

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, by Joel S. Baden. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012, 392 pages. Reviewed by Ben Zion Katz.

In this latest addition to the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library, as its subtitle implies, Dr. Baden, an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at the Yale Divinity School, attempts to renew the documentary hypothesis (DH), the leading academic theory as to how the first five books of the Bible (Genesis – Deuteronomy, also known as the Pentateuch or Torah) came to be written.

Traditional faith communities of Jews and Christians believe that the Pentateuch is, by and large, God's revealed word to Moses. The DH, on the other hand, posits four separate written documents that immediately preceded the Pentateuch as we have it, each of which told the story of early Israel in its own way. While the general outlines of the story are the same in each document (the world is created and experiences a flood; there are three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Israelites spend time in Egypt; and there is a revelation at Sinai), many of the details differ. For example, in one of the posited documents ("J"), God's personal name YHVH (often spelled "Jehovah") was known even in the patriarchal period, while in another ("E") God is referred to mainly by a more generic term (Elohim) until the time of Moses. A third ("P") also does not use the name YHVH until the time of Moses and is concerned mainly, but not exclusively, with issues related to the Priesthood, which comprise a significant portion of the last 15 chapters of Exodus, the entire Book of Leviticus, and the first 10 chapters of Numbers. Finally, "D" is said to contain most of the Book of Deuteronomy, which is cast mainly as a series of first-person sermons by Moses. The documents were then braided together in antiquity by one or more editors, usually called redactors; Dr Baden believes that there was only a single redactor, whom he styles the compiler.

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As one may infer from the names of some of the documents, early efforts at separating the purported Pentateuchal sources relied mainly on the name of God used in various narratives. What Dr. Baden is doing in his renewal of the DH is to focus on the *literary* aspects of the theory, arguing that the DH is a literary solution to a literary problem. If certain names of God (or other characteristics of the postulated documents) then emerge, that is secondary, and said to reflect the style, theme, or theology of the original hypothesized document. However, those styles, themes, names of God or theologies are not used *a priori* as criteria for disentangling a text (except in one case, discussed below), as had been done in the past. A second major refurbishment of the DH by Dr Baden is the assumption of a single compiler with little or no original literary activity of his own. The reason the DH was first postulated over the last several centuries (mainly since the Enlightenment) is that the Torah seemingly has many contradictions and repetitions. If the compiler is allowed much original literary activity (as assumed, for example, by Richard Elliot Friedman, another popularizer of the DH), then the questions of contradiction and repetition are merely shifted from the original author (or Author) to the redactor/compiler. By ruling out this possibility, Dr Baden is removing one of the objections to the DH that have been raised over the last hundred years.

*The Composition of the Pentateuch* alternates chapters between well-chosen examples (Case Studies) of how Dr. Baden analyzes and separates texts he deems composites and chapters that are more concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of the DH. For the DH to hold water, each document, when isolated, must be shown to be continuous and complete in its own right. Dr. Baden devotes several chapters to these ideas; an entire chapter is also devoted to the compiler. Chapter 2 is probably the weakest in the book, as Dr. Baden sets up several straw men (form and tradition criticism, the European approach) only to knock them down.

Many of the literary problems cited by Dr. Baden, which he uses to separate the source documents, are not necessarily contradictions that require atomization of the text to be resolved. For example, Dr. Baden repeatedly refers to the episodes of the Israelites thirsting in the wilderness in Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:2-13 as a doublet (e.g., pp. 18, 24); however, only in the latter episode does Moses lose his temper (*Listen, you rebels*; Num. 20:10), which could be due to Moses becoming weary after shepherding the

Israelites in the desert for 40 years. Exodus 4:18 and 4:19 are not necessarily contradictory: in the first verse Moses tells Jethro that he will be leaving Midian and, in the second, God informs Moses of the exact time to depart (p. 121). In his discussion of Exodus 18:2, Dr. Baden leaves out the words *after he sent her*, which resolves the contradiction with Exodus 4:20 (p. 121). He sees tension between Exodus 12:31-34, where the Israelites are urged to leave Egypt, and the next two verses, where they ask the Egyptians for silver and gold vessels and clothing (p. 122). Dr. Baden also sees tension between Genesis 47:29-31, where Jacob is nearing death, and Genesis 48:1, where Jacob appears to be on his deathbed (p. 122).

In his argument for the coherence of E (chapter 3), Dr. Baden outlines "[t]he texts that constitute th[e]...central E story" (p. 117), such that Exodus 33:4 follows 32:35. However, if that were the case, the Israelites should not have heard anything (Ex. 33:4), but should rather have seen the consequences of God's plague following the Golden Calf episode (Ex. 32:35); hearing only makes sense in context following Exodus 33:1-3, where God says He will not personally accompany the Israelites to Canaan. In addition, if Numbers 11:11 follows Exodus 34:28, it is not clear why Moses is complaining.

In his argument for the completeness of P (chapter 5), besides the gaps he himself acknowledges (p. 183) there are others: Dr. Baden claims that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah rates only an *en passant* reference in P (Gen. 19:29) because the story was so well known, and that Moses needed no introduction; however, this countermands his argument that P is an independent, self-contained source. Furthermore, Joseph just appears in Egypt and becomes viceroy according to Dr. Baden's presentation of P (Gen. 41:45, p. 180, incorrectly cited as 40:45); in a footnote (p. 301, n. 41) he argues that there was a duplicate sentence in J and P stating that Joseph was taken down to Egypt, the latter of which was deleted. Even granting the existence of this phantom verse in P, there is still no explanation in P of how or why Joseph arrived in Egypt (or of his death [p. 186], as Dr. Baden acknowledges).

Moreover, the text separations that Dr. Baden proposes in the Case Study chapters often create as many literary problems as they purportedly solve. For example, in his separation of the selling of Joseph story into an A (J) and a B (E) component (Case Study I), neither story stands on its own. In the A/J story there is no follow-up as to whether Joseph is thrown into a pit prior to be-

ing sold, nor is it related to whom he is sold in Egypt, while in the B/E version it is not related who sees Joseph coming from afar (the brothers). In the complaint in the wilderness analysis (Case Study II), the complaint against Moses in the Story of the Elders comes out of the blue (as Baden himself admits, p. 101) and the story has no ending, while the separation only works because Dr. Baden repeats some introductory phrases and leaves out a conjunction. In the Revolt in the Wilderness story from Numbers 16 (Case Study III, probably the strongest case study in the book), the story still does not fall neatly into two self-contained wholes: in the non-priestly narrative, Dathan and Abiram appear out of nowhere in verse 1 and in verse 15, where Moses entreats God not to listen to the rebels, the offering (*minhah*) to which Moses refers has no antecedent; in the Torah, it is the offering of Korah to which Moses refers (Rashi). Admittedly, the P narrative reads quite well, although Dr. Baden removes a conjunction from the beginning of verse 2 and the words "Dathan and Abiram" from verses 24 and 27. (Some of the confusion regarding the tents in this narrative could be explained by the fact that both Reuben and the Kohathites encamped on the south side of the Tabernacle, see Num. 2:10-17 and 3:27-29; cf. Rashi on Num. 16:1, s.v. *ve-Datan va-Aviram*.) Finally, regarding the statement by the daughters of Zelophehad that their father was not part of Korah's band (p. 163), this is surely odd if the rebellion narratives are separate, because Korah's rebellion was one of *Levites* whereas Zelophehad came from the tribe of *Manasseh* (Num. 27:1).

In Case Study IV, with regard to the splitting of the Re(e)d Sea, in the P narrative there are two verses in a row (Ex. 14:4 and 8) that begin with almost exactly with the same words, relating how God hardened Pharaoh's heart; in the Torah, the second verse serves as a resumptive repetition of the first. Now in the J narrative one would have expected "Pharaoh and his servants" (*Par'oh va-avadav*) at the beginning of verse 10 (as in the preceding verse 5). Also in the J narrative, verse 27 has the sea returning "to its normal state" (by itself). Here, one would have expected a reference to God (or Moses with God's help) bringing this about, as in verse 21; in the Torah, Moses is the subject from earlier in verse 27. Finally, in Case Study V, the word *od* ("also") is deleted from the P narrative, allowing the story to stand alone. In addition, it is not clear how Jacob reached Paddan Aram because he had just been in Shechem at the end of the previous chapter (Gen. 34). Dr. Baden also

duplicates the words *va-tamat Rachel* in both the P and E narratives (Gen. 35:19), translating them as "Rachel died" in P and "Thus Rachel died" in E.

He repeatedly refers to sources that were combined (e.g., the selling of Joseph narratives, the flood narratives), and to doublets/repetitions (e.g., p. 147), without explaining how two supposedly different creation stories were left to stand side by side or why other obvious doublets (e.g., the purported revelations of God's name YHVH to Moses in Ex. 3 and 6) were not combined – which would have been a simple task for the compiler.

One of Dr. Baden's strongest arguments is that D reportedly knows J and E only as separate documents (pp. 134-9) and that D lacks knowledge of P. However, Dr Baden himself notes "at least" one exception to the latter in footnote 11 on p. 289; he explains this via the compiler, an example of changing the data to fit the theory. In addition, there are at least two other counter-examples of which I am aware. According to Deuteronomy 1:25, the spies report that the land is good (*to vah ha-aretz*), which seems to be a quotation from Numbers 14:7 (P, according to Dr. Baden; see p. 319, note 9); in addition, Joshua is mentioned as Moses' successor (Deut. 1:38), which is based on a P passage in Numbers according to Dr. Baden (Num. 27:18-23; see p. 286, note 82). He also claims that D does not use the term *ger* ("stranger") when referring to Israelites in Egypt (p. 140), but this is incorrect (see Deut. 23:8).

Despite his criticism of circular reasoning with regard to other theories of Biblical authorship in Chapter 2, Dr. Baden is guilty of the same. For example, he breaks his own rule about using strictly literary analysis for most of Case Study V (p. 233), and there is accordingly much circular reasoning in this section.

When things do not turn out as planned, Dr Baden is not above invoking "scribal error" (p. 111), the compiler, or "later hands." I will give another example of how the ubiquitous compiler is utilized. Dr. Baden wishes to explain a reference to the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments are written in P, which (he believes) does not know of the Decalogue (p. 184). His explanation (p. 224) is that the compiler borrowed phrasing from Exodus 34:4 (which he ascribes to E). However, this is not consistent with Dr. Baden's thesis of a minimalist compiler, for why would that compiler change the words from *stone tablets* (*luhot avanim*) in Ex. 34:4 (twice) to *testimonial*

*tablets (luhot ha-edut)* in Exodus 34:29? Finally, texts that he cannot parse (e.g., Ex. 34:17-26) he "ascribe[s] to later hands" (p. 224).

Dr. Baden's volume is well written, informative, and forcefully presented. However, one does not have to subscribe to the DH to believe that D is a later work than other parts of the Torah (p. 247) or that some narratives might be fragmentary in nature. As it stands, without "the discovery of the text of J somewhere in the desert" (p. 67), I believe the case for the DH remains open.



## עשה תורתך קבע

### THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

July	Leviticus	23 – 27
	Numbers	1 – 23
August	Numbers	24 – 36
	Deuteronomy	1 – 15
September	Deuteronomy	16 – 34
	Joshua	1 – 9
October	Joshua	10 – 24
	Judges	1 – 13
November	Judges	14 – 21
	I Samuel	1 – 20
December	I Samuel	21–31
	II Samuel	1–17



