have it today. The first thing to note about this is that not every one of these differences indicates that the sages of the Talmud had a different text than we do. It's also possible that somewhere in the years since the compilation of the Talmud, scribal errors were made in its transmission, and so what looks like a misquotation of Tanakh is actually a mistake in the text of our Talmud.[20] However, there are cases where it is clear from the discussion of the Talmud that the original quotations were in fact different from our text today.

Rambam's Eighth Principle

The problem this presents for Orthodoxy is that most Orthodox Jews ascribe to Maimonides the Thirteen Principles of Faith, or thirteen statements of belief that a Jew must affirm. The Eight Principle is that the Torah that we have today is exactly the same as the Torah that was given to Moshe.[21] According to this, to admit to even slight changes between our texts today and those of the time of the Gemara, let alone before that, would be heresy. Thus, we are presented with a contradiction between the words of Rambam, and that which we see before our own eyes. However, salvation from this conundrum may be found if we extend our view beyond Rambam, to the other sages of the Jewish tradition.[22]

Rambam's Eighth Principle expresses a very simple view of the text of the Torah[23] which is problematic not only in terms of the texts as they existed, but also in terms of other Jewish opinions held by other great sages. One contradiction of this type is found in *Masekhet Shabbat* 55b. *Tosafot* comment there (s.v. *ma'avirim ktiv*): "הש"ס שלנו חולק על הספרים שלנו" or "Our Talmud argues on [read: contradicts] our Books [of Tanakh];" instead of denying or brushing aside the contradiction, *Tosafot* openly acknowledge its existence. R' Akiva Eiger comments as well and, in his largest comment in all of the Talmud, lists the locations of every place in the Gemara where a quotation of Tanakh contradicts our text today. *Rashba*, in discussion of the various cases where our Talmud contradicts our Tanakh, suggests that there are times when it might be appropriate to actually amend our Torah text in order to match the quotations of the Gemara.[24] *Chatam Sofer*, by no means a liberal voice in the Jewish tradition, actually gives these contradictions as the reason why we do not make a *berakhah* when performing the *mitzvah* of

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[20] For more on this, see this shiur by Rabbi Jeremy Wieder, Rosh Yeshiva of YU.

[21] For a rather different, and not mainstream, understanding of Rambam's Eight Principle that does not contradict the evidence, see here.

[22] I am indebted for many of the sources that follow to Marc Shapiro's "The Limits Of Orthodox Theology". These sources and others can be found in the article that was later expanded into the book, which can be found, pages 10-21.

[23] It is important to note that this principle is only referring to the Five Books of Moshe, not to all of Tanakh.

[24] *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba ha-Meyuhasot le-Ramban* (Warsaw, 1883), #232. See also *Meiri* to *Kiddushin* 30a, *Kiryat Sefer*, 57-58, and *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Radbaz*; #1020.

writing a Sefer Torah.[25] These are only a few of the voices in the Jewish tradition that readily affirm the differences between the Talmud's quotations of Tanakh and the Tanakh as we have it today.

However, there are also sources, before *Rambam*, that suggest such changes had occurred to the text of Tanakh. The Gemara in *Masekhet Kiddushin* 30a discusses the possibility of determining the exact midpoint of the Torah, and concludes that it cannot be done because, by the time that they were having the discussion, they had already forgotten the correct spellings of many of the words.[26]

There is also a *midrash* regarding the Torah that was used upon the return of Ezra HaSofer to Israel:

> **Jerusalem Talmud, Masekhet Ta'anit 4:2:**
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> Three books they found in the Temple court, the book 'מעון, the book זעטוטי, and the book היא. In the one they found written קדם א'לוהי מעון and in the two they found written מעונה (Deut. 33: 27), and they upheld the two and set aside the one. In the one they found written ישראל בני זעטוטי את וישלח and in the two they found written וישלח את נערי בני ישראל (Exodus 24:5) and they upheld the two and set aside the one. In the one they found written nine times היא, and in the two they found written eleven times היא ,and they upheld the two and set aside the one.[27]

This *midrash* states that the text of Ezra's Torah was actually composed by going with two out of three Torah scrolls on every occurrence of debate between them. While this is both logical and in accord with the *halakhic* principle of following the majority, the likelihood that our Torah, let alone our text today, is exactly what Moshe gave to *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert drops dramatically with each contradiction.

Earlier Intentional Changes

While these sources discuss forced or accidental changes, there are also sources that discuss the possibility that the text of the Torah was intentionally changed. *Rashi* makes a powerful statement on this matter in regard to the odd phrasing of a verse in *Bereishit*:

> **Rashi on Genesis 18:22:**

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[25] *She'elot u-Teshuvot Hatam Sofer*, *Orah Hayyim*, #52.

[26] The form of spelling mistakes under discussion are what is called in Hebrew "מלא וחסר" or "plene and defective" in English. This is the spelling of words with or without extra letters that neither make a sound nor affect the meaning, rather they simply denote the sound is made by the vowel on that syllable.

[27] Translation from Marc Shapiro, Op Cit. This *midrash* is also found in *Sifre Piska* 356., *Masekhet Soferim* 6:4, and *Avot D'Rabbi Natan*, Ed. S. Schechter, (Vienna, 1887), Recension B, chapter 46, p. 65a.

ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה' וַהֲלֹא לֹא הָלַךְ לַעֲמוֹד לְפָנָיו, אֶלָּא הַקָּבָּ"ה בָּא אֵצְלוֹ וְאָמַר לוֹ, זַעֲקַת סְדוֹם וַעֲמוֹרָה כִּי רָבָּה וְהָיָה לוֹ לִכְתּוֹב "וַה' עוֹדֶנּוּ עוֹמֵד עַל אַבְרָהָם"? אֶלָּא תִּקּוּן סוֹפְרִים הוּא זֶה, (אֲשֶׁר הָפְכוּהוּ רַז"ל לִכְתּוֹב כֵּן) (בראשית רבה)

> ABRAHAM STOOD YET BEFORE THE LORD — But surely it was not he (Abraham) who had gone to stand before Him, but it was the Holy One, blessed be He, Who had come to him and had said to him, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great" and it should therefore have written here, "And the Lord stood yet before Abraham"? But it is a variation such as writers make to avoid an apparently irreverent expression (Genesis Rabbah 49) (which our Rabbis, of blessed memory, altered, writing it thus).

Rashi is saying that in order to demonstrate proper reverence to God, the scribes actually changed the text of the Torah. Moreover, this is not a local incident, as he uses this explanation in a variety of places throughout Tanakh.[28] An even bolder *midrashic* formulation, in a discussion of certain words throughout Tanakh that have dots above them, attributes words throughout the text to the authorship of Ezra.

> **Bamidbar Rabbah 3:14; Avot de-Rabbi Nathan 34:5:**
>
> Wherefore are the dots? Thus said Ezra: "If Elijah will come and say, why have you written these words? I shall say unto him: I have already put dots over them. And if he will say, thou has written well, I shall remove the dots over them.[29]

This *midrash* is saying that Ezra added these words to Tanakh, but because he was not certain that they belonged there he put dots over the words in order to make it obvious that they were his additions. This way, they could be removed if Eliyahu HaNavi determined them to be out of place. Thus, the *midrash* is suggesting that before the Gemara, before even the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Second Temple Period, Ezra had changed the text of the Torah.

Rambam's Eight Principle flies in the face of all of these sources,[30] and the evidence we see with our own eyes. It is hard to state with confidence that we possess the exact same text, letter for letter, that Moshe had.

Resolving The Contradiction With Rambam

An interesting approach to this difficulty with *Rambam* was taken by the *Seridei Eish*, R' Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg:

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[28] See Note 140 in the article by Marc Shapiro cited above in note 10. It seems that this is not necessarily the correct interpretation of the midrashic phrase "תיקון סופרים," or "Emendation of the Scribes," but it is how *Rashi* understood it. For more on the proper interpretation, see this article by Avrohom Lieberman.

[29] Translation from Marc Shapiro, Op Cit.

[30] This is without even going into the discussion of the last eight verses of the Torah, a view from the Gemara that *Rambam* seemingly would have qualified as heretical.

Fundamentals and Faith, 90-91:

> Rambam knew very well that there variations existed when he defined his Principles. The words of Ani Ma'amin and the words of the Rambam, "The entire Torah in our possession today," must not be taken literally, implying that all the letters of the present Torah are the exact letters given to Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, it should be understood in a general sense that the Torah we learn and live by is for all intents and purposes the same Torah that was given to Moshe Rabbeinu.

This provides a more workable model for someone confronted with all of this evidence and source material. Rather than burying our heads in the sand and pretending that the Torah has never changed, we should simply appreciate that there have been no truly significant changes,[31] and that the Torah is for all intents and purposes the same as it was when Moshe gave it to Bnei Yisrael.

"Correcting" Our Text

This brings us to the discussion of textual emendations. While Lower Criticism is a field of study in and of itself, it also has ramifications for the interpretation of Tanakh. Critical Scholars often switch or remove words and letters that seem to them to be incorrect in order to create a text that reads more correctly to them. The Orthodox Tanakh Scholar Shemuel David Luzzato also used such critical methods in his commentary on the Torah. However, both this approach to textual interpretation and the attempt to find the "original text of the Tanakh" have received critiques from within Biblical Criticism.

In a study of a passage from Sefer Yehezkal, Moshe Greenberg argues that, regardless of which versions may be original, changing the Masoretic Text based on other versions often ignores and obliterates the brilliance of the text.[32] Critics often perceive "textual flaws" and, instead of looking for a deeper reason the text was written that way, simply change it to a reading they find more fitting. Greenberg argues that perceived defects in the text of Tanakh should be a springboard for a deeper investigation, as they often point the way to discovering the masterful artistry of Tanakh.

Meir Weiss argues similarly that most textual emendations are enacted based on faulty understandings of the text.[33] He says that most critics simply do not know enough about what

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[31] The only real ramifications are for the *midrashic* approach where every letter is of the utmost significance, which is beyond the scope of this discussion. Two quick points that should be mentioned: 1. This approach is not to be considered totally unusable, but it does have to be understood in light of this whole discussion. 2. There has always been a second *midrashic* school which did not place ultimate value on each and every letter.

[32] Greenberg's article can be found here.

[33] See "The Bible From Within: The Total Interpretation Method"

the text should look like, and work off faulty assumptions about the nature of Biblical Poetry and Narrative.

Greenberg also argues against the idea that scholars can even determine the "original texts" of Tanakh, not because of the difficulty of the task, but because there is no such thing.[34] He argues that at any point at which there was a fully developed text of a book of Tanakh, there was multiple versions. He does make a caveat that the text of the Torah itself seems to have been concretized pretty early, but he still maintains that there were multiple versions. This final argument of Greenberg is complex from an Orthodox perspective — as it contradicts the idea that the Torah was given by God at Sinai — but it's not incredibly difficult, nor impossible to work with. He also makes a similar statement regarding the books of *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*, but there is no principle of Faith in any part of Judaism that requires one to believe in the giving of a book of *Nakh* all together at one time. Jeremiah in fact suggests otherwise.

Jeremiah 36:2:

קַח־לְךָ מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר וְכָתַבְתָּ אֵלֶיהָ אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל־יְהוּדָה
וְעַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם מִיּוֹם דִּבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ מִימֵי יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

Take you a scroll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke that to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day.

Sefer Yirmiyahu seems to have been written more than once, at various stages of its development. Similarly, the Gemara suggests that *Sefer Shemuel* was written in parts by Shemuel HaNavi, Gad HaChozeh, and Natan the Prophet, and then all those were compiled to make *Sefer Shemuel* as we know it today.[35]

In short, we have a lot more flexibility in terms of how we understand the books of *Nakh* than we do in terms of how we understand the Torah.

Conclusion

When it comes to the Torah itself, Lower Criticism can tell us a lot about the nature of the text, but it cannot tell us what this information means. How the information is to be interpreted in terms of the text of Torah (or *Nakh*) is up to us. We can either hold tight to a strict interpretation of *Rambam's* Eighth Principle, or we can accept the true nature of the text, and embrace the sages and sources that understood the text in this manner.

[34] Greenberg, Op Cit.

[35] *Masekhet Baba Batra*, 15a

Axioms & Subjectivity

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about the intersection of Biblical Criticism and religious thought is that they have fundamentally different ways of thinking about and approaching Tanakh. This isn't a matter of proofs or faith, simply of axioms. An axiom is a starting point for a line of reasoning, one that is not proven, but simply accepted. Most axioms are understood to be self-evident, but that does not have to be the case. Sometimes, an axiom that some find to be self-evident can be disagreed with by others, without either side actually being able to prove their axiom more correct. Such is the case when it comes to Biblical Criticism, as I will attempt to demonstrate in brief.

A First Axiom

The first and most important axiom to appreciate regarding Biblical Criticism is the Non-Existence of Prophecy.[36] This is in direct contrast to the basic assumption of most religions, certainly of Orthodox Judaism, that God communicates His Will to man. This is important to realize because it enables proper understanding of things like the Documentary Hypothesis.

The Documentary Hypothesis was never meant to prove that the Torah is not Divine. Rather, it started with that assumption — with a knowledge that the text was human — and based its approach on that. It is true that Source Critics at no point ran into anything that made them stop and consider that the text might be Divine, but that was also never really an option. Orthodox Jews, on the other hand, tend to start with the belief that the Torah is Divine, or at least that such a thing is possible. Therefore, when looking at the text, Bible Critics and Orthodox Jews are more or less guaranteed to see different things, simply due to their underlying assumptions.

A Second Axiom

A second important axiomatic difference to appreciate is the understanding of Context.[37] Everyone agrees that ideas must be understood in their proper contexts, including Tanakh. However, the Academic and Traditional[38] approaches to the text differ in terms of what context they put the Tanakh in. The academic approach understands all things in terms of their historical context. Israelite society and the Tanakh are put in terms of other Ancient Near Eastern civilizations and their literatures, both sacred and secular.[39] Such comparisons can be both helpful and misleading.

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[36] For more on this, see this excellent lecture by R' Jeremy Wieder.

[37] An excellent discussion of this idea by R' Natan Slifkin can be found here.

[38] I switch here from the terms "Religious" and "Orthodox" that I have been using to the term "Traditional" as this is one area where even the religious may often make use of the Academic approach.

[39] This simple point is often missed by Rabbis who ridicule Biblical Criticism for not taking *midrashim* into account. For one such example, see here.

The traditional approach sees Tanakh, and all of our sacred texts, in light of the Jewish tradition. This is most obviously true in terms of *halakhah* — which gets decided based on the various texts of the Jewish tradition — but it is also true for Tanakh. Even where they are not decisive, *midrashim* and later commentaries are taken into account by the traditional scholar when reading Tanakh.[40] Thus, the traditional scholar and the academic will see the text of Tanakh in very different lights.

Evolution Of Text

Having said this, it's worth taking a look at the historical context of Biblical Criticism; at least at its origins. Biblical Criticism, and the Documentary Hypothesis in particular, sprouted up in the latter half of the 19th century.[41] This had a lot of ramification in terms of the way Critics treated Tanakh like other literature of the time — without proper understanding of Israelite Society — but its greatest effects on Biblical Criticism came from the Scientific and Religious atmospheres of the time.

> **M. Greenberg, The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11, pg.147-8:**
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> The triumphs of evolutionism in natural science have made it a hallmark of intellectual modernity. Over against the essentially medieval unconcern (and unawareness) of history, so characteristic of theological exegesis, current critical exegesis opposes its perspective, developmental view of the text as its chief qualification for intellectual respectability in our time. Hence, any proposal of literary development is better than none–better in that it demonstrates sophistication, that is, advance beyond medieval dogmatic prejudices and naiveté.

Once science discovered the idea that nature and life had evolved over time, that idea spread like wildfire through the consciousness of the time, pervading all discussions. Everything had to have developed over time. In many, many arenas this proved to be an excellent method, but it's important to note that, as opposed to in the natural sciences, it was something external that was imposed onto whatever was studied, rather than something internal discovered through study. When it comes to the text of Tanakh some minor development over time is self-evident — letters and words and the like[42] — but there is no obvious and self-evident evidence of a slow and steady evolution from a core text, or texts, to what we have today.

Christianity & Bible Criticism

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[40] For more on this, see Rabbi Hayyim Angel's lecture on contradictions between laws from Sefer Devarim and narratives from later in Tanakh, downloadable here. Pay particular attention to his discussion of "Halakhic Man" vs. "Tanakhic Man".

[41] The ideas in this paragraph come from a fuller and truly excellent discussion by Moshe Greenberg at the beginning of this article.

[42] For more on this, see our discussion of Lower Criticism above.

Ibid, pg.148:

> A second need for the historical-analogic method arises from the situation of the Christian faith community which is its matrix. First, that community must justify its retention of the Old Testament alongside the New, and does so by showing that light is shed upon the New by viewing the Old as a series of steps leading up to it. The more fully this can be worked out, the greater the value set on the Old Testament. Second (though less articulated), that community, though buffeted by change and modernity, affirms the validity of its ancient Scripture in the present. This affirmation is accomplished by showing that the biblical text itself incorporates a record of reinterpretation, adjustment to change and supplementation by later hands. Given the community's overriding need for validating constant reinterpretation, any proposal that roots that process in the biblical text itself will have bias in its favor.

Ironically, much of the challenge to Divine Unity of the Torah came not from secularist but from religious individuals. Julius Wellhausen, father of the Documentary Hypothesis, was a Professor of Theology who retired upon realizing that instead of preparing his students to join the clergy he was disqualifying them from that role.[43] Christianity needed Tanakh to have developed over time and to have been subject to constant reinterpretation, something Source Criticism confirmed with gusto. Thus, the Documentary Hypothesis was accepted much more readily than it would have been otherwise. Thankfully, Biblical Criticism has moved away from these harmful mindsets, particularly with the rise of both Literary Criticism and the number of Jewish Academic Scholars in the second half of the 20th century.

Subjectivity & Skepticism

At this point it's worth taking a minute to point out something that has plagued Biblical Criticism from the start, namely, subjectivity. Biblical Criticism is by its very nature an incredibly subjective field.

> The book of Micah itself structurally alternates three prophecies of doom with three prophecies of restoration or hope… These restoration passages may seem a little out of keeping or out of step with the scathing denunciations or condemnations of Judah in the other parts of Micah's prophecy, and so some scholars have suggested that… these must be interpolations by a later editor…But this is always a very difficult case or issue, because we know that the prophetic writings do fluctuate wildly between denunciation and consolation. So I think that a shift in theme alone is not ever a certain basis for assuming interpolation — outright contradiction perhaps — but a shift in theme or tone is never a solid basis for assuming interpolation.
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> *(Prof. Christine Hayes, from the transcript of Lecture 18 of the Yale Open University's RLST 145: INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT)*

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[43] From his letter of resignation (quotation available here), cited in Robert J. Oden Jr.,"The Bible Without Theology", Harper and Row, 1987.

All textual analysis, regardless of what the text is or who is reading it, suffers from the subjectivity of the interpreter. It's unavoidable. However, it is particularly prevalent in Biblical Criticism where so little is known about the historical nature of the text under discussion, and so any conception of "what it should look like originally" has to be incredibly speculative. This does not mean that all or any of Bible Critics' conclusion are necessarily wrong, but it does indicate that we should look at their conclusions with a healthy degree of skepticism.

A Postmodern Critique

Any study of a text should take into account the ever-expanding field of literary theory. While not all literary theory is relevant to all texts, and certainly not to the study of Tanakh, there is certainly what to talk about. One significant idea is what is called the "Hermeneutic Circle," particularly in the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer.[44] The hermeneutic circle, somewhat broadly, is the idea that understanding the meaning of a text involves a circular process going back and forth between the reader and the text. Gadamer argued that a person can never be free of all of their "prejudices," their preexisting judgments, and that they automatically bring these things into the process of understanding a text. Understanding thus involves the interplay of the words on the page and the ideas and values that the reader brings to the reading.

An example may help clarify things somewhat. In a poem called "The Pleasures of the Imagination," poet Mark Akenside wrote the line, "The great creator raised his plastic arm."[45] The contemporary reader will immediately be struck by the bizarre image depicting God with a prosthetic limb. But the more precocious reader will know (or, more likely, will Google and discover) that Akenside wrote that line in the 18th century, when the word "plastic" meant something more along the lines of "powerful" and "flexible," a meaning that survives today in the word "plasticity." So on one level, the two different readers bring very different understandings of the word "plastic" to their readings of the text and thus emerge with two very different understandings of the text. But, on another level, both readers also come with different assumptions about what to do when confronted with a strange image. The first reader trusts that his or her understanding of the word is correct, and thus remains with the strange depiction of God. The second reader is ready to question his or her own understanding of the word, and is therefore able to reach what is more likely the original meaning of the poem. The trust of the first reader and the readiness to question of the second are things they bring to this poem, not things inherent in the text.[46]

Postmodernism

Postmodern literary theory has gone beyond this, however. There is so much that we bring to a text when we read it. When we open a novel, where do we start to understand the story? The title page? The table of contents? We know that we start the story with the first paragraph of

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[44] This concept has been used somewhat differently by other thinkers, but their understandings are less relevant to the discussion.

[45] I have seen this line, with this attribution, quoted many places. I have also seen the line quoted as "Which filled himself, he raised his plastic arm." I have yet to find either within the text itself. Regardless, it remains an excellent example for explaining this point.

[46] Moreover, the strangeness of the image of God's prosthetic arm is something that has become a lot less strange in the last 40 years or so, as prosthetic limbs have become more common, and science fiction in popular culture has familiarized us with the idea of people who are more polymer than flesh. At some point soon, readers of that poem may not find it so strange that they must question their understanding of the word.

chapter one, and it seems to us rather intuitive, but it's not essential that we do so. When we start understanding a story with that first paragraph, that is something we brought to the text, not an inherent part of it. Similarly, when do we know that we have read a word whose meaning we must comprehend? If we stop after the first letter, then "and" will only be read as "a," followed by the words "n" and "d." We understand that we have read a word when we get to a space, which separates it from the next word. This is as opposed to a hyphen, which connects two words that we are accustomed to understanding separately. But is it obvious that a hyphen should connect words like this? Ancient Hebrew, and related languages, separated words not with spaces but with dots, which rather resemble hyphens. A modern day reader would see these dots as hyphens, connecting the words, rather than as intended to separate between them. The meaning of the shapes between the symbols is something that the reader brings to the text themselves.

For the postmodernist, there is no meaning in a text.[47] A text is just symbols, ink on a page, until the reader interprets those symbols through her preexisting assumptions about how those symbols should be read. These assumptions are acquired from the cultures and societies that we live in, and thus each culture will read the same text somewhat differently. There are as many meanings as there are communities of readers. To some, this idea is rather depressing. If we can't get to the real meaning of the text, then what is even the point of reading? Isn't it just a waste of time? To this the postmodernist might simply respond that this is only the case if the point of reading is to get to some sort of objectively true meaning of the text. Rather, reading is about understanding the text within the context of our life and our culture, within the framework assumptions we bring to the text, and this is something we can do very well.

To summarize, there is no single objective meaning to a text, but rather all meanings of a text are specific to each community of readers, and is only true in context of the assumptions they use for reading. The upshot of this postmodern literary theory is that no meaning of a text can claim to be *the* meaning of the text, and therefore no claims can be made based on that meaning about the nature of the text.

The Assumptions Of Bible Critics

Turning to the larger topic of our series, I'm not sure source criticism has really integrated this critique when formulating its bolder claims. Stating that the meaning of a text is contradictory, such that the text needs to be divided into different source texts in order to be comprehensible, only makes sense within a certain framework of assumptions.[48] They can't make any larger claim than that. If a reader were to approach the text with a different framework of

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[47] On a personal note, I am partial to the view that the meaning of a text should be understood as "what the author intended when they wrote it," or perhaps "how the original audience would have understood it," but I am aware that these conceptions rest on what are essentially axiomatic assumptions.

[48] These assumptions are often questionable from more than just a religious perspective. See Robert Alter's argument in The Art of the Biblical Narrative, discussed in the second part of this series here.

assumptions,[49] they would be led to entirely different conclusions as to the meaning of the text, which would, of course, only be correct within the context of those assumptions.

As an example, a famous contradiction that Biblical critics have latched onto is how long a Jewish man can be enslaved for.[50] Shemot 20 and Devarim 15 indicate that a Jewish man is enslaved for 7 years only, but that if the slave desires to stay with his master, he is then enslaved for life, "לעולם." Vayikra 25, on the other hand, says that a Jewish man is released in the fiftieth year, and does not even mention the possibility that the slave might decide to stay with his master. The Biblical critics assume that when one encounters two passages that seem to say different things, this means that the two passages must originally be from different texts with different authors. Thus, according to this assumption, Vayikra 25 must be from a different text with a different author than Shemot 20 or Devarim 15.

However, the Midrash famously assumes that the Torah intends for its readers to resolve such contradictions. Various *midrashim* attest to a methodology that assumes the Torah text will appear to contradict itself, that there will be passages displaying at least two conflicting meanings, and that one passage is meant to be interpreted in light of the other.[51] In our example, one need look no farther than Rashi, and other rabbinic commentators,[52] on those passages, to see that Hazal interpreted the word "לעולם," here translated as "for life" instead of the more confusing but also more literal "for eternity," to mean "for fifty years." Thus, Vayikra 25 is not telling the reader when a Jewish slave is normally released. Rather, it is telling you when a Jewish slave is released if they decided to stay with their master after seven years, by way of clarifying what the confusing phrase "for eternity" means in a context where it likely could not mean more than seventy years or so. This set of assumptions not only leads to an entirely different conclusion which, according to these assumptions, is entirely correct, but also would view the source-critical approach as being entirely wrong.

What About The Torah?

What does this postmodern critique mean for the traditional study of Torah? It would certainly be dishonest to apply this postmodern critique to academic criticism, but pretend that it somehow does not apply to *talmud Torah*. While some may initially sense the same discomfort we discussed above, I think that this postmodern approach actually flows rather well with some of the ways that Hazal and the tradition have discussed studying Torah.

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[49] For example, the *midrashic* assumption that contradictions in meaning are meant to be resolved by appealing to a third part of the text that will decide between the first two, either siding with one of the original texts or by proposing a framework wherein the original texts do not contradict.

[50] For an extensive discussion from a source-critical perspective, see this essay by R. Dr. Zev Farber.

[51] Most commonly, the passage with the meaning that appears less often in the Torah is to be interpreted in line with the dominant meaning. See *Sifra Vayikra*:Introduction (Beraita of Rabbi Yishmael); *Mekhilta deRabbi Yishmael*, *Yitro*, *Masekhta DeBaHodesh* 9; *Sifrei Zuta* 7:89. Notably, not all of these sources necessarily understand this assumption in exactly the same way, but that is beyond the scope of this series.

[52] See, however, the comments of Rashbam.

Probably the best example of this is the famous idea of *PaRDeS*,[53] a Hebrew word meaning "orchard" that has served as an acronym for four different ways of reading the Torah: plainly (*Peshat*), allusively (*Remez*), homiletically (*Derash*), and mystically/symbolically (*Sod*). Each of these four approaches is a set (or perhaps, a set of sets) of assumptions with which a reader can approach the text of the Torah, and each set will yield vastly different conclusions as to the meaning of the text.

Similarly, most Orthodox Jews are familiar with Rabbi Yishmael's list of thirteen hermeneutical principles, each of which represents a specific assumption about how the Biblical text is supposed to be approached. Fewer people are familiar with Rabbi Akiva's hermeneutics of *ribui* and *miut*, and fewer still Rabbi Yosef the Galilean's list of thirty-two hermeneutical principles. Each of these represents a specific framework of assumptions about the way the Biblical text is meant to be read. In the cases of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael, these assumptions are about how to read the Torah for the purposes of *halakhic midrash*, while in the case of Rabbi Yosef the Galilean, the assumptions are about how to read the Torah for the purposes of *aggadic midrash*. Each of these frameworks has its own place within the realm of traditional torah study.

On another level, there are *midrashim* that seem to hang the meaning of the Torah directly on the interpretation of the community of readers.[54] Midrash Tehillim (*Mizmor* 12) depicts a fascinating picture of God giving Moshe the Torah. Each commandment that God transmitted to Moshe, the *midrash* says, was accompanied by an explication of 98 facets of the commandment. 49 of those facets indicated that the object of the commandment was forbidden; the other 49 indicated that it was permitted. Moshe was confounded. A law has to be able to dictate the status of an object. With this ambiguity, how could the community be expected to follow the law? To this God responded, quite strikingly, that the legal status of each object is up to the community of legal scholars; their vote tips the scales. If the majority of them think it is permitted, then it really is permitted, and vice versa. Similarly, *Bava Metsia* (59b) famously says that it is human interpretation, not Divine fact, that determines the correct interpretation of the Torah. Specifically, the majority of the community decides what is the correct interpretation of a given law.

Hazal & Our Readings

None of this is to say that Hazal were postmodernists. There is a huge difference between the approach of the postmodernists and that of Hazal. The postmodern approach makes its claim on all texts. No text has meaning unto itself; all meaning comes from the encounter of the reader with the text. Hazal, on the other hand, seem to have made their claim based on the unique nature of the Torah. The last few *midrashim* we looked at based themselves on the Biblical

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[53] While currently popular, the *PaRDeS* acronym has not been the only way of conceptualizing a four-fold approach to reading the Torah, nor has four been the only number used for categorizing biblical hermeneutics. For more on this, see Gershom Scholem's phenomenal essay "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," in *On The Kabbalah and its Symbolism*.

[54] I am indebted for the idea and sources in this paragraph to this shiur from Prof. Yoshi Farjon.

command to interpret according to the majority. Another *midrash* is based on the very nature of the Divine Word more generally. "The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: '[Behold my word is like fire, says the Lord,] like a hammer that splits a rock' (Jeremiah 23:29), just as a hammer creates many sparks, so too a single scriptural verse means many things." For Hazal, it is not that every text is meaningless, but rather that certain texts (the Torah and, presumably, the rest of Tanakh) have an incredible abundance of meanings. This is powerfully formulated in a *mishnah* from *Pirkei Avot*. "Ben Bag Bag would say: Delve and delve into it, for all is in it" (5:22). According to this *mishnah*, at least as it is commonly understood, the Torah doesn't just have multiple meanings, but all possible meanings. Which individual meaning a reader arrives at when reading such a text can only be a matter of the preexisting judgements that the reader brings to the text. No matter how we see other texts, Hazal are telling us that what we bring to the Torah determines what the text means.

Does this mean that any and all readings of the Torah are valid? I think it does not. First and foremost, within any set of axioms and assumptions, not all readings will be compelling. A valid reading must make sense within the context of its community of readers and their traditions. But more importantly, Hazal seem to have gone out of their way to designate certain ways of reading the Torah as invalid. They did this, not based on whether or not they present compelling interpretations of the text, but based on their religious and moral value.

Avot 3:11 indicates that a person who "reveals faces in Torah not in accordance with *halakhah*"[55] does not have a portion in the World to Come — the key phrase being taken throughout the tradition to refer to either learning arrogantly or specifically interpreting the Torah to say something against *halakhah*.[56] However you understand the phrase, the *midrash* is putting incredible responsibility on a person for how they approach learning Torah, and it is not alone in doing so. "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What does the verse mean, "And this is the Torah that Moses put (*sam*)"? If he is worthy, it will become for him a potion (*sam*) of life; if he is not worthy, it will become for him a potion (*sam*) of death" (TB Yoma 72b). This *midrash* indicates that how we read the Torah determines whether it is a force for life or death. What we bring to the Torah determines the very quality of the Torah itself. Even more bold is the interpretation one *midrash* gives to Yehezkal 20:25, a rather controversial verse. "It is according to Rav Mashreshaya, who said: Two scholars who live the same town and are unkind to one another in [studying] *halakhah* — about them the verse says, "Moreover, I gave them laws that are not good and rules by which they cannot live" (TB Megillah 32a). Where the Biblical text indicates that God gave the people "laws that are not good and rules by which they cannot live," the *midrash* indicates that this really means that the interpreters of the law have turned the Torah into bad laws, by turning the study and promulgation of Torah into an antisocial and unkind process. The meaning that is bad is not inherent in the Torah, but in those who have interpreted it.

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[55] This somewhat awkward literal translation has been chosen to convey the multiple understandings of the phrase.

[56] See the *Meiri*, the *Tosefot Yom Tov*, and other rabbinic commentators on *Avot* 3:11, and the sources cited therein.

These *midrashim* makes a clear moral statement about the importance of the assumptions from which we approach the Torah. The very nature of the Torah itself is in our hands. We are responsible for how we interpret the Torah, for the meaning we read it in. We bear a responsibility for choosing which axioms we bring with us.[57] How we read the Torah is not a question of objective standards of reading, such that we could be bound by the importance of objectivity. Each reading stands unto itself, and which ones we involve ourselves in is our choice.

[57] Following Gadamer's approach mentioned near the beginning of this piece, I'm not sure we have complete control over this, and thus cannot bear full responsibility for it. However, (A) I'm not sure Hazal would agree with Gadamer's approach, and (B) I think we still do have some control over it and we bear responsibility for that.

Archaeology, History, & Tanakh In The Palace Of The Torah

This series would be critically lacking if I did not deal with questions of archaeology, history, and Tanakh. However, this series, general and introductory as it is, does not provide enough time or space for me to address the large range of issues and contradictions that arise from this topic. Moreover, I have studied archaeology minimally, and only insofar as it relates to Tanakh, leaving me unqualified to write a thorough discussion of this issue. In light of all of this, what I would like to do here is present a general approach to contradictions between the historical pictures indicated by archaeological findings and the plain sense of the text of Tanakh. It is to this end that I would like to first turn to a letter written by R. Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook.

R. Kook was sent a letter asking about how one should deal with claims that certain texts from the beginning of *Sefer Bereshit* are not historical, claims that began to become popular in R. Kook's lifetime. His response contains more specific statements that may apply to our topic, but it also contains a general statement of far-ranging significance:

ובכלל זהו כלל גדול במלחמת הדעות, שכל דעה הבאה לסתור איזה דבר מן התורה, צריכים אנו בתחילה לא דוקא לסתור אותה, כי אם לבנות את ארמון התורה ממעל לה, ובזה הננו מתרוממים על ידה, ובעבור ההתרוממות הזאת הדעות מתגלות, ואחר כך כשאין אנו נלחצים משום דבר, הננו יכולים בלב מלא בטחון להלחם עליה גם כן.

> And part of this is the general principle in the play of ideas, that when any concept that contradicts something from the Torah, we, initially, should not necessarily reject it. Rather, we should build the palace of Torah above it. The contradictory ideas thereby improve us, and clarify the different opinions. Afterwards, when we are not pressured by anything, then we will be able to combat the idea with whole-hearted security.[58]

R. Kook is essentially laying out an approach for any topic where there is a contradiction between what seems to be an idea in Judaism and an idea that is destructive to Judaism. In such a case, R. Kook suggests, our first step should not be to fight the destructive idea. Instead, we should assume, for the sake of argument, that it is true. If it is true, what would that mean for Judaism? How could Judaism be improved by this idea? And only then, once we have made this "destructive" idea as non-threatening as possible, should we attack the idea.

This two-step approach is valuable more generally as we attempt to ascertain truth throughout our lives. If we are searching for truth, we are likely to miss things if we are already committed to certain ideas. R. Kook is suggesting that we can avoid this problem — not by giving up on our beliefs and commitments, but by temporarily ignoring them and imagining what would be the case if a seemingly contradicting idea were true. Moreover, R. Kook suggests, we can thereby discover the value this idea might have for Judaism, and aspects of it that we might be able to incorporate into our Judaism, even if we ultimately reject the "destructive" idea.

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[58] The translation is mine. Due to the often difficult and poetic nature of R. Kook's language, I have translated with an eye toward the experience of reading and the general meaning than toward exactitude in the meaning of each word.

If this all sounds horribly, mind-numbingly, abstract and confusing so far, then we're right on course. I will, hopefully, clarify the idea further by way of applying it to the issue of contradictions between archaeology and Tanakh.

We start with the plain sense of the text of Tanakh, on the one hand, and the general consensus regarding the historical picture indicated by archaeological findings[59] on the other. Without attacking this consensus, without even asking the question of whether individual archaeological findings really do indicate a historical picture that contradicts Tanakh, R. Kook's letter suggests that we should temporarily assume, for the sake of argument, that the findings are correct. If it were to be true that the correct understanding of history contradicts the simple text of Tanakh, what would that mean? How could that improve our understanding of Judaism? It might well indicate that Tanakh is not attempting to teach us history, that we are not meant to extrapolate a historical picture from the text the way we do from objects dug out of the ground. This idea — "Tanakh is not trying to teach us history" — allows us to "build the palace of Torah above" the threat posed by archaeological consensus, eliminating the contradiction between the two. Instead of having two contradictory accounts of history, we have a historical account on the one hand, and the text of the Tanakh on the other. Instead, Tanakh is concerned with moral and spiritual instruction. Tanakh is less about pure history and more about how we can be better people in our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves.

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[59] This clause ended up being somewhat complex. I didn't want to write it out at greater length in the text itself, but I will attempt to explain further here. The "destructive idea" that contradicts Judaism that we're discussing here has three parts: 1) The archaeological findings. This is the actual remnants from ancient societies that are dug out of the ground, the material objects themselves. 2) The historical picture indicated by these findings. This is the theoretical interpretation that archaeologists give in attempting to understand the findings and create a broader historical account. This is done by integrating different findings and by speculating and extrapolating further. We've moved here from the realm of concrete objects into the realm of subjective interpretation, where specific interpretations can be more or less compelling to different individuals. 3) The general consensus. This is the specific interpretations that are agreed upon by the majority or all of the individuals qualified to have an opinion about the correct interpretation of archaeological findings. It could obviously be debatable who exactly is qualified, but it should be relatively uncontroversial to say that it must be individuals with expertise in archaeology. While "expertise" is still a fairly amorphous and interpretable term, this is an unavoidable, but somewhat limited, difficulty. It's worth noting, as we will further on in the paper, that both 2 and 3 are very flexible and attackable categories. For the sake of this essay, however, I will assume that versions of 2 and 3 least charitable to the plain text of the Torah are true. If my argument still works, then it will be all the stronger for it.

But can we really incorporate this idea into Judaism? Can we really give up on the idea that Tanakh records an accurate account of history so easily? And can we accept this as anything other than forced apologetics?[60]

In terms of apologetics, it's worth examining whether "Tanakh is not trying to teach us history" is something a reader might get a sense of from the text of Tanakh itself. As a case study, let's look at the conquest of the cities of Devir and Ḥevron upon the entrance of *Bnei Yisrael* into the land. To avoid quoting at length, the reader is referred to chapters 10, 14, and 15 of *Sefer Yehoshua*, as well as chapter 1 of *Sefer Shoftim*. Reading these chapters closely, we see that these cities were each conquered multiple times, by multiple different people (specifically: Yehoshua, Calev, and Otniel ben Kenaz). The last depiction of the conquest, in *Sefer Shoftim*, actually indicates that it happened after the first conqueror, Yehoshua, had already died. Given that depiction, would a reader automatically assume that the text was depicting history? I don't think so. This is not to say that the depiction of the conquest of Devir and Ḥevron in Tanakh is necessarily a-historical. It is certainly possible to resolve these disparate texts into a unitary historical account, as commentators and exegetes have done for countless years. But the fact that such a historical account is not immediately obvious from the text may indeed give us reasons to think that Tanakh is not trying to teach us history.

We still need to explain how this idea can fit within Judaism. We also, however, need to tackle an additional problem. While there are parts of Tanakh that might suggest that Tanakh is not

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[60] For the sake of clarifying this often confusingly used term, I would like to take a moment to try and lay out two distinctions, between an "apologetic" and a "reason" and between a good apologetic and a bad apologetic. In the process of explaining these distinctions, I hope to explain and help alleviate some of the negativity surrounding the term "apologetic" and the inauthenticity often associated with it. "Apologetics" and "reasons" are both given when attempting to explain a concept or practice that is taken to be objectionable. The difference between them is whether the originator of the concept/practice would have given that explanation, or whether it is only something we would say today. A reason for an objectionable concept is an explanation for it that the originator would, or could, possibly have said. An apologetic is something the originator could not have possibly said. This is why apologetics tend to be taken negatively. However, if one assumes that an apologetic is not meant to explain the origin of a concept, but only to explain its usage in contemporary society or the like, then the apologetic becomes much more palatable. "Good" apologetics and "bad" apologetics are both ways of explaining the usage of an objectionable concept in contemporary society, or the like. A good apologetic gives an explanation that the person saying it would accept, even if the objectionable concept did not exist. A bad apologetic is an explanation that the person saying it would not accept if the objectionable concept did not exist; it is something they are only accepting in order to explain away the objectionable concept. By way of example, it is often asserted that women are obligated in fewer *mitsvot* because they are inherently holier, and thus less in need of *mitsvot*. It is worth considering, however, if the person saying that women are holier would say that if he was not confronted by women being obligated in fewer *mitsvot*. If the answer is yes, then it is a good apologetic, at least for such a person. If the answer is no, then it is a bad apologetic. Then the same question must be asked for this person's audience. That is all I can write on this topic at this juncture, but I hope this has helped clarify this confusing term somewhat, and that I can write a fuller essay on the topic at some point in the future.

interested in teaching us history, so much of Tanakh resembles a history book.[61] If teaching history is truly not Tanakh's intended function, why does its form so closely resemble that of a history book? I would like to tackle both of these questions by juxtaposing the opinions of Rambam and Rabbeinu Baḥye Ibn Paquda, the author of the *Ḥovot HaLevavot*. (It might be easier to just quote the famous *midrashic* and exegetical principle, "אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה," "the Torah is not fundamentally organized according to chronology," but I prefer to look at the more explicit discussion put forth by these two *Rishonim*[62]).

Rambam dedicates the second chapter of his monumental philosophical work, the *Moreh Nevukhim*, to answering a question about the story of Adam and Ḥava in the Garden of Eden. He opens his response not by laying out his approach to the topic, as he does later in the chapter, but by critiquing the very way the questioner reads the Torah:[63]

> You appear to have studied the matter superficially, and nevertheless you imagine that you can understand a book which has been the guide of past and present generations, when you for a moment withdraw from your lusts and appetites, and glance over its contents as if you were reading a historical work or some poetical composition.[64]

Rambam here specifically contrasts the Torah as "the guide of past and present generations," with a book of history, arguing that one should not study the former in the same way that one studies the latter, and that this lies at the root of his questioner's dilemma. For our purposes, it is simply important to note that this would seem to fit very well with everything we have said up to this point. It would seem that we can indeed incorporate the idea that Tanakh is not trying to teach us history into Judaism, as Rambam suggests that this idea has been there all along. However, Rambam does not solve the problem of the seemingly clear historical form of much of Tanakh. For an approach that deals with that problem as well, we must turn to Rabbeinu Baḥye Ibn Paquda's introduction to his famed ethical work *Ḥovot HaLevavot*:

> Likewise, the blessed Al-mighty gave His Torah of truth to His servants to test them. The thinking, intelligent man, when he reads it and understands it clearly, will divide it into three divisions. The first is the knowledge of fine spiritual themes, namely, the inner wisdom, such as the duties of the heart, the discipline of the soul and will obligate his soul on them always. Afterwards, he will select the second portion, namely, the practical duties of the limbs, doing each one in its proper time and place. Afterwards, he will make use of the third division, the historical portions of Scripture, to know the various types of men and

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[61] Specifically, Nevi'im Rishonim, not for nothing referred to often as "The Historical Prophets" or "The Deuteronomistic History." Texts from Nevi'im Aḥaronim, "The Literary Prophets," and Ketuvim tend to have a generally more obviously non-historical nature.

[62] While only stated explicitly in the *midrash* and commentators, this principle is obvious from the text of the Torah itself, in the tension between Bemidbar 1:1 and 9:1, as I have written about here.

[63] Both Rambam and Rabbeinu Baḥye deal with the Torah specifically rather than Tanakh more generally, but I see no reason why their arguments and conclusions cannot serve a broader purpose.

[64] Translation from sacred-texts.com.

their happenings in historical order, and the events of past ages and their hidden messages. He will use every part according to its proper occasion, place, and need.[65]

Rabbeinu Baḥye divides the Torah into three parts, in descending order of importance: 1) Cognitive duties, 2) Physical duties, and 3) History. Rabbeinu Baḥye is essentially pointing out that we need not read Tanakh as one cloth. Even just within the Torah itself, there are various types of texts, only some of which take on a historical form. Even further, and more importantly, the purpose of the third type of Biblical text is "to know the various types of men and their happenings in historical order, and the events of past ages *and their hidden messages*."[66] Tanakh is coming to convey history, but only as a tertiary purpose, and even then history is utilized for larger goals, and is subordinate to them.[67] Essentially, Tanakh often takes the form of historical accounts — accounts that may convey valuable and real historical information — in order to teach hidden messages buried within those accounts. It would not, however, be surprising if those accounts were changed somewhat in order to better convey a more important message. Rabbeinu Baḥye thus enables us to say that A) Tanakh is not (primarily)[68] interested in teaching us history and B) when it is, that history may be subordinate to larger messages.

All of this so far has just been step one of R. Kook's two-step process. We have created an approach to Tanakh that makes the supposed archaeological consensus non-threatening, and moreover we have found that approach within Tanakh and the Jewish tradition. The second step is to return, if we so wish, to the field of battle and attack the archaeological consensus. Archaeology is a complex and often subjective process.[69] Such a discussion requires looking at each individual finding and would go incredibly far beyond the scope of this series. But I hope I have managed to lay out an approach that will allow us to have that discussion honestly and openly. More importantly, I hope I have shown how, as R. Kook suggests, this contradictory idea can improve our Judaism, helping us focus on the important messages that Tanakh is actually trying to teach us.

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[65] Translation from dafyomi.co.il.

[66] Emphasis mine.

[67] Rabbeinu Baḥye does not explicitly say that the historical sections are subordinate to larger, non-historical, goals, but it seems to me to be the obvious continuation of his idea.

[68] This word being the key difference between Rabbeinu Baḥye and Rambam, as well as everything we had said before.

[69] See note 2 above.

Concluding Thoughts

In the words that lie ahead I would like to cast a bit of reflective light on the series, beginning with why I chose the name that I did, and then move on to my final topic, the reasons that Orthodox Jews should be grateful for Biblical Criticism.

I began this series in response to a critique of a lack of nuance in the acceptance of Biblical Criticism in part of the Orthodox community. More specifically, I was responding to the people who used this critique as a jumping-off point to be just as lacking in nuance in their bashing of this part of the Orthodox Community. My overall goal throughout this series has been to attempt to find a place in between these nuance-less extremes.

In the service of this goal, I undertook to create a basic introduction to some key issues in Biblical Criticism. My basic assumption in this was that extreme (read: lacking in nuance) responses to something usually flow from a lack of familiarity with that thing. More intimate knowledge of Biblical Criticism and its constituent parts made more accessible via a simple introduction might help to create a communal discourse that was more than the rapid trading of *ad-hominems*. This assumption led me to an obvious parallel to my project in the field of English literature, No Fear Shakespeare, a line of easily accessible guides to Shakespeare's plays. The name, beyond being a clever rhyme, alludes to the way that Shakespeare's looming presence in Western culture makes his writings much more intimidating than they really needs to be. Enabling readers to become more familiar with Shakespeare's writings helps them to see from the inside that there is nothing for them to fear. Biblical Criticism has a similarly looming presence — in Modern Orthodox culture at the very least — and I thought a parallel project in this area was in order.

The logical starting place for such a project was the Documentary Hypothesis. This idea, that the Torah originated as independent documents that were later redacted together, is what most people think of when they hear the term "Biblical Criticism," and is the alternative most people see to believing in the divinity of the Torah.[70] The first real essay of the series, and likely also the most polemical, was therefore dedicated to discussing how Biblical Criticism is a broad field that encompasses much more than just the Documentary Hypothesis, and how those different fields often critique one another. I argued that Literary Criticism, the careful application of literary study methodology to the Biblical text, provides reason to be ambivalent about, if not to reject outright, the Documentary Hypothesis.

As this was, I believe, the most polemic part of this series, I think it's worth dwelling for a moment on the nature of my polemic. Most religious polemics against trends in secular thought focus on the unacceptable nature of that thought from a religious perspective. This type of argument works better the more a person is firmly and solely rooted in their religion. The more a person is immersed in modernity and secular thought, however, the more these types of arguments feel like attempts to hide from the truth. This is why such polemics often include arguments for why a person should shun modernity with all their heart. Modern Orthodoxy,

[70] That this is incredibly reductive is exactly my point.

ever concerned about contiguity with the community as it extends to the right, is particularly susceptible to claims that it has lost a proper sense of balance between its Modernity and its Orthodoxy.

I quite consciously chose to take a different approach in my polemic. My argument was not that people need to be more Orthodox, even or perhaps particularly at the expense of being Modern. Instead, I argued that uncritical acceptance of the Documentary Hypothesis isn't being bad at being Orthodox, it's being bad at being Modern. Modern Orthodoxy means a lot of things to a lot of people, but to whatever degree it means involvement with secular thought, it should mean the best of that thought. That the Documentary Hypothesis is the most popular and well-known aspect of Biblical Criticism does not mean that we should simply accept it, particularly when much of secular thought has criticized, qualified, or moved past it. If we're going to be Modern, and I do believe we should, we should be the best kind of Modern we can be.

I presented a similar argument in the fifth installment of this series, where I argued that we need to incorporate postmodern theories about hermeneutics and reading rules into our understanding of how we read the Biblical text. I then claimed that Biblical Criticism, particularly the Documentary Hypothesis, does not always take this into account properly, and that there are plenty of sources within the Jewish tradition that resonate with these theories. I went a step further than this in the third installment, where I discussed Lower Criticism and textual emendations, arguing that Modern Orthodox Jews should accept the basic Lower Criticism concept that the Biblical text as we have it is not 100% what it always was, small changes having crept in here and there. I supported this approach with Rabbinic texts, but it was from a literary perspective that I rejected textual emendation, based on scholars who argue that we generally can't be certain enough to change our texts. I then used some of the same scholars to argue that religious and critical approaches to reading Tanakh are based on fundamentally different axioms about the nature of the text, an idea I will return to at the end of this piece. Finally, from an entirely internal perspective, I discussed the nature of archaeology, an approach to how it might improve our understanding of Judaism and the Torah based on Rav Kook, and some traditional sources for this improvement.

In hindsight, this series was certainly more polemic than I had originally intended it to be. It was both an introduction to some important issues, and arguments about how I think we, as Modern Orthodox Jews, should approach them. But I never claimed, nor would I, not to have a position regarding any of the issues I discussed. I can only hope that my personal view on things did not lead me to unknowingly skew my presentations of the various topics. Perhaps in the coming years I will look back on these essay and cringe at my biases. For now, however, I am satisfied that I have done my best to write with honesty and integrity. I pray that if I return to writing about Biblical Criticism it will be in order to cover one of its numerous aspects that I simply could not write about here, rather than in order to rectify mistakes in this series.

All of that being said, I want to conclude with what I think must be a critical part of any Modern Orthodox approach to Biblical Criticism: gratitude. From a historical perspective, the Modern Orthodox community owes a lot to the field of Biblical Criticism. Advances in our knowledge of ancient Israel and its neighbors in the light of archaeological discoveries has greatly improved our understanding of Tanakh, and is a direct import from Biblical Criticism.

Similarly, the literary methods of the "Literary-Theological" approach to Tanakh taught by certain teachers at Yeshiva University and the "Tanakh at Eye-Level" movement popular in Israel (תנ"ך בגובה העינים in Hebrew) owe much, if not all, of their methods to Literary Criticism of the Bible, and of course to secular Literary Criticism more generally. Even beyond literary methodologies, Dr. Yaakov Elman has argued that renewed interest in the Biblical text within Orthodoxy in the 19th century developed in direct response to the rise of Biblical Criticism. While the relationship there was, and has been, largely antagonistic, I still think it's worth appreciating the role Biblical Criticism played in the birth of contemporary Orthodox interest in Tanakh. Whether our engagement with it is, or has been, positive or negative, Biblical Criticism has contributed in significant ways to how we understand Tanakh today.

Finally, on a more existential level, I think it's important to appreciate what Biblical Criticism has given to us in terms of how we read Tanakh. As I mentioned above, and discussed more extensively in a few of the pieces in this series, there are serious differences between religious and critical ways of reading Tanakh. The integration and interplay of these methods can be quite fruitful from a variety of perspectives, but they can also be applied separately. The most intense application of a religious approach is probably found in Rabbinic homiletics, where texts from vastly different contexts within the Jewish tradition are brought into dialogue with each other, simply by virtue of being the traditional texts of the Jewish religion. Critical reading, on the other hand, tends to put a rather large emphasis on understanding texts within their proper context. The ability to see this difference — to see how there are two very different ways of reading the Biblical text (and the spectrum of hybrids in between) — gives the religious reader a degree of reflectivity and distance that enables us to better understand the religious approach. It also means that when we do read from a religious perspective, we do choose to do so; we consciously take up our religiosity and our tradition and experience the Biblical text through them.[71] It is my hope that this series has aided in creating this reflectivity, and therefore in introducing the reader not just to Biblical Criticism, but also to a more consciously religious relationship with Tanakh.

[71] I am thinking here of the idea of "second naïveté" laid down by Ernst Simon. See this excellent summary by Elie Holzer. The discussion of Ricoeur in the same paper is, of course, also relevant.