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RABBI MORDECHAI BREUER AND MODERN ORTHODOX BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

STUDY OF *TANAKH*

Although *Tanakh* is the word of God, its study is often neglected today.¹ The anecdote of the *yeshiva bakhur* who knows the Bible only through its citations in the Talmud accurately depicts the biblical knowledge of an average *yeshiva* student. Despite considerable and sophisticated attainments in the study of Talmud, students often employ no methodology in studying *Tanakh* beyond reading Rashi and translating, as they did in elementary school.

This has not always been the case. Rabbi Joshua b. Hanina stated in the Talmud that one ought to devote equal study time to the three distinct disciplines of Scripture, Mishna and *gemara*.² Avraham Grossman has argued that in pre-crusade Europe almost all the leading Rabbinic scholars engaged in intensive biblical studies.³ We have inherited valuable and sophisticated biblical commentaries by scholars with expertise in Bible and Talmud, such as that of Rashi, Ramban, Netsiv and others.

The perplexing current neglect of serious study of *Tanakh* has a significant precedent. The minimization began in Northern France and flourished with the introduction of the dialectic style of Talmud study introduced by the Tosafists that spread like wildfire.⁴ Rashi interprets the ambiguous talmudic statement “*minu beneikhem min ha-biggayon*” as “keep your sons from Scripture.”⁵ Rabbeinu Tam justified the practice of neglecting *Tanakh* study by claiming that it is studied when encountered in the Talmud.⁶ The warning about studying too much *Tanakh* appears to stem from the simple calculation that man has limited time, and that greater familiarity with Talmud is to be recommended, given the constraints.⁷

This phenomenon was not limited to Northern France. Profiat Duran (c. 1414), who lived in Spain, wrote: “In this period I note that Jewish scholars, even the greatest among them, show great derision for biblical studies. It is enough for them to read the weekly portion (*shenayyim mikra ve-ehad targum*), and still it is possible that if you ask them about a particular verse, they will not know where it is. They consider one who spends time doing biblical studies a fool; the Talmud is our mainstay. This disease is rampant in France and Germany in our generation, as it was in the preceding period. But in earlier generations it was not so. We saw the glory of the Talmudists uplifted by the great Rashi, who delved into the meaning of Scripture (*he'emik behavanat ha-mikra*) and wrote beautiful commentaries on it, including wonderful formulations about grammar and syntax.”⁸ Today there is an underlying consensus that Talmud study remains a priority over that of Bible.⁹ This phenomenon is particularly striking when one looks at the comparatively large output by Christian, secular and non-Orthodox scholars regarding linguistic, literary and historical analysis of the Bible.¹⁰

PIRKEI MOADOT

Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, a graduate of the Hebron Yeshiva and a veteran educator, has undertaken to rectify this situation and return biblical scholarship to the halls of the yeshiva. He translated the commentary of his great grandfather Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on the Torah into Hebrew. He has edited a new Masoretic text of the entire *Tanakh* based on the *Keter Aram Tsova*, an older tradition than the Leningrad Codex of the standard *Humash*. He has taught and published articles and books on a variety of topics such as cantillation, biblical interpretation, Jewish thought and talmudic *sugyot*. In his book *Pirkei Moadot* (Jerusalem, 1986), he has developed a novel approach to the study of *Tanakh* that entails a serious and intense study of problems in “*peshat*” based on a close reading of the text aligned with theological interpretations and solutions.¹¹ He acknowledges the use of non-Jewish and non-pious sources in his understanding of *Tanakh*.¹² It is noteworthy that he developed his approach outside of the walls of the university, where most biblical scholarship has taken place. Most notably, there is a group at the Herzog Teachers Institute (affiliated with Yeshivat Har Etzion) which is furthering the challenge of studying *Tanakh* seriously that he and others have influenced.

Their efforts are most evident in the journal *Megadim*, where many of the contributors are alumni, teachers and senior students at the Yeshiva. In fact, the Teachers Institute there offers an intensive program in *Tanakh* for senior students in the Yeshiva and for continuing education of Jewish studies teachers in Israel. Rav Breuer is on the faculty at the Institute and has taught popular classes in *Tanakh* at the Yeshiva since 1979. Unfortunately his work is virtually unknown outside Israel. This is partially because he publishes almost exclusively in Hebrew and partially because his career has not taken a conventional academic path. The recently published book, *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah*, by the Orthodox Forum, has an excellent article by Rav Breuer in English that summarizes his views on biblical studies for an Orthodox Jew. It contains as well two responses to his approach by Rabbi Shalom Carmy and Dr. Shnayer Leiman that will further introduce his thought to the English-speaking community.¹³

In this article I will look at an illustration of his work, critiques of his efforts, and gain a deeper understanding of Rav Breuer's goals by responding to those critiques. I have chosen to focus on Rav Breuer because he has taught and influenced many, has explicitly stated his methods, and because he has claimed significant implications for his work. There are essentially three issues which I will address: 1) the effectiveness of his exegetical approach; 2) the relationship of his exegesis to the practice of Higher Biblical Criticism; and 3) his resort to mysticism which seems to obfuscate his arguments.

EXEGETICAL APPROACH

I will introduce Rav Breuer's approach through a sampling of his commentary on one exegetical issue: the various repetitions of the commandments concerning the holidays. The problem is complex, and he has a lengthy exposition of the difficulties that cannot be discussed in full detail. A summary, however, should suffice to give a flavor of his approach, if not the full scope of his arguments and close textual readings.

The *Humash* repeats the commandments of the holidays at different times with minor variations. Why are these repetitions necessary?¹⁴ These variations can be seen as minor differences or as outright contradictions. For example, in *VaYikra*, the starting date for *Shavuot* is set at 50 days from the day after the "Shabbat" on which the *minhat omer* is brought. In *Devarim*, however, *Shavuot* is described as beginning seven

weeks after the reaping season begins.¹⁵ At no point is a specific calendar date listed in the Torah. This ambiguity led to a dispute between the Sadducees and Pharisees regarding the time of *Shavuot* and the interpretation of the word *Shabbat*. The Sadducees claimed that *Shabbat* referred, as usual, to the seventh day of the week, while the Pharisees maintained that it referred to the first day of Passover.¹⁶

Traditional commentators reconcile the discrepancies listed above. They show that the various dates for *Shavuot* are identical, and that *Shabbat* in the *VaYikra* passage means *Yom Tov*, as opposed to the seventh day of the week, its standard meaning.¹⁷ Critical commentators see these variations as representing real differences and then attribute them to different authors and time periods.¹⁸

Rav Breuer asserts that the various dates are indeed contradictions, but instead of representing different authors they signify different facets of the holidays which are fused together.¹⁹ He sees the holidays as deriving their sanctity from two separate sources. One source is the agricultural cycles, in which the holiday serves as an expression of our joy and thanks to God for His gifts. This aspect of *Shavuot* is rooted in our earthly labors. Were this the only reason for holiday observance, the festival would have been celebrated variably, depending on when we actually reap the agricultural benefits. Furthermore, the holiday would be expressed solely by its joyous character. The other source stems from the sanctity of time and its cycles, which derives its holiness from God. Were *this* the only source for the holiday, *Shavuot* would have a fixed annual date, and the holiday would be expressed solely in its prohibitions. Rav Breuer argues that the Oral Law combines these sources, which represent different aspects of the holiday. The holidays as we celebrate them are an amalgam of these origins and contain aspects of each one.

Shavuot is particularly complex because it fuses three aspects, each represented by a different potential calendar date. The agricultural date in the *Humash* is seven weeks after the beginning of the harvest. This date changes from year to year. A calendar date is not explicit in the Torah. Nevertheless, a calendar date, the 15 of Sivan, was observed by some Second Temple sectarian Jews, as stated in the Book of Jubilees.²⁰ A third explicit date is fifty days after the *minbat ha-omer* offering (or the day after *Shabbat*), which links *Shavuot* with the Temple. The *Torah she-Be'al Pe* specifies a synthetic date that best combines these three aspects of the holiday. This date emphasizes the agricultural aspect of the holiday by coordinating to a normal harvest, but is nevertheless fixed. This

allows for the representation of each aspect. Rabbi Breuer concedes that the simplest interpretation of the word *Shabbat*, taken out of context, is the seventh day of the week, as the Sadducees claimed. However, that interpretation fails to do justice to the other texts and to other aspects of the holiday. He then explains that a primary role of the Oral Law is to reconcile and synthesize the different aspects which the Bible expresses, so that each theme and text is represented.²¹

This example shows some structural qualities of Rav Breuer's approach. He systematically divides verses of the Torah into different narratives based on a close textual reading, and sees the repetitions and contradictions of the different narratives as signifying different themes of a particular idea. It has been alleged that his approach is not persuasive.²² For example, he splits the *meraglim* narrative in *BaMidbar* into two different thematic trips, one initiated by God and one by the nation. He then divides the verses in chapter 13 and attributes some verses to the narrative of God's mission (13:1-first half of 17), and some to that of the spies (13:second half of 17-20). Verse 17 is split into two. The first half follows God's command to tour the whole land. The second half reverses that and indicates a more limited and specific region, indicating a military focus. Although this division explains some contradictions, it has a mechanical and arbitrary feel to it. Why did the Torah jumble two narratives together, seem repetitious and split verses in the middle? Rav Breuer often cuts chapters and verses, fitting them to a procrustean bed; the result is unfortunately not convincing. Furthermore, his writing is highly technical and lengthy, and can be sprawling, turgid, and repetitive.

Despite those criticisms, Rav Breuer has much to offer. He fills his articles with illuminating commentaries of a theological and literary nature. For example, separating the strands of the spy narrative leads to an understanding of the different punishments for the perpetrators that reflect the nature of their particular sins. His exegesis of the holidays provides a more complex and profound understanding of their nature, a more detailed and sophisticated reading of the text and an unusual exploration of the relationship between the Oral and Written Torah. The range is remarkable and the insights are often brilliant. One need not accept all his textual readings or conclusions, but he opens up a new way of reading *Tanakh*.

The richness of his approach is evident by browsing the pages of *Megadim* and seeing the extent of his method's influences on others and how he allows for new ways of reading the Torah.²³ For example, there is

an ongoing debate regarding the exegetical problem of the dating of the holidays utilizing similar hermeneutic strategies. Rav Yoel Bin-Nun²⁴ points out that the confusion of the holiday dates does not begin with the biblical text but is inherent in the problematic nature of the Jewish calendar. Judaism juggles a lunar and solar calendar which invariably leads to contradictions. The solar calendar is based on agricultural seasonal cycles and is intrinsically connected to the idea of *Shabbat*, a weekly rest. The lunar calendar is rooted in historical events and therefore begins in Nissan, commemorating the exodus from Egypt.²⁵ Rav Bin-Nun sees the debate between the Sadducees and the Pharisees as a struggle over which calendar should take precedence, which in turn relates to the extent of human control over religious matters. The lunar calendar sparks controversy because its implementation entails human freedom in halakha.²⁶ The dating of the holiday stems from two different calendar systems that support different themes, and need to be reconciled. He claims that the existence of a lunar and solar calendar supports Rav Breuer's theological and textual readings of two aspects to the holidays.²⁷

BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The most controversial aspect of Rav Breuer's exegesis is his engagement with biblical criticism. Contrary to most such attempts from religious quarters, and in an astonishing about face, he accepts their arguments in toto but none of their conclusions. He believes that the Torah is consistently written with parallel, overlapping and conflicting narratives. Instead of accepting a historical documentary hypothesis, he reads the different narratives as representing different perspectives which are all encompassed by the infinity of God. As limited humans, we cannot simultaneously entertain different perspectives, and they therefore appear to us as contradictions.

On the one hand this notion is not novel.²⁸ For example, Rashi on the first verse in the Torah²⁹ explains the different names of God as representing the different divine modes and characteristics of mercy and justice. Rabbi Soloveitchik *zt"l* takes a related approach to biblical criticism in his article "The Lonely Man of Faith", although it is not framed there as a response to Higher Criticism but as a philosophical *midrash*. He sees the two accounts of man's creation as displaying different facets of man and his relation to God.³⁰ However, these attempts are occa-

sional and isolated.³¹ Rav Breuer's systematic application of these differences and inconsistencies to every section of the Torah, his cutting and pasting verses to match different *midot*, and his simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the documentary hypothesis is a bold, novel and provocative move.

Amos Hakham³² argues that Rav Breuer essentially accepts the documentary hypothesis and that the only difference between him and Bible critics is the underlying bedrock of faith ("the same girl with a new twirl.") He implies that Rav Breuer is embarking on a dangerous and potentially heretical path. As he points out, most religious Bible scholars have taken the opposite tactic of showing that the documentary hypothesis is neither scientifically valid nor persuasive.³³ To view Rav Breuer's grappling with biblical criticism as a hike down a treacherous path is missing his point. He is not merely trying to deflect arguments of Bible critics; he begins with the premise that rational arguments presented by the academic world do not, in fact, cannot determine faith. An academic/scientific approach is not equipped to deal with such questions. Faith is one's axiomatic assumption in approaching the material.³⁴ Once Rav Breuer establishes that premise, he is more concerned with understanding the *Humash* than with the conclusions of the Bible critics. In reading critical literature one cannot fail to be struck by the extent it perceptively notices different themes but then tends to conclude that it is evidence for different redactions or editions.³⁵ The persuasiveness of those readings is what makes it so hard to ignore biblical criticism. Stories do seem to repeat themselves from different perspectives.³⁶ Rav Breuer salvages from biblical scholarship a hidden treasure and reclaims it for God. He helps us realize that the different themes have independent literary and theological importance.

As Rav Bin-Nun³⁷ points out, the context of interpretation and one's underlying assumptions utterly changes the meaning. It is not merely the same girl with a different twirl, but an exquisite maiden in disguise who, in momentary flashes of illumination, can be seen in her true splendor. Rav Breuer's response to biblical criticism is not simply apologetics so that the faithful can comfortably accept secular scholarship; rather, he reveals new dimensions in understanding Torah.

Rav Breuer roots his scholarship in a Jewish theological and philosophical outlook unrelated to biblical scholarship per se. He models a stance on how to deal with aspects of the secular world that are foreign or even opposed to Jewish faith.³⁸ His scholarship develops Rav Kook's philosophy of how God-fearing Jews can integrate modern scholarship

into their study of religious topics while enriching their religious understanding.³⁹ Are the findings of academic scholarship a measuring stick by which we gauge the truths of our religious beliefs, or are they an apparatus which can expand the means at our disposal to understand Torah?⁴⁰ Rav Breuer sees academic scholarship as a tool to be used when helpful and enlightening, and not as a threat.⁴¹

Rav Breuer is criticized because he resorts to mysticism to bolster his arguments. In fact, Rav Breuer uses kabbalistic thinking as a source for his approach. Kabbala develops the notion that God represents himself in this world through different modalities (*midot* or *sefirot*), and that none of these characteristics are individually sufficient to understand God, but represent aspects of God. These aspects, when harmonized, are a closer approximation of what we can understand of God. Breuer applies this notion of different divine aspects to the reading of narratives and parts of narratives in the *Humash*.

In reality Rav Breuer has no need to cite Kabbala. His arguments stand or fall on exegetical grounds in each particular case. It is just that kabbalistic thought has most directly grappled with the underlying issues his approach raises and provides a language to deal with them. There are at least two philosophical-theological questions which stand out as underlying his approach: 1) How does one theologially explain great achievements in the arts, sciences and in this case our holy *Tanakh* by people who have no apparent relationship to God or anything holy? 2) How does one account for a world where so many perspectives seem to be simultaneously valid and where a grasp of an absolute reality and truth is so elusive?⁴²

These questions are central to Rav Kook's ontology and epistemology.⁴³ When one reads through biblical scholarship, one finds that there is much thought and illuminating discovery in archeology, philology and literary analysis embedded in heresy. One school of thought denies any value to findings not discovered in the context of Torah.⁴⁴ Rav Breuer claims that this attitude encourages ignorance, is self-deceptive, and ultimately diminishes our respect for Torah.⁴⁵ He recognizes that good ideas emerge in impure settings although the good may be hidden and even perverted.⁴⁶

He explains this by seeing the power of ideas as rooted in the divine with potential applications for good or evil. He cites *Sha'agat Arye* who, in the eighteenth century, at the time Christian scholars began Higher Criticism, introduced the notion of multiple authors for *Divrei haYamim*.⁴⁷ Jews at that point did not develop those ideas for holy pur-

poses and they fell to secular scholarship. Each generation has its intellectual zeitgeist and new ideas that can be adopted for holy or heretical purposes. Reading the Torah as exhibiting parallel narratives is an example of a good idea which was adopted by the wrong side and used for depraved purposes. Rav Breuer claims that his approach will take the luster out of biblical criticism. The truth they unearthed, the divine spark in it which empowered their scholarship can be accepted, while the dross that stems from the lack of faith can be seen as the emptiness it is.

The other question that underlies his philosophic quest is how a multiplicity of seemingly legitimate views can lead to contradictory opinions.⁴⁸ Rav Breuer uses the notion of *eilu ve-eilu divrei Elokim hayyim* to explain how contradictions from a divine point of view can all be true.⁴⁹ He applies this notion to biblical verses, halakhic disputations, divine modes of being in the world, and conflicting ideologies. He investigates the question through the lens of the kabbalistic/philosophical question of how God can be a unity and yet multidimensional. Rav Breuer accepts apparent contradictions from God because God contains everything, and is ultimately a unity even when He appears fragmented.⁵⁰ For this reason the Bible tells narratives from different, even contradictory perspectives and both perspectives are true.

Rav Breuer's writings are not always persuasive because he is excessively passionate and makes unnecessary claims. For example, he states that only God could write a book filled with contradictions. In fact, many modern writers deconstruct the apparent consistency of their characters, and many modern literary critics read texts as multivocal and gapped.⁵¹ Ironically, modern human literary scholarship lends support to Rav Breuer's reading of the Torah as a complex text exhibiting different and contradictory characteristics.⁵² However, Rav Breuer adds that a divine perspective can harmonize these contradictory strands.

Rav Breuer and his colleagues use their exegetic approach to deal with difficult textual problems, to naturalize mystical thought, to provide a new theological language for a broad audience and to grapple with religious and philosophical questions posed by modernity.⁵³ Their scholarship is an example of this naturalization by concretizing the kabbalistic image of rescuing holy sparks from their impure vessels.⁵⁴ It is therefore inaccurate and unfair to accuse Rav Breuer and his colleagues of merely accepting biblical criticism and believing nevertheless. Their thought stems from a world view which springs from a deeper source and flows way beyond their particular position on biblical scholarship.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The renewed interest in Bible study did not sprout in a vacuum. The title of the journal *Megadim* is from a verse in *Shir haShirim*: “When the plants are blooming and the lover anticipates taking his loved one”. The *Midrash* interprets the verse as referring to the time of the Messiah when the scholars and Rabbis engage in new textual study in order to accept upon themselves the kingdom of God. These verses and the *Midrash* are cited and highlighted on the front cover of the journal.⁵⁵ There is a passion inspiring these writings, a belief that with the Jewish people’s return to the land of Israel we have begun a new era that ought to be reflected in Torah study.⁵⁶ It is no accident that this renaissance is in the fertile soil of Israel.⁵⁷ After all, one of the major themes of the *Tanakh* is our relationship to the land and political entity of Israel. Many of Rav Breuer’s and his colleagues’ writings focus on agricultural and historical realities and Zionist themes.⁵⁸

However, it is not simply the place which inspires but the times as well. Alexander Altmann, writing on the eve of the Holocaust, made a call for interpreting Jewish reality through the Bible.⁵⁹ He spoke of a Jewish reality that is nourished from tradition, looks to the future and sees a Jewish destiny that transcends the surrounding reality. In the face of cataclysmic events one searches for meaning and interpretations to comprehend the swirls of history which move around us. Rav Breuer and the group at *Megadim* returned to the Bible, opened new vistas in our understanding of Torah and pointed to fresh theological directions in struggling with our perplexing and challenging times. They have shown how Torah can be given on this very day.

NOTES

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Rabbi Breuer has recently published a two-volume work in Hebrew called *Pirke Bereshit* (Alon Shevut, 1998), a comprehensive and systematic commentary on *Bereshit*. It was not available during the writing of this article and is not referred to.

1. The study of Tanakh has not been ignored in homiletic writings, hasidic and *mussar derashot*. Although this literature has much to offer, it generally

- does not focus on understanding the text per se but rather on developing themes and reading the text in light of those themes.
2. See *Kiddushin* 30a s.v. “*Lo Tserikha*”, *Sanhedrin* 23a s.v. “*belula*”, and *Avoda Zara* 19a s.v. “*lo ye-shalesh*”.
 3. A. Grossman, *Hakhamei Ashkenaz haRishonim* (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 419-20.
 4. See the discussion in E. Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit, 1992), and E. Kanarfogel, “On the Role of Bible Study in Medieval Ashkenaz”, in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume Vol. I*, ed. by Barry Walfish (Haifa, 1993), who is inclined to see the beginning of this trend in the thirteenth century.
 5. See Mordechai [ben Yitzchak] Breuer, “Keep Your Children From *Higgayon*” [Hebrew] in *Mikhtam leDavid: Sefer Zikaron haRav David Ochs*, eds. Yitzchak Gilat and Eliezer Stern (Ramat Gan, 1978), pp. 242-64, and F. Talmage, “Keep Your Sons from Scripture: The Bible in Medieval Jewish Scholarship and Spirituality”, in Clemens Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (eds.), *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christians Traditions of Interpretation* (New York, 1989), for the history of interpretation of this verse. See Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1962), pp. 103, 108-109, for interpretations of what *higgayon* originally meant.
 6. See *Tos. to Avoda Zara* 19b, s.v. “*ye-shalesh*” which provides a justification for the anecdotal *yeshiva bakhur* mentioned earlier.
 7. See Talmage (1989). His argument, however, does not fully explain why the study of Talmud underwent innovations at this point and took root and flowered. It is interesting to note the parallel rise in dialectic learning in Christian Europe a century earlier. See M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago, 1968), for an analysis of what culturally and intellectually changed at the time to allow for the emergence of a dialectic approach and a literalist attitude to Scripture. See also Eliezer Touito, “The Rashbam’s Exegetical Approach in Perspective of the Historical Situation in His Time,” in Y. Gilat, Ch. Levine and Z.M. Rabinowitz (eds.), *Studies in Rabbinic Literature Bible and Jewish History* (Ramat Gan, 1982), which discusses these issues and makes other suggestions for understanding the rise and fall of biblical exegesis as related to trends in Jewish-Christian polemics.
 8. Profiat Duran, *Ma’ase Efod* (Vienna, 1865), translation by Kanarfogel.
 9. There has always been competition in Jewish studies as to which area of study ought be given priority. The contenders have been as varied as the Talmud and its theoretical commentators, mysticism, philosophy, Hebrew grammar, ethical literature and practical halakha. The bulk of Orthodox Jewish intellectual effort since the time of Rabbenu Tam has been invested in the study of Talmud, halakha and Kabbala. See Twersky, “The Quest for Spirituality” in B.D. Cooperman (ed.), *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), for a discussion of Profiat Duran’s earlier comments and how these tensions played themselves out in various Jewish thinkers. Twersky focuses more on the relationship between studying Talmud vs. Kabbala and philosophy than vs. the study of Bible.
 10. For modern day examples see the commentaries of the Anchor Bible,

Fortress Press, Old Testament Library and the breadth of philological, archeological, historical and literary analysis they contain. The Orthodox reaction to this literature has been mostly one of ignorance and disdain with some noted exceptions such as Rabbi David Tsevi Hoffman. See Barry Levy, "The State and Directions of Orthodox Bible Study" in Carmy (ed.), *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah Contributions and Limitations* (NY, 1996).

11. For a brief biography and a list of his publications through 1991 see Moshe Arendt, Moshe Bar Asher, et al. (eds.), *The Jubilee Volume for Rav Breuer* (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 1-7. The range of contributions in that volume portrays Rav Breuer's scope of expertise.
12. Although he acknowledges his indebtedness to these sources in some of his writings he does not regularly footnote them. I presume the reason is that he is not writing for an academic community, and his intended audience would be distracted by such notes. It is interesting to note Rambam's comments in his introductory statements to *Eight Chapters*: "Know that the things about which we shall speak in these chapters and what will come in the commentary are not matters invented on my own, nor explanations I have originated. Indeed, they are matters gathered from the discourses of the sages in the *Midrash*, the Talmud, and other compositions of theirs, as well as from the discourse of both ancient and modern philosophers and from the compositions of many men. Hear the truth from whoever says it. Sometimes I have taken a complete passage from the text of a famous book. Now there is nothing wrong with that, for I do not attribute to myself what someone who preceded me said. We hereby acknowledge this and shall not indicate that "so and so said" and "so and so said" since it would be useless prolixity. Moreover [identifying] the name of such an individual might make the passage offensive to someone without experience and make him think that it has an evil inner meaning of which he is not aware. Consequently I saw fit to omit the author's name, since my goal is to be useful to the reader. We shall explain to him the hidden meanings of this tractate." Cited by M. Kellner, *Maimonides On Judaism and the Jewish People* (Albany, 1991), p. 18. Translation by R.L. Weiss and C. Butterworth, *Ethical Writings of Maimonides* (NY, 1983), pp. 60-61, italics added.
13. S. Carmy (ed.), *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah Contributions and Limitations* (NY, 1996). It contains three directly relevant articles: S. Carmy, "Introducing Rabbi Breuer", pp. 147-58; M. Breuer, "The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction" pp. 159-80, S. Leiman, "Response to Rabbi Breuer", pp. 181-87. Carmy presents some background to Breuer's approach and then moderates some of his excesses. Leiman, while applauding Breuer's pioneering efforts, does not feel that he has "solved" a religious Jew's difficulties posed by biblical scholarship. Both point out that Breuer primarily deals with the literary problems posed by biblical scholarship and not the historical ones. Rav Breuer's influence is also evident in some recent English material. Joshua Berman, an alumnus of Yeshivat Har Etzion, recently published *The Temple: its Symbolism and Meaning* (NJ, 1995), where he acknowledges his debt to the Yeshiva and his teachers there in *Tanakh*. Commentary influenced by his work is also

now discernible in a weekly *parsha shiur* by Menachem Leibtag available through the Internet, which is sponsored by Yeshivat Har Etzion at www.tanach.org. The popularity of the list indicates that the work is beginning to gain a broader audience in America.

14. This question presents itself many times in *Tanakh* and there is a range of answers varying from questions of literary style to emphasis on omniscience. See Richard C. Steiner, "Meaninglessness, Meaningfulness, and Super-meaningfulness in Scripture: an Analysis of the Controversy Surrounding Dan 2:12 in the Middle Ages", *Jewish Quarterly Review* (1992), pp. 431- 449, for an interesting example of this point.
15. See *VaYikra* 23, *BaMidbar* 28-29, *Shemot* 34, *Devarim* 16, for the other holidays.
16. See *Menahot* 65a.
17. See a comprehensive review in D.Z. Hoffman, *Sefer VaYikra Vol II* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 137-140.
18. For example, see Baruch Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia, 1990), Excursus 8 for a summary, and H.L. Ginsberg, *The Israelite Tradition in the Judaic Heritage* (New York, 1981), for greater detail.
19. He further sees the different facets of the holidays as representing different facets of God which he roots in kabbalistic terminology and the traits of mercy/justice. See the introduction in Mordechai Breuer, *Pirkei Moadot* (Jerusalem, 1986).
20. Both *Sukkot* and Passover fall on the fifteenth of their month. The Book of Jubilees (15:1-2) dates *Shavuot* as falling in the middle of the third month, meaning the fifteenth of *Sivan*. This is a date not mentioned in the *Humash*.
21. David Henshke, a student of Rav Breuer, develops this theme. See for example his "The Freeing of Slaves and the Sanctifying the First Born" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 4 (1990), pp. 9-22.
22. See a variety of critiques in *Deot* (Jerusalem, 1961) vol. 11, pp. 18-26, vol. 13 pp. 14-24, where Rav Breuer first presented his work. The criticisms include its being anti-scientific, unpersuasive and heretical. It is interesting to note that not one response was positive. Rabbi Carmy has pointed out to me that Breuer's approach was so novel at the time that people didn't fully understand it. Rav Breuer's approach is more palatable today in the context of modern literary scholarship of the Bible. See also footnotes 51 and 52.
23. Articles in *Megadim* are of uneven quality. The contributors range from beginner students to accomplished scholars.
24. Yoel Bin-Nun, "*Hamets uMatsa bePesah, beShavuot u-beKorbanot ha-Lehkem*", *Megadim* 13, pp. 25-45. For alternate interpretations of the repetition of the holidays using a similar hermeneutics see David Henshke, "*Mi-Maharat haShabbat-Mabbat Hadash*", *Megadim* 14 pp. 9-27; "*Minnayin leSefirat haOmer min haTorah*", in Moshe Arendt, Moshe Bar Asher, et al. (eds.), *The Jubilee Volume for Rav Breuer* (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 417-449 and Shmuel Kohen "*MiMaharat haShabbat*", *Megadim* 4 (1988), pp. 75-83
25. See William Hallo, "New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case-study in the Contrastive Approach", *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1977) volume 58, pp. 1-19. Hallo points out that the reliance on the sabbatical week and the

- celebration of the Sabbath was unique in the Ancient Near East to the Israelites. The other ancient Near Eastern cultures relied almost exclusively on a lunar calendar.
26. Specifically he suggests that they objected to the fact that the lunar calendar is not fixed, to the rabbinic power in determining when it begins and to the fact that people violated the Sabbath to testify about the new moon. See also Yehuda Shaviv, "Tractate Rosh haShana—Problems and Solutions", *Netuim* 1 (Alon Shevut, 1993) [Hebrew], as to the significance placed on the lunar calendar by the Rabbis of the Mishna.
 27. Rav Bin-Nun's articles are also particularly rich in theological insights and an ability to synthesize and connect seemingly unrelated material. He utilizes archeological and philological material extensively in his articles. He accepts and applies Breuer's notion of different aspects in a story accounting for the repetitions and contradictions but does so with a lighter touch, less mechanically and in ways that add to our understanding of the story besides just cutting and pasting the verses. For example, in the previously cited article he places these arguments in a broader context and develops a theme of the relationship of *matsa* to *hamets* as the relationship of an unfinished product to its final, mature state. He then in turn parallels that to the relationship between *Pesah* and *Sukkot*. This is not to detract from Rav Breuer. Rav Breuer initiated this approach; Rav Bin-Nun developed and refined it.
 28. It is also important to point out that Rav Breuer also draws on other Jewish sources independent of Bible studies such as the Brisker talmudic tradition which understands *halakhot* from different conceptual perspectives and interprets halakhic disputes as dependent on these different understandings. This approach conceptually echoes the notion that Torah consists of different and apparently mutually exclusive ways.
 29. *Rashi Bereshit* 1:1, which is in turn based on the *Midrash in Bereshit Rabba* 12:15.
 30. Rav J.B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith", *Tradition* 7 (1965), pp. 5-67.
 31. Amos Hakham, "On Biblical Research, the Documentary Hypothesis, and the Method of Aspects, Comments and Reactions in Response to the First Three Articles in *Megadim* 2" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 3 (1987), pp. 67-71.
 32. Hakham, *ibid.*
 33. One of the most valuable approaches in that regard is a literary one which is not only practiced by religious scholars but by those interested in literary theory. For some early examples see R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (NY, 1981), J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen, 1975), Kermode and Alter, *The Literary Art of The Bible* (Cambridge, 1987), M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indiana, 1985). Most scholars initially involved in literary studies of the Bible did not discuss its implications for higher criticism. See D. Berger, "On the Morality of the Patriarchs in Jewish Polemics and Exegesis", in C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (eds.), *Understanding Scripture: Exploration of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation* (New York, 1987), pp. 49-62 (reprinted in Carmy, 1996) for a brief early discussion of this question. The vast amount of literary scholar-

