

**Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh***  
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**Shiur #02b:**  
**Composition of the Torah according to *Tanakh* and Jewish Tradition**  
**Part 2**

**B. The Five Books of the Torah**

Thus far we have seen that from the description that appears in the Torah itself and in the Books of the Prophets, there is no way of knowing how, when, and by whom the Five Books of the Torah were committed to writing and transmitted to the Jewish People. However, in the later books the picture changes somewhat, and we find explicit mention of the existence of a "Book of the Torah" that is more extensive than just *Devarim*. For instance, in the *Nechemia* we read:

"All the people gathered themselves together as one man to the broad place that was before the water gate, and they spoke to Ezra the scribe to bring **the Book of the Torah of Moshe**, which God had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the *kohen* brought the Torah before the congregation, both men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it in front of the broad place... And they read from **the Book of God's Torah**, distinctly; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading... And on the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, the *kohanim*, and the *leviim*, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, to study the words of the Torah. And they found it written in **the Torah which God had commanded by the hand of Moshe**, that *Bnei Yisrael* should dwell in *sukkot* during the festival of the seventh month; and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying: 'Go forth to the mountain, and fetch olive branches, and branches of wild olive, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make *sukkot*, as it is written.' ... And he read from **the Book of God's Torah** day by day, from the first day until the last day; and they observed the festival for seven days, with a convocation on the eighth day, as prescribed." (*Nechemia* 8:1-18)

In these verses Ezra reads verses about the festival of Sukkot from the "Book of the Torah of Moshe," which is also called "the Book of God's Torah." Here we cannot posit that the "Book of the Torah" refers to *solely* to *Devarim*, since the description of Sukkot in the "speech of the *mitzvot*" ([Devarim 16:13-17](#)) makes no mention of such

central details as the command to dwell in *sukkot*, the observance of the festival in the seventh month, the observance of the eighth day as a "convocation" (*atzeret*), or even the bringing of species. All of these details do, however, appear in [Vayikra \(23:33-43\)](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Hence, the Book of the Torah that was read in the days of Ezra included at least *Vayikra*, and it is defined as the Book of Moshe.<sup>[2]</sup>

We find a similar phenomenon in *Divrei Ha-yamim*, with the description of the observance of Pesach Sheni in the days of Chizkiyahu:

"Then they slaughtered the Pesach [sacrifice] on the fourteenth day of the second month... And they stood in their place as prescribed, according to **the Torah of Moshe, the man of God**; the *kohanim* sprinkled the blood, which they received from the hand of the *leviim*." (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 30:15-16)

It would therefore appear that extensive portions of the Five Books of the Torah were defined as part of the "Torah of Moshe." This Torah is clearly identified with "God's Torah" later in *Nechemia*, when the Jewish people commits, at the ceremony of the covenant, "to follow **God's Torah**, which was **given by the hand of Moshe**, God's servant" (*Nechemia* 10:30).

There are no further explicit references in *Tanakh* that prove that the Five Books of Torah were committed to writing and conveyed to *Am Yisrael*. At the same time, an analysis of the books of the Prophets and Writings does strongly suggest that they relate to all five Books of the Torah. This is clearly apparent in two phenomena: first, those instances in which these Books refer to verses in the Torah, whether openly or through allusion; and second, in the many chapters whose literary structure is built on stories from the Torah and which serve as literary parallels to them. Both phenomena are extensive in scope; we shall suffice with just a few examples of each.

### 1. Allusions in *Nakh* to the Five Books

In each of the Books of the Prophets there are many verses that are written in such a way as to indicate a clear connection to verses throughout the Torah.<sup>[3]</sup> For example, Rachav's words to Yehoshua's spies –

"I know that God has given you the land, and that the fear of you is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away from before you" ([Yehoshua 2:9](#))

clearly echo the words of the Song at the Sea:

"All the inhabitants of Kena'an shall melt away; dread and fear shall fall upon them..." ([Shemot 15:15-16](#)).

The reproach of God's angel, at the beginning of *Shoftim* –

"I raised you up from Egypt and brought you to the land which I promised to your forefathers, and I said, I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall pull down their altars... for they shall be as snares to you, and their gods will be as a trap for you" ([Shoftim 2:1-3](#))

is a faithful restatement of what God told Moshe following the giving of the second set of Tablets:

"Guard yourself lest you forge a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are coming, lest it be as a snare in your midst. But you shall pull down their altars and break their images..." ([Shemot 34:12-13](#)).

The description of God's glory filling the Temple –

"And it was, when the *kohanim* came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the House of God, so that the *kohanim* could not stand to minister, because of the cloud, for God's glory had filled God's house" (*Melakhim I* 8:10-11)

parallels the description from the *Mishkan*:

"The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and God's glory filled the *Mishkan*. And Moshe could not come into the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and God's glory filled the *Mishkan*" ([Shemot 40:34-35](#)).

When Yirmiyahu mourns,

"I saw the earth - and behold, it was void and waste; and the heavens – and they had no light" (*Yirmiyahu* 4:23),

as part of his description of the destruction, he is unquestionably hinting at the descriptions of the Creation, including,

"The earth was void and waster, with darkness upon the face of the deep" ([Bereishit 1:2](#)).<sup>[4]</sup>

There are many other such examples.

## **2. Literary Parallels in *Nakh* to Passages in the Torah**

Let us now turn our attention to the second phenomenon. In the last generation, much attention has been devoted to the literary parallels in *Tanakh*.<sup>[5]</sup> For our present purposes, of special importance is the discussion of parallels between the Books of the Prophets and Writings and the Books of the Torah. In many dozens of instances, we find clear connections between the Books – in terms of both content and language. Here, too, we shall suffice with a small number of examples.

The stories of Yehoshua recall the stories of Moshe, in many aspects. (For example, the sending of spies [[Bamidbar 13](#); [Yehoshua 2](#)]; the revelation in Jericho [[Yehoshua 5:15](#)] and the revelation at the burning bush [[Shemot 3:5](#)]; the crossing of the Jordan [[Yehoshua 3:3-16](#)] and the splitting of the Red Sea [[Shemot 14:21-22](#)]). Other parallels include the incident of the concubine in Giv'a [[Shoftim 19](#)] and the story of the angels visiting Lot in Sedom [[Bereishit 19](#)]; the story of Elkana, Chana and Penina [[Shmuel I 1](#)] with its obvious connection to the story of Yaakov, Rachel and Leah [[Bereishit 30](#)]; Eliyahu at Chorev [[Melakhim I 19](#)] and the parallel that it creates between him and Moshe; and many more examples that prove a clear connection between the stories in the Prophets and Writings, and stories in the Torah. In the great majority of cases, we are able to understand the significance of the parallel and the literary benefit in writing the stories in this way, so as to emphasize the messages that the *Tanakh* is seeking to convey.

In many cases we can also see that the story in the books of the Prophets is based on the text of the story as it appears in the Torah. Let us examine two examples.

1. There is an extensive parallel between the story of David's marriage to Michal and the story of Yaakov's marriage to Rachel.<sup>[6]</sup> In terms of content, the two narratives contain many common elements: in both cases there is a father-in-law who violates his commitment to the groom; the father-in-law has two daughters; and the groom ultimately pays double. The groom in each case flees from the father-in-law, with the help of father-in-law's daughters. In addition, in the story of David's marriage to Michal, we find an expression that is difficult to understand: "... the matter pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law; 've-lo mal'u ha-yamim' – and the days were not yet complete" ([Shmuel 18:26](#)). The commentators offer different possibilities for interpretation,<sup>[7]</sup> but it would seem that the reason that the text uses this opaque expression is to emphasize the connection to the story of Yaakov and Rachel, where Yaakov uses the same phrase in his words to Lavan: "Give me my wife, "ki mal'u yamay" – for my days are complete – that I may come to her" ([Bereishit 29:21](#)). This expression presents no difficulty in the story of Yaakov, since there a specific period of time is mentioned. It would therefore seem most likely that the author of *Shmuel* makes use of this expression, familiar to himself and to the readers, from *Bereishit*.
2. There is also an extensive parallel between the story of Ruth and Boaz, and the story of Yehuda and Tamar.<sup>[8]</sup> The deaths of Machlon and Khilyon parallel the deaths of Er and Onan; the kinsman declines to marry Ruth, just as Onan had avoided giving seed to his brother; both Ruth and Tamar undertake some activity at their own initiative in order to reach the patriarch of the family, who ultimately fathers their child, etc. *Megillat Ruth* makes explicit mention of the story of Yehuda and Tamar, in the blessing that is given to Boaz: "May your house be like the house of Peretz, whom Tamar bore to Yehuda" ([Ruth4:12](#)). In terms of language, there is prominent use of the root "y-b-m" (levirate marriage), which appears nowhere else in *Tanakh* other than in the commandment in the Torah

([Devarim 25](#)). Here, too, *Megillat Ruth* would seem to prove that at that time there was some familiarity with the more ancient Torah, including *Sefer Bereishit*.

We therefore conclude that despite the fact that the Books of the Prophets and Writings (up until *Ezra* and *Nechemia*) make no explicit mention of the existence of an extensive written Book of the Torah that goes beyond sections of *Devarim*, there are nevertheless clear connections throughout the Prophets and Writings to the Books of the Torah.<sup>[9]</sup>

### C. "It was given part by part"

As noted, the tradition concerning the writing of the Five Books of the Torah goes back to ancient times; by the period of *Chazal* it was taken for granted. In innumerable places, *Chazal* refer to Moshe as having written the Torah as dictated by God. To cite just one example:

"This teaches us that Moshe wrote what the Holy One, blessed be He, told him to. This is as it is written, 'Then Barukh answered them: He dictated to me...' ([Yirmiyahu 36:18](#))." (*Sifrei, Devarim piska* 357; and see [Bava Batra 15a](#))<sup>[10]</sup>

At the same time, opinions are divided as to when, and in what manner, the Torah was written and given to the Jewish people. The Gemara ([Gittin 60a](#)) records a debate in this regard. According to Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, "The Torah was given in full and finished form." Rashi (ad loc.) explains:

"It was not committed to writing until the end of the forty [years in the desert], after all of the sections had been given over [by God to Moshe]. And those that had been given over to him in the first and second year were set forth orally, until he set them in writing."

In contrast, Rabbi Yochanan teaches in the name of Rabbi Bena'a: "The Torah was given '*megilla megilla*'" – i.e., one part (literally, "scroll") at a time. The medieval commentators offer two main interpretations of this view. Rashi explains,

"When a unit was given over to Moshe [by God], he would write it down. At the end of the forty years, when all the sections were complete, he sewed them together with sinews."

According to this view, the Torah was given to Moshe piecemeal over the forty years in the desert; it was made up of many different units, and in the fortieth year Moshe joined them all together, thus creating the "Torah." Ramban, in his introduction to *Bereishit*, maintains that the "one part at a time" actually refers to only two parts (reflecting the literal, formal meaning of the expression '*megilla megilla*');

"When he descended from the mountain, he wrote from the beginning of the Torah until the end of the matter of the *Mishkan*, and the rest of the Torah he wrote at the end of the fortieth year."<sup>[11]</sup>

Although the Torah itself does not address this question directly, there are several verses that offer support for the view that the Torah was given "one part at a time" and, in accordance with Rashi's understanding, that there were many parts given over the course of the years. We find that in various places there is a mention of Moshe writing down some subject that is part of the Torah. After the war against Amalek, for instance, Moshe is commanded: "Write this for a memorial in a book, and repeat it for Yehoshua to hear – that I shall surely wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens" ([Shemot 17:14](#)).

We may conclude from this that at that time, Moshe wrote down the episode of the war.

In the second description of the Revelation at Sinai, we find:

"And Moshe wrote all of God's words... and he arose early in the morning, and he took the Book of the Covenant, and read it for the people to hear, and they said: All that God has spoken – we shall do and we shall hear." ([Shemot 24:7](#))

The Torah offers no elaboration on what exactly was written in the "Book of the Covenant," but from the people's response we understand that it included several commandments.<sup>[12]</sup> The journeys of the Jewish People in the wilderness were likewise recorded by Moshe: "And Moshe wrote their departures by their journeys at God's command" ([Bamidbar33:2](#)).<sup>[13]</sup> This presents the picture of Moshe writing short units; we might even conclude that the rest of the sections came to be recorded in the same way, until the entire Torah was complete. It is interesting to note that according to the French 13<sup>th</sup> century commentator, Chizkuni, when Moshe ultimately committed all the "parts" to writing, it was he himself who decided upon their order:

"But the Torah was given as a scroll, for as Moshe heard the commandments from the Holy One, blessed be He, he would write each one of them on a separate scroll. When his time came to leave this world, he organized the Book of the Torah and set the units in it, to this day, in accordance with the proper juxtapositions of them, as our Sages have taught." (Chizkuni on [Shemot 34:32](#))

The verses we have examined until now refer to the texts Moshe committed to writing concerning events that occurred in his lifetime. But what about *Bereishit*? We might posit that *Bereishit*, too, is one of the texts that Moshe wrote at God's command, and that is how Moshe came to know things that had happened before his time. However, there is also another possibility: from the Midrash Rabba it would seem, based on the approach that "the Torah was given part by part," that perhaps *Bereishit* was in fact written before Moshe's time, and that Moshe copied this

ancient text into the full Book of the Torah he wrote. According to the Midrash, Moshe knew of the stories of *Bereishit* from a book he read prior to the giving of the Torah:

"And Moshe went back to God and said: God, why have You dealt harshly with this people?'... ([Shemot 5:22](#))... This is what he said to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'I took the Book of *Bereishit*, and read it, and saw the actions of the generation of the Flood, [and] how they were judged – this was the Attribute of Justice; and the actions of the generation of the Dispersion, [and] of the people of Sedom, [and] how they were judged – this was the Attribute of Justice. But this nation – what have they done, that they have been enslaved and punished more harshly than all the previous generations? And if it is because our forefather Avraham said, 'By what shall I know that I shall inherit it [the land]?' ([Bereishit 15:8](#)), and You answered him, 'Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers...' (ibid. 13), then what about Esav and Yishmael? They, too, are his descendants, and they should have been enslaved too!" ([Shemot Rabba 5:22](#)).

This suggests that even before Moshe's time there existed a "Book of *Bereishit*" which included the exact text of the stories of the forefathers. The same source also indicates that the Jewish people, too, were aware of these texts:

"Increase the work load upon the men' ([Shemot 5:9](#)) – This teaches that they possessed texts which they would read every Shabbat, in which it was written that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would redeem Israel. Because they rested on Shabbat, Pharaoh decreed, 'Increase the word load upon the men, that they may labor in it, and not pay heed to vain words.' Let them not relax and let them not rest on Shabbat."

The *Midrash* offers no clue as to who wrote these texts, or how, but it does clearly suggest that some parts of the Torah had originally been written over different periods of time, and by different people, and only afterwards did Moshe gather them as part of God's Torah.<sup>[14]</sup> Moreover, in at least one place in *Bereishit* we find explicit mention of the existence of an ancient text:

"This is the Book of the Generations of Man; on the day that God created man, in the likeness of God He made him." ([Bereishit 5:1](#))

This book, with a genealogy of the ten generations from Adam to Noach, had existed from antiquity, and was later included – in whole or in part<sup>[15]</sup> – as part of the Torah of Moshe (or as part of the ancient Book of *Bereishit*, according to the *Midrash Shemot Rabba*). We shall discuss this in greater depth further on.

Next week we shall examine various opinions in *Chazal* and medieval commentators regarding the question of whether Moshe merely "took dictation" from God, or whether he had a hand in formulating parts of the Torah.



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<sup>[1]</sup> Our present discussion will not address the differences between the species mentioned in *Sefer Nechemia* and the description in *Vayikra* – "You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the beautiful tree, branches of palm trees, the branches of thick trees, and willows of the brook." Despite the differences, the linguistic connection between the two sources is clear.

<sup>[2]</sup> The same impression arises from the verses describing previous stages in *Ezra*. At the beginning of *Ezra* we read of the building of the altar for offering the sacrifices of the festivals of the seventh month, in the days of Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak and Zerubavel ben Shealtiel. There were told, "And Yeshua, son of Yotzadak, and his brethren the *kohanim*, and Zerubavel, son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, arose, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings upon it, as it is written in **the Torah of Moshe, the man of God**... And they observed the festival of Sukkot, as it is written, with the daily burnt offerings by number, as prescribed, fulfilling each day's requirement. And afterwards they offered the continual burnt offering, and of the new moon, and of all the sanctified times appointed by God..." ([Ezra 3:25](#)). Once again, the text reflects, in its plain meaning, commandments that appear in *Vayikra* and *Bamidbar*, but not in *Devarim*.

<sup>[3]</sup> The *Da'at Mikra* series includes, in the Introduction to each Book of the Prophets and Writings, an extensive list of parallels between that Book and the Books of the Torah.

<sup>[4]</sup> For further discussion of the extensive phenomenon of Yirmiyahu's use of verses from the Torah, see D. Rom-Shiloni, "*Ha-Torah be-Sefer Yirmiya: Ha-Technikot ha-Parshaniot ve-ha-Megamot ha-Idiologiot*," *Shenaton le-Cheker ha-Mikra ve-ha-Mizrach ha-Kadum* 17, 5767, pp. 43-87.

<sup>[5]</sup> A significant contribution was made by Yair Zakovitch, who collated dozens of "mirror narratives," as he calls them, distilling their meaning in his *Mikraot be-Eretz ha-Mar'ot*, Tel Aviv, 1985. For further reading see my work, *Makbilot Nifgashot – Makbilot Sifrutiot be-Sefer Shmuel*, Alon Shevut 5766, pp. 7-11, 194-200. (Although little has appeared in English on the subject of Biblical parallels, one recent work is that of Judy Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible*, Jerusalem 2011.)

<sup>[6]</sup> I discuss this parallel at length elsewhere: see *ibid.*, pp. 109-121, n. 15.

<sup>[7]</sup> Rashi explains: "He did not wait until the time that he [Shaul] had set for him was ended, to bring the hundred foreskins," and other commentators (Rabbi Yosef Kara, Radak, Rabbi Yishaya of Trani, and Metzudat David), adopt this interpretation, but the previous verses make no mention of Shaul stipulating any specific date or time. It should be noted that a similar expression is repeated in the next verse: "And David brought their foreskins, '*va-yemal'um*' – and they gave them in full number – to the king."

<sup>[8]</sup> For a discussion of this parallel and its significance, see Y. Zakovitch, *Mikra le-Yisrael – Rut*, Tel Aviv, 5750, pp. 26-28.



<sup>[9]</sup> In the coming sections we will address, in various contexts, the approach of biblical criticism, which sets the date of the writing of the Torah and the Books of the Prophets much later, during the period of the monarchy, or even during the Second Temple Period. The parallels between the Books of the Prophets and the stories in the Torah may be viewed as an expression of the pre-existence of the Torah; however, the critical approach argues that the connections arise from the fact that the authors of the Torah and of the Books of the Prophets wrote these works concurrently. Later on, I shall address at length the argument about the later authorship of the Torah. For now I seek only to demonstrate the connection between the Books of the Prophets and the Books of the Torah, even though it is not mentioned explicitly.

<sup>[10]</sup> Meaning that Moshe transcribed the Torah from God just as Barukh transcribed the words of Yirmiyahu.

<sup>[11]</sup> For further discussion of this debate, see A.J. Heschel, *Torah Min ha-Shamayim be-Aspaklariya shel ha-Dorot*, London and New York 5725, pp. 402-406.

<sup>[12]</sup> In this regard there is a disagreement among the sages of the Mishna (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Yitro, massekhta di-ve-chodesh, parasha 3*). According to Rabbi, the "book" indeed included only *mitzvot*: "The *mitzvot* that had been commanded to Adam, and the *mitzvot* that had been commanded to the sons of Noach, and the commandments that they [the Jewish People] had been given in Egypt and at Mara, and all the rest of the *mitzvot*." According to Rabbi Yossi, son of Rav Yehuda, the book recorded everything "from the beginning of *Bereishit* up to that point." This opinion serves as the source upon which Ramban relies in his interpretation as noted above, concerning the expression "*megilla megilla*." Amongst biblical academics the prevalent view is that the "Book of the Covenant" consisted of the chapters preceding this one in *parashat Mishpatim* – i.e., chapters 21-23 of *Shemot*.

<sup>[13]</sup> Another verse that deserves mention as part of this discussion raises some difficulty. Following the sin of the golden calf, Moshe pleads with God: "And now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, I pray You, erase me **from Your Book which You have written**" ([Shemot 32:32](#)). Which "Book" is being referred to here? Chizkuni explains: "We cannot propose that he means 'from the Book of the Torah' – for it had not yet been written. What, then, does 'from Your Book' mean? From the Book of Life, in which human beings are inscribed." His interpretation is adopted by several commentators (Rashbam, and see also Ibn Ezra and Ramban), as well as many scholars (see the summary in *Encyclopedia Olam ha-Tanakh – Shemot*, Tel Aviv 1993, pp. 197-198.) Other commentators, such as Rabbenu Bechaye, explain that the Book in question is the entire Torah, even though it had not yet been written completely. In any event, if we assume that "The Torah was given part by part," especially if we follow Ramban's understanding of just two parts, then we might explain that "from Your Book" means from the first part of the Torah, up to the story of the *Mishkan*, which Moshe received at Sinai. (This represents the view of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century supercommentary to Rashi, Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, ad loc.)

<sup>[14]</sup> See also Heschel, *ibid.*, pp. 430-432.

<sup>[15]</sup> *Chazal* refer to this book as "the Book of Adam" ([Bereishit Rabba 24:3-7](#)), and explain that this prophetic book included the names of the people of all generations. Elsewhere we read that God showed this book to Moshe: "What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He brought him the Book of Adam and showed him all the

generations that were destined to arise, from the Beginning until the Resurrection" ([Shemot Rabba 40](#)). On this basis, it would seem that only the first part of the book was included as part of the Torah. It should be noted that there are commentators who interpret the word "book" not in the sense of an object – a written text – but rather as an "account": "These are the accountings of the generations of Man" (Rashi, see also Radak).