

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

Dedicated in memory of
Joseph Y. Nadler, z"l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi

Shiur 5a: Authorship of the Books of the Prophets and Writings

A. "And who wrote them?"

In contrast to the complexity surrounding the question of the writing of the Torah, as discussed in previous chapters, the picture is somewhat clearer when it comes to the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and Writings (*Ketuvim*). In the case of some books, especially among the Later Prophets, the matter is fairly simple: the text is written in the first person, by the prophet himself, with the exception of some introductory verses which indicate some editorial activity. With regard to some other books, such as the Early Prophets, we encounter a problem similar to the one faced in addressing the Five Books of the Torah, since they too are written in the third person, and the text itself gives no direct indication of the author's identity.

Chazal address the question of the authorship of these books, and are in agreement concerning most of them:

"And who wrote them?"

Moshe wrote his book and the episode of Bil'am,^[1] and *Iyov*.

Yehoshua wrote his book and eight verses [at the end] of the Torah.

Shmuel wrote his book, and [the book of] *Shoftim*, and [*Megillat Ruth*].

David wrote *Sefer Tehillim*, including the contribution of ten elders...

Yirmiyahu wrote his book and the Book of *Melakhim*, and Lamentations [*Eikha*].

Chizkiyahu and his companions wrote *Yishayahu*, *Mishlei*,^[2] *Shir Ha-shirim* and *Kohelet*.

The Men of the Great Assembly wrote [the Book of] *Yechezkel* and the Twelve [Minor Prophets], *Daniel*, and *Megillat Esther*.

Ezra wrote his book and the genealogy of *Divrei Ha-yamim* up to himself (or 'up to *lo'*')."^[3] ([Bava Batra 14b-15a](#))

From the *beraita* it would seem that there are two categories of authorship: works wholly attributed to the prophet himself, such as Yirmiyahu and Ezra, and works which were compiled, edited, and put into their final form at a later date than the events or prophets that the books describe. Thus Yirmiyahu is identified as the redactor of *Sefer Melakhim*; Chizkiyahu and his companions as the redactors of *Sefer Yishayahu* and the

Wisdom Literature attributed to Shlomo, while the Men of the Great Assembly are considered to be the redactors of the later Books of the *Tanakh*.

Yirmiyahu is the only one of the later prophets to whom *Chazal* attribute the authorship of the Book named after him. The reason for this would seem to be the extensive detail in the documentation of Yirmiyahu's prophecies, set forth in chapter 36 of his book. This chapter records the Divine command:

"Take a scroll and write in it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Yisrael, and concerning Yehuda, and concerning all the nations, from the day I spoke to you in the days of Yoshiyahu, until this day" ([Yirmiyahu 36:2](#))

as well as its fulfillment in Yirmiyahu's words to Barukh ben Nerya (36:4), and the detailed description by Barukh himself:

"They asked Barukh, saying, Tell us now: How did you write all of these words from his mouth? And Barukh said to them, He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink, in the book." (36:17-18)

The chapter ends with the testimony:

"Then Yirmiyahu took another scroll, and gave it to Barukh, the scribe, the son of Neriyahu; and he wrote in it from the mouth of Yirmiyahu all the words of the book which Yehoyakim, king of Yehuda, had burned in the fire, as well as many other words in the same spirit." (verse 32)

This would seem to suggest that the other prophets did not record their prophecies, and therefore *Chazal* regard the redaction of their works as having taken place after the period of these prophets.

The *beraita* in *Bava Batra* continues with clarifying several points:

"Ezra wrote his book and the genealogy of *Divrei Ha-yamim* until *lo'* – and who completed it? Nechemia, son of Chakhalia.

'Yehoshua wrote his book' – but the text says, 'Yehoshua bin Nun, God's servant, died' ([Yehoshua 24:29](#))! This was completed by Pinchas.

'Shmuel wrote his book' – but the text says, 'Shmuel died' ([Shmuel I 28:3](#))! This was completed by Gad, the visionary, and Natan the prophet."^[4]

In other words, the Books of *Yehoshua*, *Shmuel* and *Divrei Ha-yamim* were written by more than one prophet; a different prophet was needed to complete what the main prophet had written – especially for the ending, recounting the death of the prophet after whom the book is named.

Later on, the gemara records a disagreement as to the identity of the author of the Book of *Iyov*. The *beraita* attributes it to Moshe, but the discussion in the gemara

includes other opinions as to the time when the book was written: the various views place this work during the period of the Shoftim, in the time of Achashverosh, or with the return from the Babylonian exile.

Elsewhere, *Chazal* make further observations concerning the authorship of these books. Some opinions maintain that, like the Books of *Yehoshua* and *Shmuel*, Yirmiyahu himself did not write his entire book, but rather only up to a certain point, as the plain meaning of the text would seem to suggest.

"Up to what point is Yirmiyahu's prophecy recorded? Rav Yaakov and Rav Abba disagree with Rabbi El'azar and Rabbi Yochanan. One opinion says, 'Up until, 'He that scattered Israel will gather them up' ([Yirmiyahu 31:9](#)), while the other says, 'Up until, 'There is hope for your future, says God, and your children will return to their border' (ibid. 16)."^[5]

Clearly, the questions concerning the authorship of the Books of the prophets are less critical and sensitive than the question of the authorship of the Torah. With regard to the Torah, very few medieval commentators – and sometimes even then only through allusion – speak of the existence of verses added at a later date, while in relation to the Books of the Prophets and the Writings many commentators have no objection to stating openly that a certain verse was added by the redactor. Such a position can be supported by the *beraita* we have cited above which claimed that most of these books did indeed have redactors who could well have added clarifications as necessary, as any faithful editor would do.

Moreover, the commentators on *Tanakh* offer additional possibilities as to the identities of the various authors. Of particular note is the view of Abravanel. In his introduction to the Early Prophets he argues against the identification offered in the *beraita* concerning the early prophets, *inter alia* because of the expression "to this day" which appears in these books, seemingly indicating that they were written in a later period. Concerning *Sefer Yehoshua*, he writes:

"Upon examining the verses I perceived that the view maintaining that Yehoshua wrote his book is extremely unlikely – not only because the end of the text notes that 'Yehoshua died' (and this issue in fact gives rise to the discussion in the gemara), but also because of other places in the text which indicate that they were not written by Yehoshua. In setting up the stones in the Jordan River, the text says, 'And they remained there to this day' ([Yehoshua 4:9](#))...^[6] If Yehoshua wrote all of this, how could he say, 'to this day'? For he wrote close to the time of the events, while the expression 'to this day' necessarily implies that it was written a long time after this happened. Likewise we find, concerning the inheritance of the tribe of Dan, that the text specifies, 'And the border of Dan was too small for them, so the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem' ([Yehoshua 19:47](#)) – but we know that this [fight] took place at the time of the statue of Mikha, at the end of the period of the Judges. This is decisive evidence that the text could only have been written many years after Yehoshua's death,

and hence Yehoshua could not have written it... And on the basis of all of this I conclude that Yehoshua did not write his book; rather, Shmuel the prophet wrote his book [Yehoshua], as well as *Sefer Shoftim*... And do not be surprised that I differ in this matter from the view of *Chazal*, for even in the *Gemara*, *Chazal* are not unanimous in this regard, and there are dissenting opinions as to whether it was Moshe who wrote *Sefer Iyov*, and whether Yehoshua wrote the final eight verses of the Torah. And since *Chazal* themselves question the authorship in some cases, it is not so far-fetched for me, too, to propose a more logical explanation in keeping with the verses and their sense."

Abravanel proves, from the various disagreements that are apparent already in *Chazal's* discussion, that the *beraita* is not based on a longstanding tradition, but rather on logical deduction from a review of the verses of the text. Hence, he concludes that the question of identifying the authors of the books of *Tanakh* must continue to be discussed and decided on the basis of the text itself and the indications that it supplies. Since *Sefer Yehoshua* includes verses which, demonstrably, could not have been written by Yehoshua himself,^[7] Abravanel concludes that the author must have been a later figure. He proposes Shmuel presumably since *Chazal* also attribute the authorship of *Sefer Shoftim* to him.

Later on, Abravanel offers a more moderate possibility:

"If you wish to say that Yehoshua wrote his book, as *Chazal* maintain, then we must posit that Yirmiyahu, or Shmuel, gathered these narratives and put them together into a book, making additions as they saw fit with their Divine inspiration."

According to this approach, Yehoshua did indeed write the great majority of his book, but it underwent later redaction by some other prophet (either Shmuel or Yirmiyahu). Abravanel is preceded in this view by the classical *Tanakh* commentators, who likewise point to specific verses in *Sefer Yehoshua* which were added by an editor at a later stage. For instance, concerning the verses that describe the conquest of Kiryat Arba and Kiryat Sefer ([Yehoshua 15:13-19](#)), which according to *Sefer Shoftim* ([1:10-15](#)) took place only at the beginning of the period of the Judges, Rashi writes in his commentary (ad loc.) that these verses were written

"... after the death of Yehoshua, for during Yehoshua's time Chevron had not yet been conquered, as we read in *Sefer Shoftim*, and the matter is noted here only because of the division of the land."

Concerning the verse that Abravanel cites, mentioning the battle of the children of Dan at Leshem, Rashi and Radak likewise maintain that the reference is to an event that occurred during the period of the Judges, and is thus recorded in *Shoftim*.

A similar phenomenon occurs with regard to *Sefer Shmuel*. Here, too, we find the expression "to this day" appearing in several places,^[8] and here too it testifies to a

distance from the time of the events. This distance of time is especially apparent in the verse,

"In early times (*Iefanim*) in Israel, a person who went to inquire of God would say, 'Come and let us go to the seer' – for the prophet of our days was previously called a 'seer' (*ro'eh*)." [\(Shmuel I 9:9\)](#)

The writer of this verse finds it necessary to explain Shaul's use of the word 'seer' (*ro'eh*) in reference to the prophet, since the word was already obsolete at the time of the writing. Rabbi Yosef Kara^[9] notes this in his commentary on this verse:

"A person who would be referred to in that generation as a '*navi*' (prophet), would in previous generations have been called a '*ro'eh*' (seer). In other words, when this book was written, the seer was once again referred to as a '*navi*,' because this book was not written in the time of Shmuel... And our Sages, of blessed memory, stated that Shmuel wrote the book, but He Who illuminates the world turns darkness into light, and turns a twisted path into a straight road."

The same approach is adopted by Abravanel, and he offers a similar explanation:

"What appears correct to me in this matter is that Shmuel, Natan and Gad all wrote their works individually – each writing what happened during his own lifetime, and all of these testimonies were gathered together by Yirmiyahu the prophet, and he joined them together into a single book. For if this was not so, who gathered these texts, which were composed by different people? For the text does not record that the prophets wrote their testimonies consecutively; rather, each wrote a book in his own right. It seems, then, that when Yirmiyahu sought to write *Sefer Melakhim*, he knew that *Sefer Shemuel* was proximate to it, and he gathered the testimonies of the prophets mentioned in the book – and there is no doubt that he also added comments of clarification, as he saw fit. This explains the expression, 'to this day,' and this explains the verse, 'In early times in Israel...'"

Opinions are similarly divided concerning the authorship of *Sefer Tehillim*. In the *beraita* quoted above, *Chazal* maintain that King David wrote the book, "through (or 'incorporating') ten elders," and the list includes ten individuals, some of whom lived earlier than David, while others were his contemporaries:

"Adam, and Malki-Tzedek, and Avraham, and Moshe, and Heiman, and Yedutun, and Asaf, and the three sons of Korach."

Rashi comments: "He wrote the things which these elders had said, for they lived before him, and some lived in his own period."

According to Rashi, David was not only the author of some of the psalms in *Sefer Tehillim*, but also the redactor of the book, collating psalms that had been uttered by others – some in previous generations, some in his own generation.

Midrash Shir Ha-shirim cites other opinions:

"Ten people uttered the Book of *Tehillim*: Adam, Avraham, Moshe, David, Shlomo – concerning these five there is no argument. Concerning the other five there is disagreement between Rav and Rabbi Yochanan. Rav counts Asaf, Heiman, Yedutun individually, and the three sons of Korach as one, and Ezra. Rabbi Yochanan counts Asaf and Heiman and Yedutun as one and the three sons of Korach individually, and Ezra." (*Shir Ha-shirim Rabba, parasha 4, 1, 4*).

Attention should be paid to two central differences between these sources. First, according to the midrash above, the general idea is not that David wrote what ten people had said, but rather that "ten people uttered *Sefer Tehillim*," and David is listed as one of them, and is one of the five individuals whose identity is agreed upon unanimously. Second, the midrash also counts Ezra among the authors of psalms – in other words, there are psalms that were included in *Sefer Tehillim* after the time of David. Indeed, this would seem to be borne out by the text itself, since there are a number of psalms which describe exile and destruction, the most famous of them being chapter 137 – "By the rivers of Babylon."^[10]

A third opinion concerning the authorship of *Sefer Tehillim* appears in Rav Sa'adia Gaon's commentary, which attributes the entire work to David, awarding no status to the ten elders mentioned in the *beraita*:

"The entire Book is a prophecy that was prophesied by David, just as the entire Jewish people unanimously refers to it as the 'songs of David'; likewise, in many sources it is attributed to him... And even though one might think that it also contains prophecies or psalms of others, in addition to David – such as Asaf, and Heiman, and Yedutun, and Eitan, and Moshe the man of God, and others – one must know that it is not so. Rather there is nothing in it that was not of David... And since this is clear, Yedutun is mentioned along with David in some places only to tell us that that psalm was a prophecy of David, yet named after Yedutun; Yedutun is a partner together with Asaf, and the sons of Korach, and Heiman – all the participants in the name of that psalm declare it and sing it together. But the psalm,^[11] 'A prayer unto Moshe the man of God,' is a song that was conveyed to the sons of Moshe who lived at the time of David, in order that they could sing it..." (Rav Sa'adia Gaon's introduction to his Commentary on *Sefer Tehillim*, Kapach edition, pp. 28-29)

In Rav Sa'adia Gaon's view, *Sefer Tehillim* in its entirety was composed solely by David, and was uttered through prophecy. While this opinion is certainly representative of and integral to a broader philosophical context,^[12] it is clear that Rav Sa'adia Gaon, too, did not regard the view of the *beraita* quoted above as binding.

The impression arising from these sources is that the *beraita* in *Bava Batra* does not represent a tradition that was accepted unanimously, and that there are authorities who differed – both in later sources among *Chazal*, and also amongst medieval commentators. In any event, our discussion will be conducted on the basis of the text itself, and will attempt to address in depth the questions surrounding the redaction of the various Books.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

^[1] The commentators question the need to specify the story of Bil'am, since it is part of "Moshe's book." Rashi notes that this comes to tell us that Moshe included this episode "even though it did not serve any purpose of Moshe, or his teaching, or the record of his actions." The Ritva raises a different possibility: "Some say that this does not refer to the story of Bil'am that is recorded in the Torah, for that was written by God, just like all the rest of the Torah. Rather, it is a document in its own right, which Moshe wrote in greater details, and it was in their [*Chazal*'s] possession." See A.J. Heschel, *Torah Min HaShamayim be-Aspaklaria shel ha-Dorot*, London and New York 5725, pp. 435-437.

^[2] The basis for the attribution of *Sefer Mishlei* to Chizkiyahu is, of course, the verse, "These, too, are the proverbs of Shelomo which were copied by the men of Chizkiya, king of Yehuda" ([Mishlei25:1](#)).

^[3] The commentators are divided as to the meaning of these closing words. Rashi explains, "up until his own lineage," but the later commentators point out that Ezra is not mentioned anywhere in *Divrei Ha-yamim*. The Maharsha proposes that the reference is to Ezra's father, Seraya ben Azarya ([Ezra 7:1](#)), who is mentioned in *Divrei Ha-yamim* I 5:40. Rabbeinu Chananel writes that what *Chazal* mean is that he wrote up until the word '*lo*,' in the verse, "And he had (*ve-lo*) brothers, the sons of Yehoshafat – Azarya and Yechiel and Zeckharyahu and Azaryahu and Mikhael and Shefatyahu; all of these were the sons of Yehoshafat, king of Israel" (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 21:2). This would suggest that Ezra concluded his writing with the end of the life of King Yehoshafat. However, this interpretation is difficult to accept, since it is not clear why Ezra would end his account specifically at this point [interestingly, the Ritva seems to have understood that the individual referred to in the verse as Azaryahu was actually Ezra himself!]. In addition, as the Tosafot point out (ad loc.), why would *Chazal* have written "until '*lo*'" if the word as it appears in the verse is actually "*ve-lo*"? Maharshal takes a completely different view of the Gemara here. He maintains that the words should not be read as '*ad* (until) *lo*,' but rather '*ed* (a witness) to him' – i.e., "evidence for his own lineage in *Sefer Ezra*." He goes on to propose that the words of the Gemara that we will quote below, testifying that the end of the Book was written by Nechemia, actually refer to the Book of *Ezra*, and not the Book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*.

^[4] This final statement would seem to be based on the penultimate verse (29:29) of *Divrei Ha-yamim* I: "The acts of King David, from beginning to end, are written in the

book of Shmuel the seer and in the book of Natan the prophet and in the book of Gad the visionary."

^[5] *Eikha Rabba, Petichta* 34, Buber edition, p. 20. (The midrash is also cited in *Yalkut Shimoni, Yirmiyahu*, 281.)

^[6] Here Abravanel adds other instances in *Sefer Yehoshua* where the same expression appears.

^[7] In addition to the verses cited by Abravanel we might add, "And Yehoshua turned back at that time and he captured Chatzor, and he killed its king by the sword, for Chatzor had previously been the chief of all of these kingdoms" ([Yehoshua 11:10](#)). This suggests that the redactor treats the preeminence of Chatzor as a fact that had been well-known in the past, but that the contemporary audience needs reminding of.

^[8] See [Shmuel I 5:5](#); 6:18; 27:6; 30:25; [Shmuel II 4:3](#); 6:8; 18:18.

^[9] We will be examining Rabbi Kara and his exegetical approach in detail in chapter 8.

^[10] Rashbam adopts this approach in his commentary on *Tehillim*, which was only recently discovered, and parts of which were published by A. Mondschein in his article, "Al Gilui ha-Perush ha-'Avud' shel Rashbam le-Sefer Tehillim," *Tarbiz* 79 1, 5770-5771, pp. 91-141. *Inter alia*, Rashbam argues that some of the "songs of ascent" (*shirei ha-ma'alot*), such as chapters 120 and 123, were composed in Babylonian exile, or at the beginning of the Second Temple Period. See *ibid.* pp. 130, 133.

^[11] [Psalm 70](#).

^[12] As part of his dispute with the Karaites. See U. Simon, *Arba Gishot le-Sefer Tehillim – mi-RaSaG ve-ad Ibn Ezra*, Ramat Gan 5742, pp. 17-24.