

Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh*
By Rav Amnon Bazak

Dedicated in memory of
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Shiur #4c: Duplication and Contradiction (continued)

Let us now address another argument that is central to Wellhausen's approach, and which was contested by many in the previous generation: the dating of the Priestly source to the Second Temple Period. Wellhausen claimed that at the time of Ezra and Nechemia the Jewish religion was shaped and influenced by the priestly regime, and within this context there was a fundamental transition from religion based around natural life, to one focused on historical events and to ceremonial and symbolic frameworks. One aspect of this was that the festivals, which had originally been purely agricultural celebrations, were imbued at this time with additional historical significance. Wellhausen argued further that it was during this period that the idea formed of sacrifices that could atone for sin (the sin offering and guilt offering), and that the idea of sacrifice in general became dominant and prevalent. In addition, the entire subject of priestly gifts, according to Wellhausen, appeared only in the period of the priestly regime, along with the festivals that were not agricultural in nature – Rosh ha-Shana and Yom Kippur – which drew on the sense of iniquity of the Jewish community in its Babylonian exile.

These speculative claims as to the nature of the Priestly source and its relationship to the preceding Books were countered, from different directions, by Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffmann and Prof. Yechezkel Kaufmann.^[1] In brief, I shall set forth three of the major arguments found in their works against this approach.^[2]

1. In terms of subject matter, it is difficult to understand why the Priestly source, which includes major sections of *Shemot* and *Bamidbar* and almost all of *Vayikra*, would include laws that have no connection with the Second Temple Period – such as the instructions to build the *Mishkan* and its vessels, and the division of the land among the tribes. At the same time, some laws that were extremely relevant during that period – primarily the issue of mixed marriages, which was a central issue treated by Ezra and Nechemia – make no appearance at all.

2. In light of archaeological finds from the ancient Near East,^[3] it became clear that phenomena such as a multitude of ceremonies and sacrifices existed even hundreds of years prior to Israel's entry into the land. "The argument that during the period of exile new sacrifices, new festivals and new religious institutions were invented, seems absurd to anyone who is familiar with the cultures of the ancient Near East... Wellhausen viewed institutionalized and complex ritual as the fruit of later development.

He had no idea of the existence of orderly and fixed ritual in the major cultural centers of the ancient Near East."^[4]

3. Scholars have noted linguistic elements showing the profound differences between biblical Hebrew and the development of the language in the Second Temple Period.^[5] For instance, the word '*edah*' (congregation), which appears dozens of times in different parts of the Torah that are attributed to the Priestly source, was cited extensively by Wellhausen's school as evidence of later writing. However,^[6] this word is used less and less: in the Books of the Early Prophets it appears twenty times; in the Later Prophets – only three times, and in the Books from the time of the return from the Babylonian exile (Ezra and Nechemia^[7]) it makes no appearance at all – although seemingly, it should be quite ubiquitous. Instead, these Books make extensive use of the word "*kahal*." The decrease in the number of appearances of the word "*edah*" indicates the gradual abandonment of this term, which points to the conclusion that it belongs to the linguistic context of a period long before that of the Second Temple.

In addition, there are also prominent differences between the language of *Yechezkel* and that of *Vayikra*, despite the relatively extensive treatment of Temple matters in *Yechezkel*. For example, the verb used in the Priestly source to describe the washing of the parts of the sacrifices is "*r-ch-tz*,"^[8] while in *Sefer Yechezkel* the verb "*n-d-ch*" is used instead (for example, 40:38 – "*yadichu et ha-olah*" – "they would wash the burnt offering"), and likewise in *Divrei Ha-yamim* (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 4:6).

In view of these discrepancies, there are some scholars who agree that biblical Hebrew is indeed different from the Hebrew of the Second Temple Period, but argue that it is the invention of scholars who lived during the Second Temple Period, and existed as a literary language rather than a living one. Such claims, which seem tenuous on their own terms, would also seem to ignore archaeological findings which appear to corroborate the development of the Hebrew language as it is presented in the different books of the *Tanakh*.^[9] Thus we find that ancient biblical Hebrew matches inscriptions from the period of the monarchy,^[10] while later biblical Hebrew matches external testimonies that we have from the Second Temple Period, such as the Book of Ben Sira and the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, in the Books of *Bereishit*, *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*, there is frequent mention of the city of "Damesek" (Damascus),^[11] while in *Divrei Ha-yamim* it is referred to as "Darmesek" (*Divrei Ha-yamim* I 18:5-6; *Divrei Ha-yamim* II 16:2), even where the verses parallel sources in *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*. The same phenomenon is to be found in external sources, too: in the Tel Amarna letters, dating to the 14th century B.C.E., and other inscriptions, the city is called "Damesek," while in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other later writings it is referred to as "Darmesek."

These arguments have led many scholars to reject Wellhausen's hypothesis concerning the later authorship of the Priestly source,^[12] even though some of them generally subscribe to the documentary hypothesis.

D. Linguistic layers

Until now we have discussed the refutations of the documentary hypothesis with regard to the dating of the Deuteronomist source and the Priestly source. However, beyond addressing the problems inherent in the historical claims of the documentary hypothesis, we must also emphasize a central difficulty that emerges from an in-depth analysis of the language of the *Tanakh*. The study of the development of biblical Hebrew provides a very strong indication that the *Chumash* predates not only the later Books of *Tanakh*, as discussed above, but also the Books of the Prophets.^[13] This is shown most strongly when we contrast the language of the *Chumash* with the Books of the Prophets where, despite the general similarity between them, we find a number of motifs that appear exclusively in one but not the other.

For example, some common expressions in the prophetic literature are completely absent from the Torah. Let us mention three prominent examples.

1. The expression "*ha-Shem Tzeva-ot*" ("Lord of Hosts") appears 260 times in *Tanakh*, but starting only in the Book of *Shmuel*.^[14] There is no mention of this description of God in the Torah, nor in the Books of *Yehoshua* and *Shoftim*.

2. The expression "So may God do, and so may He add," appears eight times as an oath in the Books of *Shmuel* and *Melakhim*, but is not used in connection with any of the oaths in the Torah.^[15]

3. "*Naveh*" refers to the place where shepherds sit as they pasture the flocks. The word is used in this sense some twenty times in *Tanakh* – all from the Book of *Shmuel* onwards.^[16] Its absence from the Torah would seem to indicate that the word did not exist in this sense at that time, and that it began to be used only during the period of the monarchy, much later on.

The absence of these common expressions from the Torah would suggest that the Torah's Hebrew is a more ancient stage of the language than that which is found in the Books of the Prophets. Had some parts of the Torah been written from the period of the monarchy onwards, there would be no reason for the absence of such common expressions.

We may also point out instances of the opposite phenomenon: words which exist in the Torah, but do not appear in the Books of the Prophets. For example, the word "*isheh*" (referring to a burnt offering) appears dozens of times in the Books of *Vayikra* and *Bamidbar*, and is a central motif in the world of sacrifices, but it appears nowhere in the prophetic literature. On the basis of the documentary hypothesis, it is difficult to understand why this is the case, and why the authors of the Books of the Prophets would not have used the same terms which they had employed, according to this view, in writing the Books of the Torah.

There are also many instances of differences in spelling between the Torah and the Books of the Prophets. To cite just two examples:

1. The word "*hi*" (she) is spelled just eleven times in the Torah with the letter '*yud*'; far more often (199 times!) we find the same spelling as the word "*hu*" (meaning 'he') – i.e., with a '*vav*,' with only the vowels (*chirik*) indicating the feminine form. In the rest of *Tanakh*, in contrast, the word is spelled with a '*yud*' 474 times, and not a single time with the letter '*vav*.' It is reasonable to assume that this difference in spelling reflects a difference in the way the word was pronounced, but in any event it points to a difference between the period of the Torah and that of the prophets.

2. The word "*na'arah*" (girl) appears twenty-two times in the Torah, mostly in *Devarim*; only once is it spelled with the letter '*heh*' at the end ([Devarim 22:19](#)); in every other instance it ends with the letter "*resh*," accompanied by the "*kamatz*" vowel to signify the feminine form. In contrast, the rest of *Tanakh* includes the word 23 times – all spelt with a '*heh*' at the end. Here again it would seem that in the most ancient form of Hebrew, the same word was used for the masculine and feminine forms of the word, and that the traditional pronunciation of the word "*na'ar*" as "*na'ara*" represents a later development.^[17]

These discrepancies of spelling are easy to understand if we assume that the period of the Torah was characterized by a more ancient stage of the Hebrew language.^[18] By comparing the various Books of the *Tanakh* with one another, and by comparison with external findings, we see quite clearly the development of the Hebrew language and the building of its various layers as the *Tanakh* progresses. The documentary hypothesis, which claims that that the Torah was authored contemporaneously with many later books of *Tanakh*, has no convincing explanation for this fact.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

^[1] Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffmann (1843-1921) was one of the leaders of German Jewry, a halakhic authority and a commentator on *Tanakh*, who headed the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin. In his book, *Decisive Refutations of Wellhausen*, originally written in German, Rabbi Hoffmann presented a moderate and objective refutation of Wellhausen's claims of a Priestly source dating to the Second Temple Period. Yechezkel Kaufmann (1889-1963), a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was among the scholars who did accept the documentary hypothesis in principle, but nevertheless were completely opposed to Wellhausen's claim in this particular regard. See his work, *Toldot ha-Emunah ha-Yisraelit*, vol. 1, Jerusalem 5736, pp. 113-120 (translated and abridged by Prof. Moshe Greenberg as *The Religion of Israel*, Chicago 1960).

^[2] See Weinfeld, *MiYehoshua ve-ad Yoshiyahu*, columns 499-502.

[3] We shall discuss the relationship between these finds and the biblical text in a later chapter.

[4] Weinfeld, column 500.

[5] See, for example, the following by A. Hurvitz: *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel*, Paris 1982; "The Historical Quest for Ancient Israel and the Linguistic Evidence of the Hebrew Bible: Some Methodological Observations," *Vetus Testamentum* 47, 1997, pp. 301-315; "*Al Kama Munachim mi-Techum ha-Kedusha ve-ha-Tahara ha-Meshamshim be-Sefer Yechezkel be-Mishkal 'Mekutal'*," in: Y. Zakovich and A. Rofe (eds.), *Sefer Yitzchak Aryeh Zeligman*, Jerusalem 5743, pp. 247-256; "*Ha-Vikuach ha-Arkheologi-Histori shel Kadmut ha-Sifrut ha-Mikrait Leor ha-Mechkar ha-Balshani shel ha-Ivrit*," in: Y.L. Levin and A. Mazar (eds.), *Ha-Pulmus al ha-Emet ha-Historit ba-Mikra*, Jerusalem 5761, pp. 34-46.

[6] See Rabbi Hoffmann (above, n. 1), p. 62, n. 1; A. Hurvitz, "*Le-Shimusho shel ha-Munach ha-Kohani 'Edah' be-Sifrut ha-Mikrait*," *Tarbiz* 40:3 (5731), pp. 261-267.

[7] In *Divrei Ha-yamim* it appears just once (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 5:6), but there, too, the verse has a parallel in *Melakhim I* 8:5, such that the appearance of the word here does not represent any new content.

[8] See, for example, [Shemot 29:17](#); [Vayikra 1:9](#), 13: 8:21; 9:14.

[9] See Hurvitz 1997 (above, n. 5), p. 308-313.

[10] Relevant findings in this regard include the Siloam (Shiloach) inscription, the Lachish letters, and inscriptions in neighboring languages such as the Mesha Stele. We will discuss archaeological artifacts from the period of the monarchy later on.

[11] [Shmuel II 8:5-6](#); *Melakhim I* 11:24, and elsewhere.

[12] See, *inter alia*, Weinfeld, column 502; Schwartz, p. 209.

[13] The examples cited here were presented in a lecture by Y. Elitzur, "*Revadim be-Ivrit ha-Mikrait ha-Keduma*," at the Study Days in *Tanakh* held in Alon Shvut during the summer of 2006.

[14] *Chazal* note this: "Rabbi Elazar said: From the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, created His world, no one called Him 'Tzeva-of' until Channa [mother of Shmuel], who called Him by this Name" ([Berakhot 31b](#)).

[15] Other examples: 1. the root "*k-l-m*" (shame), as a verb and as a noun, appears some seventy times in *Tanakh*, but never in the Torah. 2. The word "*dim'a*" (tear – as in weeping) appears in its various forms 25 times in *Tanakh*, but never in Torah (except for [Shemot 22:28](#), where the root is used in a completely different sense: "You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe fruits [*meleatekha*] and of your liquors [*ve-dim'akha*]").

[16] It appears in the Torah only once, and in a metaphoric sense: "To Your holy habitation" (*el neveh kodshekha* – [Shemot 15:13](#)).

[17] Further examples: 1. The phenomenon of defective spelling (where on occasion a word is spelt with a letter missing) is far more prevalent in the Torah than it is in the Books of the Prophets. For instance, the word "*eleihem*" (to them) appears in defective form (without the '*yud*') in the vast majority of cases in the Torah (86 out of 103 instances); in the Books of the Prophets, in contrast, it appears in defective form only rarely (19 out of 150 instances). This example is cited from J. Barr, *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible*, New York 1989, p. 135. 2. The word "*ha-el*," in the sense of "*ha-eleh*" ("these"), appears 8 times in the Torah, but nowhere in the Books of the

Prophets. (In *Divrei ha-Yamim* I 20:8 we find one instance of "*el noldu*" – "these were born.")

^[18] Linguistic scholar Gotthelf Bergsträsser addressed these phenomena; in his book on the grammar of the Hebrew language he writes that they "should be attributed solely to later editing." However, the claim that a later editor would alter the language in such a peculiar way seems highly unlikely.