

Shiur #3c: Later Verses in the Torah: The Phenomenon and Its Ramifications (continued)

We discussed previously the final eight verses of the Torah, and the possibility raised by Rabbi Yehuda ([Bava Batra 15a](#)) that these were written by Yehoshua. If there is already a view that these verses were a later prophetic addition, there is room to question whether it should be attributed specifically to Yehoshua, since two of these eight verses would seem to have been written from a far broader and more distant perspective than that of Yehoshua, who replaced Moshe as leader right after his death. First of all, there is the sense of great distance in time suggested by the expression, "but no man knows his grave to this day" ([Devarim 34:6](#)); and second, the text asserts, "There arose no prophet since then in Israel like Moshe, whom God knew face to face" ([Devarim 34:10](#)). The verse does not say, "No prophet will arise," but rather, "there arose no prophet." This would seem to reflect a perspective later even than that of Yehoshua, and if we adopt the view of Ibn Ezra and other commentators, it is entirely possible that it was added by some other prophet, not necessarily Yehoshua himself.

Thus, we have seen that among the medieval commentators there are two different approaches concerning the verses that appear to have been added at a later time. The more widely accepted approach attributes them to Moshe, who wrote them in a spirit of prophetic foresight. The other approach, advocated by Ibn Ezra and some of the sages of Germany, maintained that the Torah contains verses that were added by prophets at a later stage.

B. The Origins of Biblical Criticism

Ibn Ezra's approach was both innovative and complex, and for this reason he was careful not to set it down openly, so as not to lead into error those who might not understand him properly.^[1] However, his caution lost its effect with time. Some 500 years after he wrote his commentary, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), who may be regarded as the first of the biblical critics,^[2] arrived at the following sweeping conclusion:

"With these few words [Ibn Ezra] hints and at the same time shows that it was not Moshe who wrote the Chumash, but rather someone else, who lived at a much later time, and that the book that Moshe wrote was some other [work]."^[3]

It must be pointed out immediately that attributing this claim to Ibn Ezra was unquestionably misleading and a misrepresentation, as noted by Rabbi Shemuel David Luzzatto^[4] in his commentary at the beginning of *Devarim*:

"Now that Spinoza's books have already been disseminated in the world... I am forced to state that Spinoza wrote a complete lie... when he said that Ibn Ezra had hintingly written that it was not Moshe who wrote the Book of the Torah. It is true that Ibn Ezra alluded, via the hidden wisdom, that there exist in the Torah a

few additional verses from after Moshe's time, but nowhere in all his words and all his allusions is there any room to regard him as not believing that Moshe wrote his book... Spinoza, aside from having made some errors in his studies, also unquestionably spoke duplicitously, and in several places misled his readers, with cunning and guile."^[5]

Indeed, even Ibn Ezra himself speaks against broadening the idea of later additions to the Torah. In *Bereishit*, we find a list of the kings of Edom:

"These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom **before any king reigned over Bnei Yisrael**. And Bela, son of Be'or, reigned in Edom... and Ba'al Chanan, son of Akhbor, died, and Hadar reigned in his stead, and the name of his city was Pa'u, and his wife's name was Meheitavel, daughter of Matred, daughter of Mei Zahav." ([Bereishit36:31-39](#))

This unit, too, could seem to be a later addition, since it implies that there is already a king ruling over Israel. As we saw in the previous *shiur*, some of the medieval commentators did indeed view the unit in this light. Ibn Ezra cites a Karaite commentator named "Yitzchaki"^[6] who does suggest that "this unit was written in the days of Yehoshafat," but Ibn Ezra rejects his view with great vehemence:

"It is with good reason that he is called 'Yitzchaki,' for all who hear will laugh at him... and heaven forefend, heaven forefend that the matter is as he says, in the days of Yehoshafat, and his book should be burned."

Instead, Ibn Ezra proposes a different interpretation:

"And in truth, the meaning of 'before any king reigned over Bnei Yisrael' refers to [the leadership of] Moshe, as it is written, 'Vayehi' – And there was (or 'he became') – 'a king in Yeshurun' ([Devarim 33:5](#))."

We must ask, why does Ibn Ezra attack Yitzchaki so fiercely for suggesting that this is a later unit, offering instead a fairly weak alternative interpretation, while he himself accepts in principle that there are verses that were added to the Torah at a later stage?

Ibn Ezra offers no explicit reasoning, but it is possible that he is willing to accept the idea of later additions only with regard to fragments or single verses, but not with regard to entire textual units (with the exception of the conclusion of the Torah, where the addition does not occur in the midst of the text).^[7] In any event, it seems that Ibn Ezra's objection speaks for itself with regard to Spinoza's claim that Ibn Ezra himself believed that Moshe did not write the Torah.

To address the matter at hand: Spinoza's claim invited the first critical polemic concerning the period of the composition of the Torah, and the debate continues to this day. Obviously, the central point of contention surrounding verses that appear to be

later additions is whether they represent exceptions, as Ibn Ezra and the sages of Germany understood them to be, or whether they are only a small sample that is in fact representative of the biblical text as a whole, as argued by Spinoza and many of the scholars who followed him.

The debate over this question spills over into the subjective realm, and is closely bound up with one's fundamental point of departure. The approach of the medieval sages was based, of course, on the ancient tradition of the Book of the Torah having been written by Moshe at God's command, with a willingness in principle to recognize the occasional later addition. The phenomenon of later additions exists in almost every ancient text, and there is no need to bring a list of examples to prove this. Suffice it to note that in many places the *Geonim* and the medieval commentators refer to this phenomenon in connection with the writings of *Chazal*, especially in the Mishna and the Talmuds.

The alternative claim, that the phenomenon of later additions in the biblical text is not a matter of a few isolated examples, but rather indicative of a much broader body of later writing, runs as follows:

"These excerpts are not addenda; they are integral to the narrative and necessary in their context, and do not bear the signs of later addenda at all. They do not interrupt the flow of the narrative; they cannot easily be removed in such a way as to leave a logical text, and their language and style in no way differs from that which precedes or follows them."^[8]

On this basis, this approach concludes that the entire Torah is a composition dating to a time later than Moshe. Yet an objective appraisal of the verses we have discussed until now would seem to indicate the very opposite. Specifically such fragments as "And the Canaanites were then in the land," "Concerning which it is said this day, In the mountain God shall be seen," or "Behold, his bed is a bed of iron" precisely meet those criteria that are mentioned as possible indicators of (occasional) later addenda: they may certainly be deleted with ease from the text, and they are not integral to the narrative itself. Therefore, there is no reason not to adhere to the path set by the medieval sages, and to view these verses as exceptions which indicate nothing about the origins of the text as a whole.

C. Other arguments

Spinoza and his followers based their views not only on verses whose language seems to suggest that they were written after Moshe's death, but also on other arguments, which we will now examine, drawing a distinction between the different claims and their degree of seriousness.

One of the main arguments is as follows: if the Torah was written by Moshe, how is it that Moshe refers to himself in the third person,^[9] writing among other things, "And the man Moshe was extremely humble, more than any other person upon the face of

the earth" ([Bamidbar 12:3](#))? However, this argument may be rejected out of hand: the Torah was never presented as Moshe's own book, and it speaks in the third person for the simple reason pointed out by Ramban:

"Moshe wrote the lineage of all the early generations, as well as his own lineage and his actions and the events of his life, in the third person. Therefore the Torah says, 'And God spoke to Moshe and said to him' – as a narrator talking about two other characters. This being so, there is no mention of Moshe in the Torah until he is born, and then he is mentioned as though someone else was talking about him... And the reason for the Torah being written in this way is because it preceded the creation of the world, and obviously also the birth of Moshe, as the Kabbalah teaches – it was written in black fire upon white fire. And thus Moshe is like a scribe who copies from an ancient book and writes, and therefore he writes impersonally." (Ramban, introduction to *Bereishit*)

The Torah cannot be Moshe's own book, since parts of it describe events that preceded his own birth, while other parts describe events of which Moshe could not have had any knowledge. There is also a more fundamental aspect to this question: the Torah is not Moshe's personal book, narrating the events of his life and his actions; its importance is derived specifically from the assumption that it expresses God's word. There is therefore no contradiction between the fact that the Torah speaks about Moshe in the third person, and the assumption that Moshe wrote the Torah – as the traditional view has it – like a scribe copying from an ancient book.^[10]

Let us now examine a far weightier argument which Spinoza was the first to raise, and which has since been echoed by others. The problem pointed out by these critics is that in many instances the Torah mentions places by name, yet those names were given to those places only after Moshe's time. The best-known example concerns Avraham's battle against the five kings:

"And when Avram heard that his brother had been taken captive, he led forth his trained servants, born in his house – three hundred and eighteen – and he pursued them until Dan. And he divided [his camp] against them by night, he and his servants, and he smote them and pursued them until Chova, which is on the left side of Damascus." ([Bereishit14:14](#))

Avram pursues the kings northward, up until Dan, which is in the region of Damascus. The name "Dan" raises an immediate question: the original inheritance of the tribe of Dan was supposed to be in the center of the coastal region and the interior lowlands, as set forth in [Yehoshua \(19:40-48\)](#). However, the tribe of Dan did not succeed in conquering its intended inheritance (see [Shoftim 1:34](#)), and was therefore forced to find an alternative portion of land, as described at the end of *Shoftim*, in the story about Mikha's idol (chapter 18). Thus the children of Dan moved to the north, conquered the city of Layish, and only then gave the city its new name:

"And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan, their father, who was born to Yisrael. But the original name of the city was Layish."
([Shoftim 18:29](#))^[11]

How, then, does *Bereishit* speak of the city of Dan, while during Moshe's lifetime the tribe of Dan was not even supposed to live there? Why is the city not referred to by its original name – Layish (or Leshem)?^[12]

Biblical commentators throughout the generations have wrestled with this question, and have proposed various explanations. Radak offers two solutions. The first is that the name "Dan" is written here with prophetic insight, with reference to the future:

"[Thus named] because of its ultimate destiny, because when Moshe wrote this it was not yet called by this name; it was called 'Leshem.' And when it was conquered by the children of Dan, they called it 'Dan' after Dan, their father."

This interpretation continues the approach maintaining that some verses in the Torah were written through prophetic vision with reference to the future, even though they are formulated in the past tense.^[13] Yet this approach is somewhat problematic, for there is no hint in the text that it refers to a future reality. It is therefore difficult to understand why the generation that received the Torah was presented with a place name unfamiliar to them.^[14]

We shall continue next week with Radak's second answer.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

^[1] See Rabbi Yosef ben Eliezer in n. 7 below.

^[2] Along with Thomas Hobbes, who arrived at similar conclusions to those of Spinoza: see T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson, Baltimore 1968, e.g. p. 418.

^[3] B. Spinoza, "Theological-Political Treatise," *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, Cambridge 2007.

^[4] The biblical commentator Rabbi Shemuel David Luzzato (Shadal) (1800-1865) was also a philosopher, educator, and historian. He headed the rabbinical academy in Padua, and engaged in every branch of Jewish study, integrating his faith in God and in the Torah with critical research. I shall cite his approach to various subjects in this series.

^[5] Concerning Spinoza's distortion of Ibn Ezra, see also M. Haran, *Mikra ve-Olam*, Jerusalem 5769, pp. 546-549.

^[6] Opinions are divided as to his identity, but the prevailing view identifies him as Yitzchak ben Yashush of Toledo (982-1057). For more on this subject, see: U. Simon, "Yizchaki: A Spanish Biblical Commentator Whose 'Book Should be Burned' According to Abraham Ibn Ezra," in M. Brettler and M. Fishbane (eds.), *Minha Le-Nahum*, Sheffield 1993, pp. 217-232

^[7] As R. Yosef ben Eliezer (*Tuv Elem*) writes: "For if it had been written in the days of Yehoshafat, then an entire unit would have been added to the Torah, while the Torah itself stipulates, 'You shall not add to it' ([Devarim 13:1](#)). And if someone should raise the question, Did R. Avraham (Ibn Ezra)

himself not hint, at the beginning of *Devarim*, that the later prophets added words and verses to the Torah? The answer is that to add a word or verse in explanation of what Moshe had written, to clarify it, is not the same as adding an entire unit; for a word or a verse is commentary, whereas an entire unit is a textual addition."

^[8] B. Y. Schwartz, "*Ha-Torah: Chameshet Chumasheha ve-Arba Te'udoteha*," in Z. Talshir (ed.), *Sifrit ha-Mikra – Mevo'ot u-Mechkarim*, Jerusalem 5771, p. 177.

^[9] Spinoza made a mistake when he argued that only in part of the Torah does Moshe speak in the third person, while in *Sefer Devarim* he speaks about himself in the first person. Spinoza did not pay attention to the fact that nowhere does Moshe speak about himself in the first person as the "narrator"; every instance of his use of the first person, throughout *Sefer Devarim*, is a quotation from one of the lengthy speeches that he delivers before his death. As Ramban notes in his introduction to *Bereishit*: "Do not be troubled by the matter of Moshe speaking about himself in *Sefer Devarim* – 'And I pleaded and prayed to God, and I said' – since the beginning of that *Sefer* states, 'These are the things which Moshe spoke to all of Israel' – and thus the text records his speech in the first person."

^[10] M. Z. Segal (*Mevo ha-Mikra*, Jerusalem 5737, p. 124) argues that the argument of the Bible critics is "founded on the norms of secular literature, in which the author highlights himself. But this is not the approach taken by narrators of the *Tanakh*, who generally minimize their own presence." See also n. 13 ad loc. This argument is also made by Robert Alter (*The World of Biblical Literature*, ch. 8, New York 1992). Surprisingly, the same baseless claims are still being propounded in our generation, despite the simple fact that nowhere is there any suggestion that the Torah is presented as Moshe's own book. See, for example, R.E. Friedman, *Who Wrote The Bible?* San Francisco, 1997, p. 24; B.Y. Schwartz (see above, n. 8), p. 176.

^[11] In the brief parallel description in [Yehoshua 19:47](#), the original name of the city is recorded as "Leshem."

^[12] The same difficulty arises concerning the verses at the end of the Torah, where we read: "Moshe ascended from the plains of Moav to Mount Nevo, to the top of Pisga, facing Yericho. And God showed him the entire land of Gil'ad, **up to Dan**; and all of Naftali, and the land of Efraim and Menashe, and all the land of Yehuda, up until the utmost sea" ([Devarim 34:1-2](#)). The impression arising from a simple reading of the text is that the reference here is to "Dan" in the north. However, in this context – at least according to Ibn Ezra's approach – this does not present problem, since according to his view the final eight verses of the Torah were not written in Moshe's time.

^[13] This traditional approach had been mentioned by Ibn Ezra before he outlined his own "secret of the twelve."

^[14] The difficulty is noted by R. Barukh Epstein (1860-1942) in his *Torah Temima*: "Even though we find instances where the Torah names something on the basis of the future [as explained above, in *parashat Bereishit (10:11)*, on the verse, 'From that land emerged Ashur'], this applies only where it had no previous name. Therefore the Torah now names it according to the way in which it will be called in the future. But this is not the case here: until the name of the place was changed to 'Dan' it had a name that was known – Layish, or Leshem – and so why does the text refer to it by its later name?"