

## BOOK REVIEW

*A Journey Through Torah: A Critique of the Documentary Hypothesis* by Ben Zion Katz, Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2012, 144 pp. Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg

How is a traditional Jew supposed to deal with the Documentary Hypothesis (DH)? These days, the entire academic world of biblical scholarship seems to agree that Mosaic authorship of the Bible is untenable, that multiple authors over many time periods are responsible for different parts of the Five Books of the Torah, and that a redactor put them all together, leaving in many repetitions, differences in style, and contradictions. The approach taken by many traditional Jews is to ignore the DH, branding it *apikorsut* (heresy) and a corrupting influence that undermines faith. There have certainly been critiques of the DH, but many of these are by now outdated or not comprehensive enough (e.g., R. David Zvi Hoffmann's commentary on the Torah, Umberto Cassuto's *The Documentary Hypothesis*). Most traditional Jews try to live according to the statement made by Rav Soloveitchik in the first chapter of *The Lonely Man of Faith*, "I have not even been troubled by the theories of Biblical criticism which contradict the very foundations upon which the sanctity and integrity of the Scriptures rest", mainly by not investigating the matter too deeply, or ignoring it altogether.

In this short book, Ben Zion Katz confronts the DH head on, in an honest and open way. He first indicates various flaws in the approach (the orthographic argument, pointing out that the Bible uses the more ancient forms of certain words, e.g., *na'arah* without a final letter *hé*, was particularly intriguing, p. 40), but also notes where certain conclusions must be taken seriously. He then amasses sources from the Talmud through the medieval Sages who, at least partially, accept certain aspects of both lower criticism (textual emendation) and higher criticism (authorship). The Talmud (TB *Bava Batra* 15a) famously discusses the last eight verses of the Bible, detailing the death of Moses, and offers the opinion of R. Judah that they were written by Joshua. Later, Ibn Ezra (d. 1164) discussed the "secret of the twelve," verses that he believes were added to the Bible after the death of Moses. R. Judah the Pious (d. 1217), in comments that would later be censored, similarly notes

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passages that are post-Mosaic (the book's author first discussed this in a 1997 article in the *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, "Judah HaHasid: Three Controversial Commentaries," 25:1).

From these and other sources, culled from the Talmud (particularly TB *Gittin* 60a, which suggests that the Torah was given *megillot megillot*, "scroll by scroll", i.e., in sections, p. 116), the Midrash and classical commentaries, the author presents "the fragmentary hypothesis" (p. 119). While rejecting the DH as a whole, he asserts "that it is reasonable to conclude... that Moses wrote the prehistory of the Israelites based on older material collected prior to Sinai." Moses edited this material into a single narrative. Furthermore, "it is also reasonable to hold, along with a minority of medieval Jewish exegetes... that non-legislative changes were made in the Torah by prophets after Moses" (p. 129).

The author feels that, in light of modern scholarship, "the strictly traditional approach... especially as it has come to be espoused in our times, is no longer tenable" (p. 129). However, "there is a middle-ground approach within Jewish tradition for a critical approach" that "a serious, yet open-minded person of faith" can accept (p. 130). Jewish tradition has been able to accommodate ideas about the age of the world and evolution through the creative and judicious use of traditional source material, and Ben Zion Katz believes that this can likewise apply to the findings of academic biblical scholarship.

This is a well researched and thoughtful book, which takes an unflinching look at a very serious matter facing traditional Jews today. Even if one does not agree with the author's conclusions, it is necessary to open up a discussion of this issue and endeavor to reach some sort of *modus vivendi* with it for intellectually honest traditional Jews.

There is one serious deficiency in *A Journey Through Torah*, which will, I hope, be corrected in future editions – the lack of an index. Though short, it is packed with technical arguments and scriptural references, making the absence of even an index of the verses cited unacceptable.

This book is heartily recommended, and Urim Publications must be commended for publishing this unique, daring, and very much needed work.