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TORAT HASHEM TEMIMA: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF RAV YOEL BIN-NUN TO RELIGIOUS TANAKH STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of what R. Shalom Carmy calls the “literary-theological” approach to Tanakh study has been transforming the way we approach our most sacred texts. This approach demands a finely tuned text reading, along with a focus on the religious significance of the passage. The premises of this *derekh ha-limmud* include: (1) *Torah she-be’al peh* and traditional *parshanut* are central to the way we understand the revealed word of God; (2) it is vital to study biblical passages in their literary and historical context.¹

The rabbis and scholars at Mikhlelet Herzog (affiliated with Yeshiva at Har Etzion), and other contributors to journals such as *Megadim* (first published in 1986), have championed this literary-theological approach. One of the great leaders of this movement is R. Yoel Bin-Nun, a prolific member of the *Megadim* board and head of Mikhlelet Herzog. Through his articles and editorial policies, R. Yoel has been able to articulate what he views to be the proper boundaries of religious Tanakh study. Because he is so prominent an editor-contributor to *Megadim*, the story of his work is linked with the story of *Megadim*.

Additionally, R. Yoel presents a more comprehensive approach to Tanakh than many of his colleagues as a result of his unusual ability to address historical-archaeological scholarship on a serious level. He combines expertise in Tanakh, Hazal, *parshanut*, halakha, history-archaeology, linguistics, and theology. His fresh approach to Tanakh inspires, stimulates, and challenges his readers. At the same time, he actively confronts Bible Criticism by using its own tools of scholarship to respond to its challenges. In this essay, we will consider some of his principal contributions in *Megadim* and beyond.

DEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF TRADITIONAL LEARNING

Since *Megadim* stands at the cutting edge of religious Tanakh learning, it has engendered major policy debates. Perhaps three of the most controversial areas in the past twenty years have been: (1) R. Mordechai Breuer's theory of aspects; (2) encounter with non-Orthodox scholarship; and (3) the balance between *hiddush* and deference to classical *mefarshim*.

R. MORDECHAI BREUER'S THEORY OF ASPECTS

One of the most creative—and controversial—figures in contemporary religious Tanakh study is R. Mordechai Breuer. R. Breuer posits that the proposed divisions of the Documentary Hypothesis are correct, and he agrees with the critics that no one person could have composed the Torah. However, R. Breuer disagrees fundamentally with the critics by insisting that *no* person wrote the Torah; God revealed it to Moshe in its complex form so that the multiple aspects of the infinite Torah could be presented in different sections. Since we are limited as humans, we cannot simultaneously entertain these perspectives, so they appear to us as contradictory. The complete truth emerges only when one takes all facets into account.²

Soon after the inception of *Megadim*, Amos Hakham attacked R. Breuer for pushing the limits of traditional learning too far, and implicitly criticized *Megadim* for publishing articles from this school of thought.³ Among Hakham's chief objections were: (1) Fundamentally, R. Breuer's theory is simply Bible Criticism with a religious face; it is plausible only if one already believes in *Torah min ha-Shamayim*. (2) R. Breuer argues that only God could have written the Torah, since it is incomprehensible to humans—a specious argument about a Torah written “according to the language of people.” More responsible scholars have demonstrated that the Torah is a great literary work even by human standards, and therefore it is indeed comprehensible.⁴

In response to Amos Hakham, R. Yoel defended R. Breuer.⁵ R. Breuer fully believes in *Torah min ha-Shamayim*, so his approach is hashkafically acceptable.⁶ Of course, one may disagree with R. Breuer's learning methodology and his individual analyses. At the same time, however, R. Yoel fundamentally accepts R. Breuer's view that one cannot learn *peshat* in the Torah without some recourse to a methodology involving the synthesis of different aspects of the Torah.⁷

NON-ORTHODOX SCHOLARSHIP

Believing in “hearing the truth from the one who says it,” a number of authors in *Megadim* draw from non-Orthodox scholarship. A serious policy discussion arose, however, when *Megadim* published a review of the first volume of a new secular commentary series, *Mikra le-Yisrael: Ruth*, by Yair Zakovitch. In his review, R. Avraham Shama criticized Zakovitch’s non-traditional arguments on scholarly grounds. R. Shama also noted some positive features of the commentary, praising Zakovitch’s literary analysis of the text.⁸

Several readers expressed outrage that *Megadim* would review a non-traditional commentary altogether, let alone favorably. The publication of this review, according to those respondents, implicitly conferred legitimacy onto a commentary that clearly lies outside of tradition. In his response, R. Yoel maintains that printing the review did not lend religious legitimacy to the secular commentary; R. Shama specifically pinpointed and refuted the hashkafic problems with it. At the same time, there is much to be learned from critical scholarship (and, for that matter, there is much that the academy may learn from the *bet midrash*). Blanket attacks serve only to widen the gap between us.⁹

HIDDUSH VS. TIME-HONORED INTERPRETATIONS

Tanakh is an infinite work, and therefore there is always room for the *perushim ha-mehaddeshim be-kol yom* (new interpretations that develop each day). While R. Yoel’s comprehensive methodology fosters many creative interpretations, it also has drawn criticism from those who prefer the time-honored explanations of our predecessors.

An example of healthy debate revolves around the issue of why Yosef, after he rose to power in Egypt, did not contact Yaakov. In the inaugural issue of *Megadim*, R. Yoel proposed a novel solution to this problem. Unlike we (the “omniscient readers”) who are informed by the narrative, Yosef did not know the aftermath of his being sold, i.e., that Yaakov, deceived by Yosef’s brothers, mourned inconsolably. Yosef began to wonder: Why does Yaakov not search for me? Why did he send me to my brothers whom he knew were hostile? Perhaps Yaakov was banishing me as a result of my dreams! For years, Yosef mistakenly suspected that Yaakov participated in the plot to sell him! Therefore, Yosef never attempted to contact his father. Only when Yehuda quoted

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Yaakov's belief that Yosef was killed (*Gen.* 44:28) did Yosef learn what Yaakov had been thinking—and what the reader knew—all along. This prompted Yosef to reconcile with his brothers.¹⁰

In the following issue of *Megadim*, R. Yaakov Medan wrote a lengthy article disagreeing. Is it more likely that Yosef would suspect his father of being a total hypocrite; or that Yosef would blame his brothers, who certainly hated him? Moreover, Yosef did not break down when Yehuda informed him that Yaakov was saddened by Yosef's loss; he revealed his identity only after Yehuda asserted that Yaakov would die if Binyamin would not return. Thus, R. Yoel's thesis does not solve the problem.

R. Medan adopts the more conventional view that the narrative revolves around repentance, with Yosef orchestrating events to enable his brothers to repent for having sold him. Only after Yehuda demonstrated full repentance by offering himself in Binyamin's stead did Yosef reveal himself to his brothers. This answer is far more in line with the approaches of earlier *mefarshim*, notably that of Ramban.¹¹

In his response, R. Yoel observes that R. Medan's analysis does not receive textual support from what Yosef said or did. Yosef could not have orchestrated this repentance, since he could not have known that his brothers would come to Egypt in the first place. "The assumption that Yosef read *parshat ha-shavua* each week with Midrash, and knew all future events, is wishful thinking."¹²

On one level, this debate revolves around the Yosef narrative. However, there is an underlying methodological conflict as well. Finding questions against the views of earlier *mefarshim*, R. Yoel develops a new approach. R. Medan, in contrast, attempts to resolve the questions leveled against those earlier *mefarshim*. The reason this debate works so effectively is the palpable respect each writer has for the other. This is the sort of pushing and pulling necessary to refine truth within the boundaries of traditional discourse.

Alas, the dialogue is not always so respectful. In a later issue of *Megadim*, R. Yoel explains the existence of Amalekite raiders in *I Samuel* 27 and 30 after Shaul ostensibly had wiped Amalek out in chapter 15. R. Yoel deems Shaul's premature plundering of the Amalekites central to his failure. It detained his troops from pursuing Amalek, enabling many to escape. David, in contrast, thoroughly defeated the Amalekites first, and only then returned to plunder their camp.¹³

R. Yisrael Rozen responded with an article of his own, caustically attacking R. Yoel for employing non-midrashic exegesis. Stating that R. Yoel's method smacks of Karaism, he levels several strong textual cri-

tiques of R. Yoel's hypothesis and presents an alternative solution which he considers "Hazal's view."¹⁴

R. Yoel responds that advancing novel interpretations based on careful readings of the text is what *pashtanim* have always done. Additionally, it is wrong to present a "midrashic view" as though Hazal spoke with one unified voice; for each Midrash that R. Rozen quotes in his article, R. Yoel cites several others that present different viewpoints. Whether or not R. Yoel's hypothesis is compelling in his analysis of Amalek, it was important for this debate to have occurred in order to teach the readership not to speak so sharply and dogmatically, nor to reject *hiddushei Torah* (novel interpretations) just because they are new. Each argument must be weighed against the text evidence.

An unfortunate casualty of the foregoing dispute is that the arguments pertaining to the Amalekite issue in *Samuel* were not sufficiently refined. While the erroneous dogmatic pronouncements of R. Rozen were properly rejected, several of his textual considerations—which remain valid—were left unaddressed as a result of the confrontational nature of this dialogue.

R. THAU'S CRITICISM AND RESPONSES

In 2002, R. Zvi Thau of Yeshivat Har ha-Mor published a scathing condemnation of Mikhlelet Herzog and other similar institutions. That these teachers confront the challenges of Bible Criticism was enough for R. Thau to label them "poisoners," to consider their educational methods "the root problem of our generation," and to declare it preferable to forfeit one's life before studying in such institutions (*yehareg ve-al ya'avor*). R. Thau accused these rabbis and scholars of teaching Tanakh as a secular book, accepting heretical premises, and forcing these assumptions upon their students.¹⁵

Though the tone and content of this critique are reprehensible, R. Thau achieved the positive effect of spurring a productive dialogue at Yeshivat Har Etzion promoting further elucidation of the issues pertaining to the confrontation with contemporary scholarship. R. Amnon Bazak initiated the dialogue, respectfully yet strongly expressing chagrin over R. Thau's baseless and horrible slander of *yir'ei Shamayim* and *talmidei hakhamim*. Although there is much room for debate in the realm of educational policy and method, the teachers at Mikhlelet Herzog reckon with critical issues in Tanakh from a God-fearing perspective. Aside from the need to "answer the heretic" and to train teachers

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to handle a wide array of questions, there are positive contributions from scholarship that enhance our understanding of Tanakh. R. Thau's argument that non-Orthodox Bible scholars have nothing intelligent to say is erroneous; on the contrary, many issues and questions they raise are identical to those raised by traditional commentaries throughout the ages. R. Thau stated in his article that he does not know how to respond to critical questions; R. Bazak asserts that this willful avoidance shirks integrity in learning and educational responsibility.¹⁶

R. Bazak's article elicited a response from R. Mosheh Lichtenstein, who praises R. Bazak's defense against R. Thau's attacks, but then submits that introspection still is necessary. R. Lichtenstein outlines a substantial criticism of R. Breuer's approach and some potential religious hazards of the methodology taught at Mikhlelet Herzog. He raises some of the common critiques of R. Breuer's approach, including his acceptance of the divisions of the Documentary Hypothesis as "science" and his assumption that the Torah is incomprehensible to humans. In addition, R. Lichtenstein believes that R. Breuer's method leads one away from traditional commentary and *Torah she-be'al peh*, forging an entirely new approach to learning. While fundamentally accepting the possibility of contribution from historical scholarship, R. Lichtenstein espouses a negative view of the risk/benefit ratio from that confrontation.¹⁷

R. Lichtenstein's remarks in turn elicited responses from R. Breuer, R. Shama, and R. Yoel. R. Breuer defends his own methodology, insisting that it is specifically through his theory of aspects that one may fully appreciate the intimate relationship between *Torah she-bikhtav* and *Torah she-be'al peh*.¹⁸ R. Shama adds that R. Lichtenstein cannot escape the fact that there are difficult issues that must be confronted and explained. This does not mean that R. Breuer's approach is the only valid traditional method; but it certainly is one means of achieving the desired ends of interpreting the Torah from a God-fearing perspective. R. Shama notes that of course there are religious dangers in confrontation, but there also are religious dangers in avoiding careful study of Tanakh.¹⁹

R. Yoel reiterates the underlying hashkafic assumptions of his school of thought. It is necessary to grapple with literary and historical-critical issues for the sake of learning the word of God. R. Lichtenstein fails to distinguish between secular theories and underlying assumptions which R. Yoel and his colleagues categorically reject; and facts (e.g., contradictions, repeated stories) which R. Yoel and his colleagues address using methodologies different from those of the critics. R. Yoel concludes,

I reject the restrictive attitudes practiced in religious circles championed by those who never have studied these subjects thoroughly, and who are unqualified to address the essential issues. . . . One wishing to discuss the underlying assumptions of Tanakh learning first must clarify the depth of the subject matter in Tanakh and linguistics, and then we will be happy to hear his opinion on the important educational issues connected to this subject.²⁰

While these rabbis espouse substantially different views, their dialogue is exactly what is needed to clarify the most important issues in religious Tanakh study and education. Through the give and take in *Megadim* and other debates, R. Yoel has effectively articulated the boundaries of traditional learning and set the tone for respectful discourse. Once inside those boundaries, debates in *peshat*, methodology, and educational policy will always occur, enabling us to refine our understanding of Tanakh and how it should be studied even further.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO TANAKH

In his writings, R. Breuer steers clear of historical criticism, concentrating exclusively on literary issues.²¹ R. Yoel, in contrast, believes that these disciplines, when studied responsibly, combine harmoniously and deepen our understanding of Tanakh and other areas of Jewish thought.²² With his comprehensive approach to Tanakh, it appears that R. Yoel has overcome all of the major critiques leveled against R. Breuer: (1) He is not committed to the divisions of Higher Criticism, and therefore has autonomy in learning; (2) he weaves together all areas of inquiry, rather than artificially isolating the literary elements of the text; (3) his approach works just as effectively in *Nakh* as in the Torah. Below are a few outstanding examples of his synthesized approach.

JOSHUA: TEXT, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND THEOLOGY

Long before archaeologists began doubting the veracity of Yehoshua's conquest, the narratives in *Joshua* presented textual difficulties. *Joshua* chapters 1-12 convey the impression of Israel's conquest of the entire land. Chapters 13-19 then list many unconquered Canaanite cities. Fully aware of these discrepancies, our *mefarshim* have attempted to harmonize them. For example, Radak (on *Josh.* 11:23) reconciles the verses by suggesting that Israel captured the borders of the land, creat-

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ing the wherewithal to conquer the rest of the land over time. Alternatively, Ralbag suggests that since the war had ended, it was considered as though the entire land had been conquered.

With the rise of secular literary and historical scholarship, though, anti-traditional suggestions were presented, challenging the truth of the narratives. Many scholars argued that *Joshua* 1-12 and 13-19 represented conflicting literary traditions. Additionally, secular archaeologists insisted that the total conquest described in *Joshua* was not corroborated by findings in Israel dated to that period. Rather, the evidence suggests a gradual settlement of the land.

With his expertise in both Tanakh and history-archaeology, R. Yoel is uniquely qualified to shatter these arguments.²³ According to the narratives in *Joshua*, only Jericho, Ai, and Hazor are reported to have been burned to ground. Contrary to our initial impression of a total conquest, some of the 31 defeated cities listed in *Joshua* 12 could not be conquered even *after* Yehoshua's victories (e.g., Jerusalem in 12:10, 15:63; Gezer in 12:12, 16:10). R. Yoel concludes that most of Israel's victories under Yehoshua likely were battles of armies against other armies, rather than annihilations of those cities. The campaign described in *Joshua* 1-12, then, simply broke the back of the Canaanite military coalitions.

Thus, a comprehensive reading of *Joshua* suggests a gradual settlement of the land, since most cities remained Canaanite in Yehoshua's lifetime. Similarly, we should not expect archaeologists to uncover any more than three destroyed cities dated to Yehoshua's period, i.e., Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. R. Yoel argues that archaeological evidence corroborates the destruction of Ai and Hazor in Yehoshua's time (elsewhere, he wrote a full-length article concerning the proper identification of Ai²⁴), and we do not have conclusive evidence one way or the other from current findings in Jericho. In sum, the archaeological record is largely consistent with the account in Tanakh, if one only reads the text and considers the archaeological evidence carefully.²⁵

R. Yoel's text-historical analysis also is significant in his separate treatment of the ethical ramifications of the war against the Canaanites. As noted above, Yehoshua likely engaged the Canaanites in a military battle, rather than a war of annihilation against men, women, and children. While the war against the Canaanites was a battle against immorality, Israel retained her strong ethical character, fighting only out of necessity.²⁶

Thus, R. Yoel has demonstrated a strong link between the text complexities in *Joshua*; the theology of conquest; and the connection to what has and has not been unearthed by contemporary archaeologists. The

biblical text accurately describes the details of the conquest, and the archaeological record corroborates—rather than challenges, the story told in *Joshua*. Few are able to blend these disciplines so masterfully.²⁷

IVRI-HAPIRU CONNECTIONS

From the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. through the twelfth century B.C.E., cuneiform tablets from Sumer, Babylon . . . as well as hieroglyphic texts from Egypt, register the presence of groups of people variously referred to as . . . *hapiru*, *ḫr(m)*, and *ḫr(w)*. The meaning of these terms has long been subject to scholarly dispute, but they are all concerned with the same class of people. . . . The people referred to by these terms are distinguished not only by extensive geographic distribution but also by considerable ethnic diversity and linguistic variety. They everywhere constitute a recognizable subservient social class. . . . They are rootless aliens, deprived of legal rights. . . . Are the ‘Apiru and the Hebrews related? (Nahum Sarna).²⁸

In approaching this subject, one must examine biblical evidence and the relevant Ancient Near Eastern texts (ANET). Moshe Greenberg believes that the Hapiru referred to in ANET were refugees. Thus, the term denotes a class or social status, not a specific ethnic group. On the biblical side, Greenberg agrees with Ibn Ezra (on *Ex. 21:2*), that *Ivri* is an ethnic term referring specifically and exclusively to Israel.

Having studied the ANET evidence with his mother (herself a scholar of ANET²⁹), R. Yoel agrees fundamentally with Greenberg’s analysis of Hapiru that it is a non-ethnic term in ANET. However, based on a thorough case-by-case presentation, R. Yoel disagrees with Greenberg’s analysis of Tanakh, maintaining that *Ivri* in Tanakh likewise is not an ethnic term. For example, R. Yoel cites Moshe and Aharon’s first dialogue with Pharaoh. Moshe and Aharon began, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel (*Elokei Yisrael*): Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness” (*Ex. 5:1*). Pharaoh was unimpressed: “Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go?” (*5:2*). Moshe and Aharon retorted: “The God of the Hebrews (*Elokei ha-Ivrim*) has manifested Himself to us. . . .” (*5:3*). In his analysis of this passage, R. Yoel observes that farmers typically believed in local gods. In contrast, refugees and slaves could not rely on local gods; they needed a cosmic god who transcends geographical boundaries. As the king of an agrarian society, Pharaoh was unfamiliar and unconcerned with *Elokei*

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Yisrael. Pharaoh lived in Egypt, ostensibly outside the jurisdiction of a God in Israel. Moshe and Aharon therefore countered by referring to God as *Elokei ha-Ivrim*, i.e., the God Who transcends all boundaries, and Who can help the oppressed wherever they live.

In the case of Yona, most think that the prophet was giving an ethnic description when he proclaimed *Ivri anokhi* to the sailors (*Jon.* 1:9). R. Yoel, however, insists that exactly the opposite is true. The terrified sailors prayed to their local deities, and asked Yona to do the same. Yona responded that he was an *Ivri*, i.e., a refugee who serves the God Who is everywhere. This response shocked the sailors, who suddenly appreciated the religious quandary, that Yona was fleeing a God Who controls everything.

R. Yoel concludes that the term *Ivri* in Tanakh has the same basic meaning as Hapiru, referring to the Israelites not in an ethnic sense, but rather in the sense of their social status and belief in God Who is everywhere. In this instance, R. Yoel marshals biblical and ANET evidence to arrive at a plausible hypothesis to a long-standing scholarly inquiry.³⁰

THE MEANING OF GOD'S NAME

In his discussion of the meaning of God's Name, R. Yoel sifts through the evidence carefully in a linguistic-semantic study. He concludes that historically, there was a transition from a more active meaning in Tanakh (God will appear, will dwell, will save, will rule forever) to a more passive meaning in rabbinic literature (God exists). R. Yoel submits two reasons for this transition. First, the Aramaic root "to be" takes a more passive meaning. Hazal, who spoke Aramaic, would have been influenced by their usage of that language. However, there is a theological reason as well. After the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of prophecy and the Davidic dynasty, God no longer revealed Himself to Israel in the same way. Hazal therefore deliberately concealed the active meaning of God's Name, waiting for the time when God would again manifest Himself directly in this world. Implicitly, by writing this article, R. Yoel is reclaiming the active meaning of God's Name as part of the redemption process, i.e., God is actively manifesting Himself to our generation.³¹

CONCLUSION

In an article discussing R. Mordechai Breuer's methodology and contributions, R. Meir Ekstein observes that

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 highlighted on the front cover of the journal. 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.³²

R. Yoel's work is captured perfectly by that depiction. His love of God and desire to know Tanakh with all its dimensions permeate his work. His passion for Israel and his stress on the connections between our ancient roots and the present day similarly are regular features in his writings.

In an essay on Purim, R. Yoel notes that God's Name does not appear in the Megilla, nor do we find evidence of prayer or other overtly Jewish actions. The Megilla presents a world we have not yet encountered in Tanakh—a totally pagan and secular kingdom. Does God govern even there? The Megilla teaches that He most certainly does. God defeated pagans on their home court, using turnarounds, lottery, and "coincidence" to win.³³ This conclusion sounds strikingly similar to R. Yoel's idea of the need to defeat secular scholarship on its own court, using the tools of literary analysis and historical scholarship to undermine the critics' false assumptions.

Most importantly, R. Yoel's love for the word of God and intellectual honesty are inspirational to all who study his work. He successfully demonstrates the unity of text, tradition, history, and land in an overarching and untiring effort to serve God and to bring His teachings to life.

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NOTES

1. R. Shalom Carmy, "A Room with a View, but a Room of Our Own," in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. R. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), pp. 1-38.
2. For a summary of the issues involved, see the essays in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*: R. Shalom Carmy, "Introducing Rabbi Breuer," pp. 147-158; R. Mordechai Breuer, "The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction?" pp. 159-180; Prof. Shnayer Z. Leiman, "Response to Rabbi Breuer," pp. 181-187. An excellent analysis of the implications of Rabbi Breuer's method, with many important references for further study, is R. Meir Ekstein, "Rabbi Mordechai Breuer and Modern Orthodox Biblical Commentary," *Tradition* 33:3 (Spring 1999), pp. 6-23. For a collection of R. Breuer's articles on his methodology, and some of the important responses to his work, see *The Theory of Aspects of Rabbi Mordechai Breuer* (Hebrew), ed. Yosef Ofer (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2005).
3. Amos Hakham, "*Al Heker ha-Mikra, Torat ha-Te'udot ve-Shitat ha-Behinot*," *Megadim* 3 (Sivan 5747-1987), pp. 67-71. He was responding to the first three articles published in *Megadim* 2 (Marheshvan 5747-1986), pp. 9-44, including one by R. Breuer.
4. R. Shalom Carmy ("Introducing Rabbi Breuer," pp. 156-157) observes further that great human writers also employ multiple styles. Moreover, one may apply the theory of aspects in *Nakh* as well, whereas R. Breuer insists that the Torah specifically was written in this manner, since it was given directly from God.
5. "*Teguva le-Divrei Amos Hakham be-Inyan Torat ha-Te'udot ve-Shitat ha-Behinot*," *Megadim* 4 (Tishri 5748-1987), p. 91.
6. A few years later, R. Yoel defended an article by R. David Henshke (and therefore the religious integrity of *Megadim*) against similar charges. See R. David Henshke, "*Mi-Mahorat ha-Shabbat—Mabbat Hadash*," *Megadim* 14 (Sivan 5751-1991), pp. 9-26; and R. Yoel's response in "*Teguvot—Shetayim*," *Megadim* 15 (Marheshvan 5752-1991), pp. 99-101.
7. Though not committed to the divisions of Higher Criticism as is R. Breuer, R. Yoel employs this approach in articles such as "*Derekh Erets Pelishtim' Mul Derekh ha-Midbar Yam Suf: Mekor ha-Isur la-Shuv Mitsrayma u-Masbma'uto*," *Megadim* 3 (Sivan 5747-1987), pp. 21-32; "*Ha-Yom ha-Shemini ve-Yom ha-Kipurim*," *Megadim* 8 (Sivan 5749-1989), pp. 9-34; "*Zakhor ve-Shamor be-Dibur Ehad Ne'emru*," *Megadim* 9 (Tishri 5750-1989), pp. 15-26; "*Hamets u-Matsa be-Pesah, be-Shavu'ot u-be-Korbanot ha-Lehem*," *Megadim* 13 (Adar 5751-1991), pp. 25-45; "*Ha-Arets ve-Erets Cena'an' ba-Torah*," *Megadim* 17 (Elul 5752-1991), pp. 9-46; reprinted in *Pirkei ha-Avot: Iyyunim be-Parshiyot ha-Avot be-Sefer Bereshit* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2003), pp. 29-71.
8. R. Avraham Shama, Review of *Mikra le-Yisra'el—Perush Hadash la-Mikra (Megillat Rut)*, *Megadim* 14 (Sivan 5751-1991), pp. 148-150.
9. "*Teguvot—Shetayim*," *Megadim* 15 (Marheshvan 5752-1991), pp. 101-102.

10. “*Ha-Pilug ve-ha-Abdut: Kefel ha-Ta’ut ve-Halom ha-Gilui—Mippenei Ma Lo Shalah Yosef (Shali’ah) el Aviv?*” *Megadim* 1 (Nisan 5746-1986), pp. 20-31; reprinted in *Pirkei ha-Avot*, pp. 165-180.
11. R. Yaakov Medan, “*Ba-Makom she-Ba’alei Teshuva Omedim’ (Parshat Yosef ve-Ehav)*,” *Megadim* 2 (Marheshvan 5747-1986), pp. 54-78; reprinted in *Pirkei ha-Avot*, pp. 181-214.
12. R. Yoel’s response appeared in *Megadim* 2, pp. 109-110, and was reprinted in expanded form in *Pirkei ha-Avot*, pp. 215-222. For further elaboration and analysis of this debate, see R. Yuval Cherlow, *Yireh la-Levav* (Hebrew), (Tel-Aviv: Miskal—Yedioth Ahronoth Books, 2007), pp. 279-283.
13. “*Masa Agag—Het Shaul ba-Amalek*,” *Megadim* 7 (Shevat 5749-1989), pp. 49-63.
14. R. Yisrael Rozen, “*Al Shaul va-Amalek ve-Al ‘Mahafkhanut Hadshanit’*,” *Megadim* 9 (Tishri 5750-1989), pp. 81-87. They continued their debate in *Megadim* 9, pp. 88-94.
15. *Tsaddik be-Emunato Yibych—Al ha-Yahas le-Bikoret ha-Mikra, Ibud Sihot she-Nitenu al yedei ha-Rav Zvi Yisrael Thau, shelita*, ed. Netanel Binyamin Elyashiv (Jerusalem: 5762-2002).
16. R. Amnon Bazak, “*‘Yesharim Darkei Hashem—ve-Tsaddikim Yelekhu Bam.’*” *Daf Kesher* #845, Yeshivat Har Etzion (at www.etzion.org.il/dk/Ito899/845mamar.htm).
17. R. Moshch Lichtenstein, “*Ahat Dibber Elokim—Shetayim Zu Shamati?*” *Daf Kesher* #851, Yeshivat Har Etzion (at www.etzion.org.il/dk/Ito899/851mamar.htm).
18. R. Mordechai Breuer, “*Bikoret ha-Mikra ve-ha-Emuna be-Torah Min ha-Shamayim*,” *Daf Kesher* #864, Yeshivat Har Etzion (at www.etzion.org.il/dk/Ito899/864mamar.htm).
19. R. Avraham Shama, “*Teguva le-Ma’amaro shel ha-Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein*,” *Daf Kesher* #866, Yeshivat Har Etzion (at www.etzion.org.il/dk/Ito899/866mamar.htm).
20. R. Yoel, “*Ahat Dibber Elokim—Shetayim Zu Shamati?*” *Daf Kesher* #863, Yeshivat Har Etzion (at www.etzion.org.il/dk/Ito899/863mamar.htm).
21. See the criticisms of R. Breuer’s position by R. Shalom Carmy, “Introducing Rabbi Breuer,” p. 157; and Prof. Shnayer Z. Leiman, “Response to Rabbi Breuer,” pp. 181-187.
22. For an article discussing some implications of the use of Ancient Near Eastern sources in Orthodox biblical scholarship, see Prof. Barry L. Eichler, “Study of Bible in Light of Our Knowledge of the Ancient Near East,” in *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations*, ed. R. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), pp. 81-100.
23. “*Ha-Mikra be-Mabat Histori ve-ha-Hitnahlut ha-Yisraelit be-Erets Cena’an*,” in *Ha-Polemos al ha-Emet ha-Historit ba-Mikra*, Yisrael L. Levin & Amihai Mazar eds. (Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, Merkaz Dinur: 2002), pp. 3-16.
24. “*Ba el Ayit?—Pitaron Hadash le-Zibui ha-Ai*,” in *Mebkerei Yehuda ve-Shomeron*: second conference, Zeev H. Ehrlich & Yaakov Eshel eds. (Kedumim-Ariel: Makhon ha-Mehkar, Mikhlelet Yehuda ve-Shomeron, 1992), pp. 43-64.
25. In another article (“*Historiya u-Mikra—ha-Yelekhu Shenayim Yahdav?*”

- Sefer Bereshit*,” *Al Atar* 7 [2000], pp. 45-64), R. Yoel undercuts the arguments of those who deny the authenticity of *Genesis* based on the absence of external corroboration. He summarizes the critics’ main arguments, and then refutes them one by one using historical and literary arguments.
26. “*Sefer Yehoshua—Peshat ve-Divrei Hazal*,” in *Musar Milhama ve-Kibush* (Tevunot: Yeshivat Har Etzion, 1994), pp. 31-40. R. Yoel elaborates on Israel’s ethic of war—the need to retain a fully ethical character while still having the strength to fight evil when necessary—in “*Yedei Esav—Kol Yaakov*,” *Shenaton Amit* 5758-1998, pp. 13-20; reprinted in *Pirkei ha-Avot*, pp. 154-164. For further elaboration on the halakhic and hashkafic ramifications of this position, see R. Shalom Carmy, “The Origin of Nations and the Shadow of Violence: Theological Perspectives on Canaan and Amalek,” in *War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition*, Lawrence Schiffman & Joel B. Wolowelsky (eds.) (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2007), pp. 163-199.
 27. In an article discussing the altar found at Mount Ebal (“*Ha-Mivne be-Har Eval ve-Zihuyo ke-Mizbe’ah: Nitu’ah Parshiyot ha-Mizbe’ah ba-Mikra Le’umat Hilkhoh Mizbe’ah ba-Talmud*,” in *Lifnei Efrayim u-Binyamin u-Menashe*, ed. Zeev Ehrlich [Jerusalem: ha-Midrasha be-Erets Binyamin, Bet Sefer Seder Ofra, 1985], pp. 137-162), R. Yoel weaves together a thorough analysis of Tanakh, halakha, and archaeology. In an article on Binyamin’s tribal inheritance, R. Yoel attempts to demonstrate how the geographical location of that tribe has theological ramifications (“*Nahalat Binyamin—Nahalat Shekhina*,” in *Lifnei Efrayim u-Binyamin u-Menashe*, pp. 25-46).
 28. Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 378-379.
 29. Both of R. Yoel’s parents were Bible scholars, and R. Yoel cites them periodically in his articles.
 30. “*Ha-Ivrim ve-Erets-ha-Ivrim*,” *Megadim* 15 (Marheshvan 5752-1991), pp. 9-26.
 31. “*Havaya Pe’ila ve-Kiyumit ba-Mikra—Perusho shel Shem H’*,” *Megadim* 5 (Nisan 5748-1988), pp. 7-23. It is worth noting the analogue to the human component of pre-*hurban* activeness vs. post-*hurban* passivity in R. Yoel’s writings. In an article discussing the nature of prophetic prayer, he argues that from Avraham through Yirmiyahu, prophets prayed as active partners with God. Yehezkel, living at the beginning of the post-*hurban* era, inaugurated a new era of prayer characterized by passivity. See “*Nevu’at ha-Tefilla shel Avraham*,” in *Pirkei ha-Avot*, pp. 72-99.
 32. R. Meir Ekstein, “Rabbi Mordechai Breuer and Modern Orthodox Biblical Commentary,” *Tradition* 33:3 (Spring 1999), p. 15.
 33. “*Megillat ha-Hefekh*,” in *Hadassa Hi Esther: Sefer Zikaron le-Hadassa Esther (Dassi) Rabinowitz z”l* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 1999), pp. 47-54.