“And Who Wrote Them [the Biblical Books]?”:

Traditional Rabbinic Views on the Formation of the Bible

ABSTRACT

The history of opinions regarding the formation of the biblical books, from the onset of biblical writing until the canonization of the entire Bible, has been frequently discussed, and its main points are well known. Dozens of “Introduction to the Bible” books include such a history, as well as academic studies, reviews, detailed encyclopedia entries, and lately, also various internet articles.

While the scholarship on this topic is broad, one important chapter in this history has been underrepresented. The Jewish-Rabbinic stance on the question of the Bible’s formation, as expressed in its literature, has not yet been subjected to a comprehensive and authoritative examination. The scholarship on this topic is not negligible; many studies illuminate various aspects of this issue, based on key dicta in the Rabbinic literature, medieval exegesis, and essays from the Enlightenment period. However, to date, there has been no attempt to collect all the relevant dicta (hundreds of them!), examine them closely, determine their source and impact over the ages, and present a methodological picture of the traditional Jewish position on this central and important issue.

In my study, I wish to complete this fascinating chapter of biblical research and compose a “Jewish-Rabbinic Introduction to the Bible.” I intend to present the traditional Jewish stance on the question of the Bible’s formation, as found in the literature, according to historical periods: the Second Temple period, the writings of the Sages, the Middle Ages, the early Modern period, and the Modern period, following the order of the biblical books. The final chapter will deal with the various traditional stances regarding canonization and the division into three sections (Torah, Prophets, and Writings). The writing of each chapter will be based on the critical examination of the primary sources, including investigation of the influence these sources had on each other, and the ways in which the various opinions were received.

The “Jewish-Rabbinic Introduction to the Bible” will hopefully take its place alongside the other well-known critical introductions to the Bible found in academic libraries worldwide. It will make it possible for scholars and readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the history of Bible study that includes the traditional Jewish materials.