Re-submission, Application No.: 339/22

“And Who Wrote [the Biblical Books]?” (Bava Batra 14b-15a)

First, I would like to thank the reviewers of this research proposal for their insightful and constructive responses.

In recent years, I have devoted a significant part of my research to the question of who authored the books of the Bible, according to Jewish tradition over the generations. My goal is to produce a book that will be an introduction to the Jewish-rabbinic Bible, and which will have a place alongside the well-known introductory books of biblical criticism that are found in every academic library in the world. I hope that this monographic text will serve as a vital reference for researchers interested in the history of biblical studies, the Jewish Sages’ contribution to this historical development, as well as for all those who are interested in the intellectual history of rabbinic Judaism in general. The research proposal I submitted last year (Application No.: 339/22) was intended for integration into this broad project.

At the core of research proposal 339/22 is a list of authors of the Bible that is included in the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b-15a (from here: the list of authors) and the accompanying in-depth discussion of this list (ibid.). There have been hundreds of references in Jewish literature to this list of authors and the accompanying discussion, from the Middle Ages through the present day. These are seen as a starting point for any discussion on the question of the authors of the books of the Bible, and according to many, the compulsory starting point. To a large extent, the development of systematic Jewish biblical research from the Enlightenment through the twentieth century can be seen as a gradual process of liberation from these two Talmudic pillars and the traditions associated with them. However, despite the foundational role this list of authors and the accompanying discussion have in Jewish tradition, no comprehensive, detailed study has yet been dedicated to them. I intend to fill this gap with a systematic study devoted to the set of questions and issues related to these Talmudic passages. This will include a thorough investigation of the traditions underlying this list of authors, the guiding principles of those who compiled it, and the history of its acceptance. This study will begin with the discussion accompanying the list of authors, and will then trace them in late Midrashic sources. It will investigate their formative influence on biblical commentators and sages in the Middle Ages and in the early modern and modern era, and their primary role in the development of Jewish biblical research. This study will be integrated into the proposed introductory book on the Jewish-rabbinic Bible and will comprise a significant aspect of it.

The research proposal received favorable responses from the four reviewers. However, the reviewers explicitly or implicitly questioned whether it was appropriate to limit the study to the list of authors and to examining the origin of the books of the Jewish Bible in reference to the acceptance of this Talmudic passage.

Reviewer 1 explicitly wrote:

“Viezel’s use of Beraita on the treatise Baba Batra as a starting point for a comprehensive discussion of the question of who authored the books of the Bible is not trivial.”

He added and clarified:

“The Jewish Sages dealt with the origin and identity of the authors of the various books of the Bible in other contexts as well, not directly or strictly related to the mentioned Beraita [... and therefore] it may be appropriate to expand the discussion of the relevant questions in biblical studies to a somewhat broader historical and theological context [...] not only in relation to the specific questions addressed in the Beraita.”

Reviewer 2 did not view my focus on the list of authors and the accompanying discussion as a limitation, but wrote:

[...]

It is clear, therefore, that this reviewer also found the constraints of the study as point to be considered.

Reviewer 4 similarly wondered about limiting the research to the list of authors and the accompanying discussion, as seen in the following comment:

[...]

I must agree with the reviewers, and therefore the revised research proposal, submitted here, reflects their concerns. My intention is to expand the proposed introductory book to include the Jewish-rabbinic Bible in its entirety. I will examine responses to the question of who wrote the books of the Bible according to Jewish tradition across the generations, without limiting this investigation to a single source, albeit a central and influential one. This systematic and detailed monograph will cover all the sources and materials relevant to the question of the origin of the books of the Bible, from the writings of the various generations of Sages through books being written today. It will include detailed discussions of the Sages’ sources and their influence on each other, taking into account where and when they lived, and the reception of their various opinions. It will look at the fundamental methodological problems of addressing these literary-religious questions.

The proposed introductory book to the rabbinic-Jewish Bible will begin with a comprehensive chapter discussing in detail the selected corpus and the methods of investigation and analysis. In this first chapter, I will clarify some fundamental questions and distinguish between the rabbinic-religious approach to the question of the authorship of the books of the Bible and a critical research approach to this question. Further, I will discuss in depth the ways in which works of literature were perceived and understood by the various generations of Sages, and the degree of their awareness over time regarding the question of the authorship of the books of the Bible. I will look at the significance of this changing awareness in analyzing the opinions of the Sages, and the fundamental difficulties in clarifying their positions, since their sporadic comments about the authorship of the books of the Bible do not coalesce into a comprehensive and systemic picture. The book will include three chapters corresponding to writings from three main periods: the era of the Sages, the Middle Ages, and the early-modern and modern era. These chapters will consist of sections and subsections corresponding to the books of the Bible and will take into account the era and location of the sources. I will conclude the book with a fourth chapter that deals with the development of the entire Bible, the traditions regarding its canonization, and its division into three parts (Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings).

The list of authors included in the Baba Batra, which was at the core of research proposal 339/22, and the questions raised by this list, will find their natural and correct place in the proposed introductory book to the Jewish-rabbinic Bible. I will discuss the list of authors, its sources, and its principles in a section in the first chapter dedicated to the writings of the Sages. In a separate section, I will address the accompanying Talmudic discussion on the list of authors and the few references to this list in late Midrashic sources. The influence of this list on the generations of Sages will be clarified and detailed in the second and third chapters, taking into account the eras and places of the Sages and corresponding to the order of the books. This organization of the discussion will not obscure the foundational role of the list of authors or the extent of its influence on the generations of Sages, but will accurately and precisely locate its historical impact.

This organization corresponds to new findings that emerged from two studies I conducted in the past year on the origins of the list of authors, including the times and places of its historical development (Viezel, 2023b; 2023c). It emerged that one should not accept the traditional position that the list of authors originated with the writings of the Tannaim, although this has been consensual from the Middle Ages onwards and is still accepted by most scholars. However, the list of authors was compiled after the time of the Amorim, most likely in Babylon. Additionally, the relationship between the list of authors and the accompanying Talmudic discussion differs from what is commonly assumed in Jewish tradition and research. Some of the writings included in this Talmudic discussion are from the Tannaim and Amorim, and it seems that the influence flows in the opposite direction. That is, the list of authors was not the basis of the Tannaim’s discussion on the question of who wrote the eight verses that conclude the Torah, and it did was not what influenced the position of the Amorim position on the question of Job’s era or Ezra’s literary message. Rather, the list of authors was developed under the influence of these writings and other traditions and sayings, some of which can be identified and some of which may be reconstructed. Understanding this new chronology enables a more precise investigation of the compilation of the list of authors. It helps solve several enigmas and dilemmas that have been incompletely or even incorrectly explained over time.

The reviewers made several other important comments. Reviewer 2 suggested sources to be included in reference list, and Reviewer 4 mentioned the importance of using the (excellent!) website [www.alhatorah.org](http://www.alhatorah.org). In accordance with these two reviewers’ recommendations, this updated and broader research proposal includes additional bibliographic items and the online tools for data collection and analysis have been expanded. Inevitably, some items are still missing from the bibliography, which will be completed as the project progresses. Eventually I hope to accurately present the role and contribution of all those who have dealt with the question of the compilation of the books in the Bible according to Jewish tradition. The history of the research devoted to this issue will be fully clarified in the proposed introductory book to the Jewish-rabbinic Bible.

Reviewer 3 brought up an important point that needs clarification:

“The author emphasizes the importance of the distinguishing, in principle, between rabbinic-religious works dealing with the question of who authored the books of the Bible and critical research on this question (which is beyond the scope of the current research). However, the writer also wants to look at the Karaite interpretations and to touch upon the study of the Christian Bible and influential Hebraist writings.”

In terms of distinguishing between traditional and critical approaches to the books of the Bible, I intend to give a detailed and in-depth methodological overview in this introductory book to the Rabbinic Jewish Bible. I should note that my recently published book *The Intention of the Torah and the Intention of Its Readers: Episodes of Contention* (Viezel, 2021b) includes detailed methodological discussions of these distinctions.

As for addressing the medieval Karaite exegesis and early modern Christian Hebraist writings, these materials will not be investigated for their own sake, since my research will be limited to the Jewish-rabbinic tradition. However, some Karaite and Hebraistic sources are known to have directly or indirectly influenced the work of some rabbinical Sages. Therefore, in line with the goal of fully investigating the Sages’ sources, it will be necessary to discuss the works of these Karaites and Hebraists.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank the reviewers for their knowledgeable, sympathetic, and constructive feedback, which encouraged me to reflect upon, rethink, and revise the proposal.