**“And Who Authored Them?”: The Traditional Jewish Position on the Composition of the Books in the Bible**

**Survey of the Scholarship**

I wish to present the scholar and the informed reader with a Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible. This will be a systematic and detailed summary of answers given in rabbinic literature, by medieval and early modern exegetes and linguists, sages and rabbinic scholars from the Enlightenment, as well as rabbinic and Ultra-orthodox literature today to the question of the composition of the Bible. This summary will include detailed discussions of the Sages’ sources and their interrelationships, the acceptance of new opinions, and the methodological problems that accompany any discourse on these types of literary-faith questions.

Introductions to the Bible constitute their own genre of research literature (סנדלר, 1963). They discuss the process by which the books came about, examining each book separately as well as the Bible in its entirety. These Introductions devote much attention to the history of biblical scholarship, and usually also include extensive bibliographies. This focus on the history of the scholarship demands the consideration of methodological questions and meta-study issues, and these Introductions have indeed significantly contributed to the formation of the principles that guide the field of biblical criticism.

The classical Introduction books, starting with Eichorn (1780-1787; and, for example, de Wette, 1817; Wellhausen, 1878 [whose book includes much material beyond that of a standard Introduction to Bible]; Driver, 1913; Eissfeldt, 1956; Childs, 1979) do not really take Jewish sources into account. At most, they mention the list of biblical authors found in BT *Bava Batra* (14b-15a) and note that Ibn Ezra identified verses that were added to the Torah after Moses’ death. This differs from the Introduction books written by Jewish scholars or by scholars interested in Judaism, which (also) examine opinions found in classical Jewish literature. The earliest of these is בן-זאב’s (1810) Introduction to the Bible, which was influenced by Eichorn’s Introduction (Breuer, 1996; introductory issues also appear in the Introduction to מנדלסון’s *Netivot Ha-Shalom*, which was also influenced by Eichorn [also see Breuer and Gafni, 2013]). This trend continued in Introduction to the Bible books (or books with introductory discussions) written during the past 150 years (see, in particular, רנ"ק, 1851 [section 11]; Löw, 1855; Fürst, 1867; Geiger, 1876; Wogue, 1881; Blau, 1894; Margolis, 1922; ברנפלד, 1923-1929; רובשוב וסולובייצ'יק, 1925; Zeitlin, 1932; סגל, 1946-1950; Arbez and McGuire, 1960; ויסמן et al., 1988-1990; רופא, 2007). These books do not presume to be complete or detailed Jewish-rabbinic introductions to the Bible.

Two studies that were published during the previous decade (בזק, 2013; and פרג'ון, 2015) aspire to summarize the traditional stance on the question of the Bible’s authorship. בזק classified dicta from the Sages’ literature and from medieval exegesis according to topical categories and discusses them to differing degrees of detail. His approach is educational and apologetic, and it seems that he primarily wishes to bring the traditional readership closer to the field of biblical criticism, without crossing any religious lines. פרג'ון’s study comprises a wide collection of dicta from rabbinic literature, from medieval exegesis to modern rabbinic literature, most without any discussion. פרג'ון classified the dicta he collected by topic, some of which relate to the composition of the biblical books. Several of the dicta brought by בזק and פרג'ון and irrelevant to the question of the books’ composition and reflect various conceptual failures.

Although we do not have a systematic Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible, the scholarship does not ignore answers given by classical Jewish literature on the question of the composition of the biblical books. We have dozens of studies, from the Enlightenment to today, that deal with these answers; they demonstrate intensive research which has recently grown and expanded. Most of the attention focused on a limited number of sources and dicta from the rabbinic literature, including the list of biblical authors found in *Bava Batra* and other traditions that discuss the relative stature of biblical books which were almost excluded (especially BT *Shabbat* 13b and *Hagigah* 13a). Of the medieval exegetes, Ibn Ezra’s comments regarding verses that were added after Moses’ death drew the most attention, as well as the commentary of Joseph Kara on 1Sam 9:9 where it seems that he doubts the traditional attribution of the book’s authorship to Samuel, three remarks attributed (I believe mistakenly, Viezel, 2015b) to Judah HeHasid (“Judah the Pious,” 1150 –1217) in which certain Torah verses were said to be written by Joshua or by members of the Great Assembly, and Abravanel’s Introduction to Joshua where he attributes the book to Samuel. For the sake of convenience, I will divide this complex study into four topical categories:

1. Studies devoted to the stature of the biblical books within Jewish tradition, including a survey of relevant dicta regarding their composition. Here I mention, particularly, the works of סימון (1982) and Berkovitz (2018) on Psalms, מאק (2004) and Kalman (2021) on Job, Wyrick (2004) on Proverbs, and Kalimi (2009) on Chronicles. We should also examine commentaries with a broad Introduction that includes a discussion of traditional views regarding composition. This is characteristic of commentaries in the *Miqra Meforash* series (ed. אברהם כהנא, 1904-1930), *Miqra le-Yisrael* (eds. משה גרינברג and שמואל אחיטוב, 1990 and on), and *Da’at Miqra* (ed. יהודה קיל, 1971-2003). However, important discussions regarding the traditional stance on the composition of the biblical books are also found in other commentaries (see, particularly, Pope, 1977, on Song of Songs; and Japhet, 1993 on Chronicles).

2. Discussions dedicated to the stance of a particular exegete on questions of the Bible’s composition, or comparative discussions between exegetes’ opinions on the topic. Some of these studies are repeatedly quoted, including (according to their publication date) the above-mentioned book by סימון (1982), which traces developments in the question of the authorship of Psalms, particularly during the Middle Ages; סרנה’s (1983) article that presents a collection of relevant dicta from medieval exegesis; הריס’s (2000) article, dedicated to the question of the Bible’s composition in northern French exegesis (as well as Harris, 2006, 2009, 2012); Steiner’s (2003) article that lists the traditions regarding the literary activities of Ezra and the members of the Great Assembly (also Steiner, 1996); and the works of תא-שמע (2004, pp. 273-313; 2006, 241-258) that deal with this question within Ashkenazic and Byzantine exegesis. For other important studies see ברין on Judah HeHasid, Joseph Kara, Ibn Ezra, and Italian and Byzantine exegetes (2003, 2007, 2008); יפת on Rashbam’s commentary on Job and the Megillot; anonymous commentaries on the Song of Songs and Ezra (1985, 2000, 2000a, 2009, Japhet, 2011, 2012); סימון on Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Torah and on Isaiah (2013, pp. 224-248, 407-464); צייטקין on Radak’s commentary on Psalms; and Provençal exegesis on Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes (2006, 2011). Also see Katz (1997), Elman (1997), פרץ (2000), טויטו (2003, pp. 112-121 [a previous version appeared in 1979]), Shapiro (2004, chs. 7-8 [a previous version appeared in 1993]), מונדשיין (2005), פנקובר (2006), אלבוים (2007), שורץ (2011), יעקבס (2013, 2017), Lockshin (2015), van Ruiten (2014), Cohen (2020), and others. The mystical and Kabbalistic literature also shows a certain measure of scholarly interest in the question of the composition of the biblical books (or rather, of the Torah). Others who dealt with this topic include שלום (197, pp. 36-85); אידל (1981, 1995, 2012; Idel, 1988);דן (1988, esp. ch. 5); and פדיה (2003). Karaite studies also deal with the question of composition, especially the commentary of יפת בן עלי. Some of these studies also focus, either incidentally or in more detail, on the close connections and mutual influence between Karaite exegesis and the rabbinic tradition. Among these is Marwick’s (1943) study on the order of the biblical books according to יפת, סימון’s (1982) book regarding יפת’s approach to the composition of Psalms and other biblical books, and בן-שמאי’s (1983) critique of סימון’s book. The past few years also saw the publication of פוליאק’s studies (especially פוליאק, 2014, Polliack 2003, 2005, 2008) and פוליאק ושלוסברג (2009), Wechsler (2008, 2010), בן-שמאי (2010), Goldstein (2011, pp. 119-138), Zawanoswka (2012, 2014), and Cohen (2020).

3. Studies devoted to the literary activities of certain characters – Moses (Wollenberg, 2019), David (שנאן, 1995; Mroczek, 2008, 2016); Solomon (ששון, 2013; Vayntrub, 2018); Jeremiah (Kalman, 2009, 2019); and Ezra and members of the Great Assembly (Steiner, 2003).

4. Studies dedicated to questions related to the composition of the biblical books, especially: The heavenly source of the Torah and questions stemming from this (השל’s monumental study, 1965); issues related to the Torah scroll (כשר’s halakhic-encyclopedic book, 1960; also קורמן, 2003; קופרמן, 2008); the question of divine revelation and the personal factor in prophecy (Jacobs, 1973, 2004; גרינברג, 1992; Sommer, 2015); the relationship between the written Torah and the oral Torah, and subsequent conclusions regarding the latter’s composition (אורבך, 1969, ch. 12; הריס, 1995; רוזנברג, 1997; סילמן, 1999); the canonization of the Bible according to the Sages (Leiman, 1976; הרן, 1996; and, among others, Barton, 1996; Dempster, 2008); the formation of the Masoretic Text and its transmission according to the Rabbinic and medieval sages (Aptowitzer, 1906; כהן, 1979; רוזנטל, 1983; Steiner, 2003; יפת, 2008b, pp. 189-206; סימון, 2013 [1968]); points of confluence between the principles of Jewish faith and biblical criticism scholarship, including a precise distinction between the two (Jacobs, 1964, ch. 9; key chapters in סימון, 1979; הרן, 2009 [1986]; Levenson, 1993; ברנדס et al., 2015; Berman, 2020); and, to some extent, also apologetic rabbinic works that present a historical description of Jewish scholarship on the Bible while ignoring the Christian biblical scholarship or overtly negating its worth (for example רייפמן, 1866; כהנא, 1882; and for other key topics see שלי, 1942; Breuer and Gafni, 2013).

The above survey shows an intensive interest in the question of the composition of the biblical books within the rabbinic tradition over the ages. However, it also shows the lack of an authoritative, detailed study that includes all the relevant dicta, one which discusses, in detail, the methodological difficulties this issue raises, and offers the reader a complete and updated picture of this basic issue in the history of biblical research.

For over a decade, I have been dedicating a significant part of my scholarly work to the discussion of this question within traditional Jewish sources from the end of the Second Temple period until current rabbinic and Ultra-orthodox literature (וייזל, 2007, 2008, 2010a [pp. 219-270], 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b; Viezel, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2017a, 2017b). I put special effort toward a comprehensive examination of all the scholarship on the topic and a description of its apparent achievements, but also of its methodological and conceptual difficulties (ויזל, 2016a; Viezel, 2019). These methodological studies clarified, for me, the importance of a detailed and systematic Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible that would form a reference point for any future study dedicated to this central issue.

I have taken significant strides toward the completion of such an Introduction within the framework of a scholarship given by Israel’s Science Foundation (2017-2021, no. 1055/17). During these years I examined key issues in the question of the composition of the biblical books, and in the development and transformation of perceptions and attitudes from the end of the Second Temple era until today, and I have delved into the methodological and conceptual questions necessary for composing a comprehensive Introduction. I also examined the traditional approach to the tripartite division of the Bible into Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and to the deep connection between this division and the question of the authors’ divine inspiration (ויזל, 2021a, 2023). I studied the various opinions regarding the time of the Torah’s composition (Viezel, 2023a), discussions on the authorship of the final eight verses of the Torah (2022), discussion on the authorship of the Balaam pericope and its citation within the list of biblical authors in *Bava Batra* (2020), and the question of the authorship of Job, with its attribution to Moses (Viezel, 2022). I also dedicated a paper that proposes conceptual distinctions between biblical criticism and rabbinic stances, noting Ibn Ezra’s special place within the critical scholarship (Viezel, 2022b). Such methodological and conceptual inquiries also accompany my latest book, which includes a discussion of the attribution of the Torah’s authorship to God, and the development of this perception, its principles, and its formative influence over the ages (ויזל, 2021b). I dedicated two studies to the history of the list of authors in *Bava Batra*, its sources, and its time and place (Viezel, 2023b; 2023c), which I consider particularly important. It seems that the accepted opinion in the scholarship that considers this list a *baraitha* is incorrect, as it was compiled after the Amoritic period. This new chronological understanding enables a better understanding of the considerations of the list’s compilers and solves certain difficulties and details included in the list, that were partially, and on occasion even erroneously, explained over the years.

All my studies mentioned above, as well as materials I have gathered but not yet published, place me in an advanced position toward the completion of a Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible. The support of Israel’s Science Foundation will enable the successful completion of this wide-ranging project.

**The Proposed Research: Its Sources, Methods, and Tentative Chapters**

The corpus: All the rabbinic literature throughout the ages. Rabbinic literature, including Talmudic and midrashic sources, and Aramean translations (the Targums); rabbinic literature from the Middle Ages and early Modern era, especially biblical commentaries, linguists, halakhic works, and commentaries on the Talmud and on prayers; rabbinic literature from the Modern age until today – commentaries, monographs, and studies. I will also devote attention to works that are not part of the classical rabbinic mainstream, as these occasionally influenced rabbinic responsa on the topic of the Bible’s composition, or contributed to the acceptance of the various opinions. For example, central dicta in the rabbinic literature regarding the books’ composition are in dialogue with various sources from the end of the Second Temple period (I have recently treated this topic: Viezel, 2023b; 2023c). So, too, any analysis of medieval exegesis from Islamic countries needs to take the term ‘*modwin*,’ and its appearances in the Karaite literature, into account (especially Polliack, 2005; בן-שמאי, 2010; for my stand on this matter see ויזל, 2016a). So, too, it would be difficult to understand the special place held by rabbinic literature in the Modern age without considering Ibn Ezra’s position in early Modern Christian scholarship (Viezel, 2022b; and, among others, Malcolm, 2002; Gómez Aranda, 2016).

Methodological Introduction: The study will be preceded by a comprehensive introduction where I will discuss, in detail, the chosen corpus and the research and analysis methods, as well as a number of fundamental questions. I will devote special attention to, among others, the following basic points:

1. A distinction between the rabbinic-religious treatment of the question of the Bible’s composition and the critical scholarship on this question;
2. A discussion of the way in which biblical scholars perceive literary activity and the distinct way in which this activity was perceived by the Sages until the invention of the printing press, occasionally even up to the Modern era. Here, too, I will delve into the highly significant changes that took place over time in the concept of ‘author’ (for example, Foucault, 1998 [1969]; Najman, 2003; Mroczek, 2008, 2016; van der Toorn, 2009; Vayntrub, 2018; ויזל, 2021b).
3. Following the previous two points: A discussion of the Jewish Sages’ awareness of the question of composition, and the importance of this awareness in the analysis of their dicta. Here I clarify that, occasionally, a dictum that did not originally refer to the question of composition was perceived by following generations of sages as central to the investigation of this issue (an example of this is Abaye’s contention that Moses himself composed the curses in the book of Deuteronomy).
4. There is a fundamental difficulty in presenting the Sages’ coherent stance, when their occasional remarks regarding the books’ composition do not form a comprehensive and systematic picture. There are diverse opinions on this topic, some of which contradict each other. This fundamental difficulty is recognized in a study dedicated to the Sages’ beliefs and opinions (see a summary in גרינולד, 1984; זוסמן, 1993, pp. 77-87), though it is also quite apparent in the works of Sages throughout the ages.

The chapters: My studies, to date, have led me to the conclusion that it is best to present the findings in three chapters, according to three central periods: The Sages’ literature, the early medieval and early Modern period, and the Modern period. The sections of these chapters will be constructed based on the order of books, and the length of each section will be determined in accordance with the number of relevant dicta and their complexity. The Introduction will close with a fourth chapter dealing with the development of the entire biblical corpus, tracing traditions regarding its canonization and tripartite division (Torah, Prophets, and Writings).

I will base my writing of the chapters and sections on a close examination of the primary sources, as accepted in historical philological research. I will give special attention to the language of the dicta’s authors, their methods, and both explicit and implicit content inherent in their words. The Sages used sources that predated them as well as contemporary sources, sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly, without referencing them, and I will endeavor to uncover, to the extent possible, the Sages’ sources and rabbis, and the transition of beliefs and opinions between the various Jewish communities. The various dicta cannot be detached from the time and place of the Sages who uttered them, and it is only natural that their life circumstances, including the various controversies (with Christians, Muslims, Karaites, and Bible critics), left their mark on the Sages’ perspective. Therefore, I will take into account the estimated time in which the Sages lived, as well as their location, when analyzing their words.

Project Timeline

This project will take four years to complete, time that will be dedicated to locating, classifying, and analyzing the materials, and writing the chapters and sections of the Introduction.

**Locating the primary sources**: The years I have dedicated toward the completion of a Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible have taught me that the corpus of relevant dicta is enormous, numbering thousands (!) of dicta, many of which (especially from the Modern era) have never been cited in the scholarship. I use the following databases for locating the sources: the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, Mikra’ot Gedolot HaKeter, AlHatorah.org, *Otzar ha-Hokhmah*, HebrewBooks.org, Historical Jewish Press (the NLI), as well as various catalogs, both electronic and in print. The experience I gained over the last few years has taught me that these databases and catalogs are not enough. I found important materials, especially from today’s rabbinic and ultra-Orthodox literature, only by a careful reading of relevant books. My desire to expose all the materials is not based only on a tendency toward perfectionism; as I realized on more than one occasion, it is sometimes the overlooked, forgotten dictum that proves to be the foundational stone in the development of the various opinions.

Contribution to the Scholarship

The answers given to the question of the Bible’s composition, within the classical rabbinic literature, form a basic and fascinating chapter in the history of biblical scholarship. These answers shaped the way in which rabbinic circles until today, as well as wider circles beyond the critical world, perceive the Bible. This fundamental chapter, though well-studied, has yet to be illuminated in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Furthermore, many of the studies devoted to it suffer from methodological and conceptual failures, and their conclusions demand renewed examination. As such, my research goals are twofold: I wish to present the scholar and the informed reader with a systematic and detailed summary of all the answers to the question of the Bible’s composition, as given by the Jewish tradition over the ages, with a constant aspiration of setting clear methodological premises and consolidating firm research principles that will serve as a starting point for future studies in the field.

Alongside the contribution of presenting the traditional stances on the question of the biblical books’ composition, analyzing the many dozens of dicta will necessarily also lead to many localized discoveries. Among these is a reconsideration of dicta that were sidelined and the illumination of dicta that never received proper treatment, determining the influence of one sage on another, exposing the Sages’ sources and rabbis, and a reasonable description of the development and transformations of the various opinions.

My ambition is to compose a Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible that will stand alongside the critical introductory books which are well-known in academic libraries worldwide. An introductory book that will be a necessary point of reference for all those involved in the history of biblical scholarship, and in the location and contribution of Jewish sages to the development of this history; as well as an important milestone for those interested in the general intellectual history of rabbinic Judaism.

**Who Composed the Torah?: Concreteness, Polemic, and Fantasy**

A text is the product of a distinct human-literary act that takes place within a specific place and time. Theoretically, one can trace the author or authors of any text, point to their time and place, and precisely describe their literary activity.

The Torah, too, is a text; and, like any other text, it is the product of a human-literary act. However, in contrast to other texts, the Torah reflects a particularly lengthy process of formation. This includes pulses in which sources and materials from different periods were collected, merging shorter and longer sections alongside one another or weaving them together into one tapestry, and repeated editing. This literary complexity does not enable – and will probably never enable – a simple and convincing resolution to the questions of when, how, and who wrote the Torah. An indirect expression of this pessimistic claim is the fact that it is difficult to find two critical Bible scholars today who would describe the process of the Torah’s formation in the exact same way. Even so, it seems that scholars agree upon several key points. First and foremost, they agree that there was *no* one person – for example, Moses or Ezra – who wrote the Torah. It was *not* even a group of authors – for example, Temple priests or members of the Great Assembly – who gathered at a certain time and place and put the entire Torah down on parchment, from the beginning to the end.

Members of the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – find it difficult to imagine an authoritative and holy text that is not attributed to God, to a prophet, or to some unique person with lofty traits. There seems to be a necessary connection between the two, where the sublime attributes and holiness of the text are directly derived from the sublime attributes and holiness of the author. However, this is not necessarily so. In Hinduism, for example, the Vedas are perceived to be authorless, yet this does not tarnish their authoritative stature. The scholarly consensus that the Torah does not have any one author and cannot be pinned down to any particular time or place does not, therefore, contradict any necessary religious logic. Furthermore, this scholarly consensus is also not new. I say this as the Torah itself does not contain any hint of attribution, in its entirety, to either God or any other character, as opposed to some of the other biblical books which open with a verse identifying their author, be it a prophet, or David, or Solomon. In other words, during all the stages of the Torah’s formation, and even afterward – when it was perceived as an authoritative text worthy of copying and preserving – those who learned, read, and copied it did not have any need to explicitly identify its author.

This state of affairs changed over time. From the second century BCE onwards, quite a few works started to attribute the Torah to God, regardless of how we define the term ‘attribute’ in this context. As far as we can reconstruct, during this period the Torah was the focus of controversies and polemics with pagans who doubted its holiness. This period also featured sectorial differences within Judaism, and additional texts, besides the Torah, gained authoritative status. Attributing the Torah to God seems like a byproduct of these polemics and controversies. Its goal was to confirm the Torah’s status as the loftiest and holiest book, while distinguishing it from other texts.

During this period, alongside the attribution of the Torah to God, it was also attributed to Moses. There are even two works from the second and first centuries BCE that indirectly reflect the opinion that Moses wrote the Torah by divine dictation, or that God spoke from Moses’ mouth. Attributing the Torah to Moses, the greatest of prophets, was probably also related to a desire to raise the Torah to the highest level and distinguish it from the other texts that had gained authoritative status. However, it is possible that the attribution to Moses was also established in light of a literary-semantic development that had no direct connection to the polemic itself. The basic sense of the Hebrew word ‘Torah’ is ‘an instruction,’ or a collection of directives and laws. In the book of Deuteronomy, which is comprised primarily of Moses’ speeches, the word ‘Torah’ is quite common, indicating the laws that Moses received from God. Constructs such as ‘*Torat Mosheh*’ (the ‘Torah of Moses’) and ‘*Sefer Torat Mosheh*’ (the ‘book of the Torah of Moses’) that appear in other biblical books similarly, for the most part, refer to certain Deuteronomic laws. However, over time, the word ‘Torah’ started to be used to indicate all the laws that were given to Moses by God, even those not in Deuteronomy. From here, the word ‘Torah’ soon began to refer to the entire Torah, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Accordingly, the constructs ‘*Torat Mosheh*’ or ‘*Sefer Torat Mosheh*’ were perceived as referring to the Torah in its entirety, and its attribution to Moses gained permanence.

The fact that the Torah is long and furcated, and includes stories that predate Moses, did not trouble those who perceived Moses as its author. In fact, this matches the classical tendency of attributing enormous corpora to a single author: Homer wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey, Lycurgus or Solon composed laws and institutions, Vyasa composed the Mahabharata, and Valmiki composed the Ramayana. Similarly, in the Jewish and (later on) the Christian world, David composed the entire collection of Psalms, and Solomon the wisdom literature.

During the following centuries, attributing the Torah to God and Moses became a clear and unquestionable religious consensus. The Sages seem to have assumed that the Torah was formed in two stages: an earlier stage, in which the Torah was in heaven, and a later stage, when it was given to Moses. Most of the dicta that relate to this formation process are markedly schematic, positing that the Torah was in heaven and then given to Moses, and lacking any concrete details. Other dicta feature fantastic midrashic descriptions. In a few, the Torah, in heaven, is described as a book that God holds in His hand or as an angel who sings hymns of glory. A few dicta place the Torah in heaven two thousand years before Creation, or a thousand generations before it was given to Moses, where it served God as a blueprint for creating the world. There are also dicta according to which God finished writing the Torah during Creation, or right before giving it to Moses. For the most part, Moses is said to have received the Torah at Sinai, despite the fact that the Torah itself records Moses as receiving only the Tables of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments, at Sinai.

Of the dozens and hundreds of these dicta, there is only one that can lead to a concrete picture regarding the writing of the Torah: “And Joshua wrote these things in *Sefer Torat Elohim* [the book of God’s Torah]” (Josh 24:26). From this verse we can ostensibly learn that Joshua wrote something in the Torah. Some propose that this refers to the eight verses at the end of the Torah, the ones that describe Moses’ death. As opposed to this, others say that Moses wrote the entire Torah by divine dictation, including the final verses describing his death. Other than this exceptional dictum, there is no hint of any interest in the concrete questions regarding the composition of the Torah and its writing. God’s role in the composition of the Torah remains unclear, as well as Moses’ contribution and the question of how it passed into Moses’ hands. There is not even any reference to the theological and philosophical questions that arise from the assumption that the Torah was in heaven before Creation and given to Moses, in its entirety, many years before the events described within.

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead determined that “Generality is the salt of religion,” and that the “General lofty ideals rarely fulfill their exact lexical expression.” Indeed, religions are known for their abhorrence of concretization and theological precision; they tend to prefer general descriptions or, instead, fantastic ones. We can perhaps say that the tendency to avoid precise details results from a sense that there is no need to deal with the obvious. However, it is perhaps also an expression of unconscious self-censoring. A detailed and concrete approach to the principles of faith promotes the chance, albeit theoretical, of considering factors that may undermine the ideals and raise heretical insights. For our purposes, a concrete description of the process by which the Torah was composed, or the division of labor between God and Moses when writing it, may lead to several complex theological quandaries as well as substantial difficulties. The preference of dealing with the question of composition only schematically, or alternatively in a midrashic or fantastic manner, therefore coheres with Whitehead’s statement.

As noted above, attributing the Torah to God and Moses, during the Classical period, is a product of both inter-faith and intra-faith tensions. These tensions disappeared over the first few millennia CE. The pagan, anti-Jewish polemic petered out, and the focus of the controversy with Christianity became the correct exegesis of the Torah, and not its holiness per se. Accordingly, we may add another important distinction to Whitehead’s rule, which will be supported below: The tendency to avoid precise and concrete descriptions of principles of faith, and to prefer generalizations or midrashic and fantastic representations, is characteristic of times during which these principles of faith are not contested. The opposite is true as well – when these principles are the focus of controversy, believers will feel the need to define them more precisely.

Indeed, the rise of Islam once again placed the Torah at the center of controversy. The Qur’an itself already hints that the Torah is a fake, and Muslim thinkers developed and refined this claim over the following centuries. This Muslim anti-Jewish polemic forced the Jewish Sages to propose various precisions regarding the writing of the Torah, ones which determined its divine source and Mosaic writing. Between the tenth century and the end of the twelfth century, a variety of responsa discuss the authorship of the final eight verses of the Torah, the ones that describe Moses’ death, debating whether they were written by Moses or by Joshua. Some Sages discussed the possibility that other verses in the Torah were appended after Moses’ death. Others tried to pin down the exact time during which the Torah was written, and there were even initial attempts at discerning the division of labor between God and Moses. These include the suggestion that God passed on non-verbal content to Moses, while the latter translated God’s divine content into the words that appear in the Torah as we have it. Each of these attempts expresses complete and definite faith in the attribution of the Torah to God and to Moses, but concurrently also opens the discussion to considerable theological questions that touch upon the essence of faith in the divine Torah.

During the second half of the twelfth century, in his commentary on the Mishnah, Maimonides set out the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith. According to him, the eighth principle states that the Torah is divine, with Moses writing it in its entirety, word for word, while God dictated. Maimonides also emphasized that anyone who claims otherwise is blaspheming God and deserves death by the divine hand. Scholars agree that Maimonides formulated these words under the direct influence of the controversies with the Muslims. In fact, he probably did not think that Moses wrote by divine dictation, but rather supposed a far more complex division of labor between the divine content and Moses’ words. However, his principle was perceived as fundamental and accepted truth. Maimonides’ enormous influence led Sages from his time on to assume that Moses did indeed write the Torah, word for word, as God said. Many of these Sages posited that the writing took place at Sinai. However, others presented a more complex picture, according to which Moses wrote the Torah in stages, under divine inspiration, throughout the period of the wanderings in the Wilderness.

The notion that Moses wrote the entire Torah, per divine dictation, and according to the eighth principle as formulated by Maimonides, is very characteristic also of Sages from the late medieval and early Modern eras. However, in this case, this concrete image is intertwined with midrashic and fantastic descriptions from the first few centuries CE. This period also saw a development of interesting mystical and Kabbalistic descriptions that create an analogy between God and the Torah – ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, is called Torah,’ and ‘The Torah in its entirety comprises the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He.’ This lengthy period also witnessed a significant decline in attitudes toward Jews and the Jewish faith. Even so, we have no record of any anti-Jewish polemic focused on the question of the Torah’s holiness. It seems that the upsurge of the fantastical and mystical approach, at the expense of the concrete approach, coheres with the rule proposed above, wherein a direct relationship exists between the precise definition of religious principles and polemics surrounding these principles. This rule is also attested to over the following centuries.

During the Modern era, up until today, most rabbinic scholars continue to accept the premise that Moses wrote the entire Torah by God’s dictation. However, during the past 150 years, the controversy with Bible criticism that undermines the Torah’s divinity led rabbinic scholars to present a more complex picture of composition. Some of these rabbinic scholars even accepted the premise that the Torah includes verses that post-date Moses’ time, just as suggested at the onset of the Middle Ages before Maimonides’ eighth principle gained authority. However, some rabbinic scholars went even further, suggesting that the Torah was composed by a prophet or prophets who drew from Moses’ works or discerned between the words of Moses and those of an anonymous redactor. These scholars are known for their concrete presentation of the process of composition, distancing themselves from the midrashic and fantastic approach.

The above historical survey yields a complex picture. The basic tendency of religions is, according to Whitehead, to avoid the concretization of religious principles and theological precisions and to prefer general or fantastic descriptions. However, it seems that this maxim is true so long as the principles of faith are not the focus of controversy and polemic. Therefore, when the Sages found themselves in the midst of a struggle that focused on the question of the Torah’s holiness – a struggle against pagans and other Jewish sects during the Classical era, against Muslims during the Middle Ages, and against Bible scholars in the Modern era – they were drawn toward concrete and precise descriptions, and the fantastic and schematic way of thinking declined. The opposite is true as well: When the Torah was not the focus of controversy, the Sages avoided concrete and precise descriptions, and sufficed with schematic assertions or developed and refined the fantastical descriptions.

This repeated motion, between the concrete and the fantastical, between the precise and the schematic, has a paradoxical foundation. As noted above, concreteness and precision may invite theological questions and significant difficulties, as opposed to schematic or fantastical descriptions. If so, perhaps it would have been easier for Jewish Sages throughout history had they faced doubts regarding the Torah’s holiness by presenting a general description or by developing the fantastical one. It would have been simpler had they allowed the Torah to remain in limbo between Heaven and Earth, without pinning it down to an author’s name or precisely describing the literary process by which it finally reached Israelite hands.

I intend to offer the scholar and informed reader a Jewish-rabbinic Introduction to the Bible, meaning, a systematic and detailed summary of rabbinic Jewish traditional dicta from throughout the ages regarding the composition of the biblical books. I came to realize the need for such an introductory book after writing several articles on the subject. Happily, the Israel Science Foundation agreed to fund this project, as research no. 1055/17. Thanks to their support I find myself today in an advanced position, where continued support will enable the completion of this Introduction over the next few years.

The years I worked on research project no. 1055/17 were dedicated to the following three complementary fields:

1. Gathering sources: The Jewish tradition bases its stance on the question of composition on the combined corpus of all the relevant sources and dicta, spoken and written over two thousand years, throughout the various Jewish communities worldwide. This comprises thousands (!) of sources and dicta, some of which never reached scholarly attention. The sources I have collected, classified, and analyzed thus far show that only an uncompromising exposure of all the relevant materials will enable the formation of a precise picture of the development of these opinions, as well as the ability to correctly place the Sages within the history of the treatment of this issue.
2. Lectures: Frontal presentations of the findings to colleagues and scholars, in scientific conventions and lectures in faculties of Bible and Religion both in Israel and abroad.
3. Promotions: Presentation of the findings on leading research platforms prior to publication.

I find the lectures and pre-publication promotions to be very important. They allow me to receive feedback from colleagues and experts, helping me hone my research methodology.

The list of published studies (or forthcoming ones) carried out by research project no. 1055/17 are divided into three groups:

1. Studies that form the basis of the chapters, sections, and subsections that will comprise the Introduction book, as follows…
2. A book
3. Two monograph studies that stem from classifying and analyzing the sources and dicta. These studies can be viewed as byproducts of the research project.

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Note: The *Hebrew Union College Annual* journal ceased publication for a few years. When it renewed its activities there came to be a permanent gap between the year written on each volume and the year of its publication. This paper appears in the volume of 2017, but it was written and published in 2019.

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Several side issues pose difficulties for the completion of a “Jewish-Rabbinic Introduction to the Bible.” On the one hand, these issues should be properly addressed; but on the other hand, dealing with them extensively will deflect the book from its course and will harm its sequential flow. A central one of these issues is the attribution of the Torah (as well as the other biblical books) to God and the effect of this divine attribution on those who studied the Torah throughout the generations. In my book, I discussed these issues at length, and it will therefore serve as a necessary companion to the future Introduction book.

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The work will take place over four years, during which I will collect the primary sources, determine their correct versions, analyze and classify them, and write the chapters. The corpus of materials is enormous and can only be located with the help of precise searches and a lot of reading. Two advanced students will serve as research assistants, and will help me collect, analyze, and classify the sources, working under my close supervision.

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I intend to use the help of two advanced (doctoral or post-doctoral) students for the four years of research. Their work will focus primarily on the collection of the thousands of relevant sources and dicta, which will then be added to the enormous corpus of dicta I have already collected thus far. Each source and dictum will be carefully analyzed and will serve as the basis for the Introduction’s chapters. These sources and dicta will be located and compiled systematically, drawing on electronic databases, catalogs, and a careful and thorough reading of essays and books. My research experience has taught me that locating the materials necessitates frequent visits to various libraries, primarily the National Library in Jerusalem. For this, I will need to provide the research assistants with laptops, and in addition, also professional literature and basic office services (printing, scanning, and the like). As in previous years, I intend to accompany my writing with a steady publication of preliminary articles, and with presentations of the findings in scientific conventions and solicited lectures both in Israel and abroad. The feedback I receive from these publications and lectures will allow me to improve my methodology and arrive at more accurate conclusions.