

IBN EZRA

floods the city. The decree of the stars is fulfilled, but the righteous are saved.

THE BIBLE

Ibn Ezra's foremost achievement is his commentary on the Bible, particularly the one on the Pentateuch. This commentary has stood the test of time and ranks with Rashi's as the most widely studied.

Ibn Ezra began his commentaries on the Bible in Rome in 1140 C.E. and continued them for the rest of his life. He probably composed commentaries on the entire Bible, but we lack his work on the Early Prophets, Chronicles, Proverbs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

He began his work on the Pentateuch in Lucca, a northern Italian city to which he went after practically being driven from Rome by scholars who claimed his ideas bordered on heresy. Scholars think he produced two commentaries on the Pentateuch, a "short commentary" and a "long commentary." The short commentary survives in *toto*, while the long commentary is extant only on Exodus and in fragments on Genesis. However, some scholars believe that his long commentary was limited only to the latter two books. Scholars are also divided as to which commentary came first. Did Ibn Ezra just write a short one and then expand it, or did he write a long one and then abridge it?

Where did Ibn Ezra get his material? Most scholars are of the opinion that he was not an original thinker. He copied from the Spanish grammarians and from Biblical exegetes. He often quotes the opinion of Saadiah Gaon and occasionally uses him without a citation. He frequently attacks and deprecates the Karaites, but quotes from them constantly, especially Yefet ben Ali and Joshua (either Joshua ben Judah

Abu al-Farag Furkan or Joshua ben Ali). Dr. Philip Birnbaum, the noted Hebrew scholar and authority on Ibn Ezra, says that Ibn Ezra is more indebted to Yefet ben Ali than he admits. Be that as it may, even if the material were only an anthology (and no one goes as far as to say that there is nothing original in his commentary), Ibn Ezra deserves the credit for having left us a memorable and everlasting work, with a definite point of view, theory, philosophy and method of Biblical study. We must remember that Rashi's great work is also largely an anthology.

Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Pentateuch is difficult to study because he is often unclear. One has to labor to decipher his comments. His philosophical references are for the most part allusions. His work is without doubt the most difficult to understand classic commentary on the Pentateuch. Why did Ibn Ezra choose such a style? Some scholars maintain that he did so in order to hide his anti-traditional beliefs. However, this is not borne out by his strong belief in the Oral Law, as evidenced in these same commentaries and his pietistic poetry. Others suggest that the commentary as we have it consists of Ibn Ezra's lecture notes upon which he elaborated when teaching. Dr. Philip Birnbaum notes that since Ibn Ezra wrote his works for patrons, he was under considerable pressure to produce and therefore did not edit or even review his compositions. Probably both of the latter explanations have validity, with the addition of a small dose of the first theory. Ibn Ezra no doubt wanted to make his novel approach to the Pentateuch obscure to the uninformed and unintelligent.

What was Ibn Ezra's approach to understanding the Pentateuch? He tells us himself, first as a hint in his introductory couplets and then much more precisely and clearly in the longer poetical introduction. In his opening poem he writes, *This book of Jasher composed by Abraham the poet is bound by ropes of grammar. Jasher (yashar) means straight and alludes to the literal interpretation of the Bible. Ibn Ezra is saying that*

his commentary contains a literal interpretation of Scripture based on the rules of grammar.

In the long introduction that follows, Ibn Ezra explains in detail. He says that there are five approaches to Biblical exegesis. The first four, which he rejects are: (a) long expositions interwoven with elements unrelated to the text; (b) anti-*halakhic* interpretations offered by heretics; (c) allegorical interpretations; and (d) Midrashic interpretations. The fifth method, the one chosen by Ibn Ezra, is a grammatical analysis of a verse, which is then accepted at face value.

Ibn Ezra's commentary deals with a host of grammatical and stylistic insights. They are:

- (1) The *vav* is not always to be rendered "and," but, like the Arabic *fa*, has other meanings as well.
- (2) The Bible occasionally uses the imperfect with the meaning of the perfect.
- (3) Scripture employs repetition in prophetic utterances.
- (4) The perfect is often to be understood as a pluperfect. This congruence of tenses explains the apparent contradictions and interruptions in the sequence of Biblical text.
- (5) Scripture recurrently omits some prepositions because it expects the reader to introduce them.
- (6) The Bible occasionally uses an adjective but leaves out the noun which it qualifies.
- (7) Scripture often omits the subject or the object in a verse because it is implied by the verb used.
- (8) The Bible omits particles, verbs and other items.

(9) The Bible often uses abridged phrases and sentences.

(10) When Scripture uses a noun in the absolute where the rules of grammar call for one in the genitive, the noun is to be repeated in the construct.

(11) When a verb in the singular governs a noun in the plural, the verb refers to each one within the plural.

(12) Scripture employs paragogic, or superfluous letters. Ibn Ezra points out superfluous *alefs*, *bets*, *hels*, *vavs*, *yods*, *cafs*, *lameds*, *mems*, and *nuns*.

(13) Biblical chapters are not always in chronological sequence.

(14) Scripture employs round numbers. Consequently the numbers seven and ten are not always to be taken literally.

(15) Scripture occasionally first summarizes and then goes into detail.

(16) The Bible at times uses two words with the same meaning back to back where one would suffice.

(17) Scripture engages in word play.

(18) Some Biblical verses have to be rearranged in order to be understood.

(19) The Bible employs nouns in apposition.

(20) The Bible occasionally repeats a proper noun a number of times in one verse, rather than use a pronoun the second time the individual is mentioned.

The use of grammar and the literal interpretation of the Pentateuch led Ibn Ezra to some startling statements. We have already noted his

philosophical approach to and view of Biblical authorship. Among just a few of his novel insights in Genesis are: the tree of knowledge is sexual knowledge; the building of the tower of Babel was not evil in itself; Isaac was a poor man; Isaac had concubines in addition to his wife Rebecca; our patriarchs occasionally did not tell the truth; Simon was imprisoned by Joseph because he was next to the eldest, Reuben, whom he did not wish to imprison because he was innocent of selling Joseph into slavery. Ibn Ezra implies that Joseph was giving his brothers a subtle hint as to his identity. Every page contains a new approach, especially to one trained in the classical commentaries.

Although Ibn Ezra held that Biblical verses are to be taken at face value, he made an exception for those verses which contradict reason. He thus believed that all verses which refer to God in human terms are not to be taken literally; "far be it to attribute a body to God." He explains the case of anthropomorphism in the Bible this way: "It is well-known that the Torah spoke in the language of man, for the one who spoke it (Moses) and those who heard it (Israel) were human. Now a human being cannot speak of things above or below him without employing human terminology."

As stated above, where Scripture does not contradict reason, the Bible is to be taken at face value. Thus the account of the Garden of Eden, according to Ibn Ezra, took place exactly as described in Scripture.

Halakhic Midrashim presented a more difficult problem. Here we deal with the realm of the observance of Jewish law. In these cases Ibn Ezra tried to show that the Rabbinic interpretation was the literal one. In cases where this could not be maintained Ibn Ezra held that the law transmitted by the rabbis of the Talmud was true in itself, but that the sages used the Biblical verse as a peg on which to attach a law.

He thus maintains, contrary to the Rabbinic sages, that *Be fruitful, and multiply* (Gen. 1:28) is not a command but a blessing, and that the sages merely used this verse as a mode for the transmission of a law passed on to them. Commenting on Ex. 23:2, Ibn Ezra points out that the rabbis interpreted the last three words of this verse, *achare rabbin le-hattot* (after a multitude to pervert justice), to mean that legal disputes are to be solved in accordance with the majority opinion of a legally constituted court of law. He notes that this is not the literal meaning of the verse, but that the rabbis used this text as a sign by which to remember the above-noted *halakchah*.

In other cases Ibn Ezra notes that a given Talmudic interpretation of a verse is Rabbinic in origin. For example, Ex. 23:19 reads, *Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk*. According to the rabbis this verse prohibits the cooking of any kosher meat and milk. Ibn Ezra insists that the Pentateuch prohibits only the seething of a kid in its mother's milk and that the other above-noted prohibition is Rabbinic.

When Ibn Ezra offered an interpretation of a verse which was not in keeping with the *halakchah* he usually added a note to the effect that the *halakchah* is to be followed either because it is independent of the verse or because one is obligated to follow the Rabbinic enactments because "the minds of the sages were greater than our minds." Ibn Ezra did this because he did not want his literal interpretation to lead to a violation of the *halakchah* or to serve as support for anti-*halakchic* sectarians. Thus Ibn Ezra was infuriated when shown a commentary on the Bible which stated that the days mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis started in the morning, not the night before as maintained by *halakchah*. Ibn Ezra was aghast at this interpretation lest it mislead people to do work on the eve of the Sabbath and thereby violate its sanctity. He wrote a book entitled *The Sabbath Epistle* to refute the notion that the Biblical day begins in the morning, and he cursed the author (who was probably

Samuel ben Meir, Rashi's grandson) of the aforementioned commentary with the imprecation, "May the hand of him who wrote this wither, and may his eyes be darkened."

Ibn Ezra's heterodox statements, i.e., that certain verses and parts of verses in the Pentateuch are post-Mosaic, his philosophical view of the Almighty, his ideas concerning creation, his seeming disregard for and disrespect toward the Midrash, and certain opinions quoted in the Talmud, and his citations from the heretical Karaites have led many orthodox Jewish scholars to avoid his commentary. In fact, the great 16th century Talmudist, Solomon Luria, writes: "He (Ibn Ezra) was no Talmudist; the major portion of his work, including his commentary (on the Bible), treats of astronomy, natural sciences, and other secular subjects. Yet he dared to contradict Biblical scholars and the Talmud. Out of ignorance he ascribed Biblical laws to the Talmud and Rabbinic laws to the Bible. He countenanced the forbidden and prohibited sanctioned practices. His exegesis is not followed in matters of law; for in his legal pronouncements he often overruled the decisions of both Tannaim and Amoraim. He boasted that his independent rational faculty would alone guide him in interpreting the Bible and that he would not accept the commentaries of others. His work may best be judged by his adherents - heretics and Sadducees" (*Responsa of Solomon Luria*, pp. 9 and 10).

Similarly some modern scholars claim that Ibn Ezra was in reality an anti-traditionalist in disguise who hid his true beliefs behind a mask of piety and "secrets." They go so far as to picture him as a forerunner of modern Biblical criticism. Is any of this true? The answer is no. His writings reveal him to have been a pious Jew who believed in the Written and Oral Laws. He accepted God's revelation of the Torah to Moses and all of the Biblical miracles. However, his approach to Rabbinic exegesis, *both halakhic and non-halakhic* was in the tradition of other Spanish

Jewish thinkers of his day. Thus Samuel Ha-Nagid wrote concerning the Aggadah: "One should learn from aggadic statements only those things which make sense. It is important to know that all matters which our sages established as law, in connection with a commandment transmitted by our teacher Moses who received it from the Almighty, cannot be augmented or diminished in any way. However, their interpretation of Biblical verses is subjective. Hence those interpretations which are logical we accept. The others we reject." Maimonides' approach to Aggadah is similar.

Judah ha-Levi also gave non-traditional interpretations to Biblical verses. Indeed, he interpreted the Biblical phrase *on the morrow after the Sabbath* (Lev. 23:11) literally, as the Sadducees did. Furthermore, he believed that the establishment of the observance of Shavu'ot 50 days from the second day of Passover was of Rabbinic origin. Judah Ha-Levi implied that the *halakhah* is in force because it was established by our ancestors. However, one is free to interpret Biblical verses independently of *halakhah*.

It is not only the Spanish scholars who felt this way. Some early Tosafists not only had a high regard for Ibn Ezra, but went even further along the path than even he ventured. We know that Rabbenu Tam exchanged poetry with Ibn Ezra and even quoted him in his Talmudic work. Moreover, the Tosafist Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, Rashi's grandson, who in his Biblical commentary followed the literal meaning so strictly, claimed that according to the first chapter of Genesis the day begins in the morning and not in the evening as the Talmud says, a view that horrified Ibn Ezra.

In conclusion, Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary is unique, has withstood the test of time, can offer something to anyone who cares to study it, follows a definite tradition in early Biblical exegesis, and is

Marty Lockshin

RASHBAM

Introduction

on. I am most grateful
Syd Eisen and Baruch
t, help and friendship.
ent, Ms. Cheryl Tallan,
preparing this manuscript
its and suggestions.
s special mention. My
Noam and Reva, have given
wife, Ruth, has helped me
oned. She has encouraged
l. She has given my life
ction and trust that makes
ul. I am most grateful.
e's parents supported me in
d were the most important
had. During the years in
rk both my father, Mr. Louis
-law, Dr. Robert Mendelsohn,
ed to their memory.
t consists of an attempt to
great scholar is naturally
times. Many of the ways in
n today significantly differ
I had not too long ago. I
rs I will yet abandon many of
fer in print in this book. I
ate to this book, then, as the
hbam's commentary on Genesis
nly that this book will help
n to reach their own conclu-
ay we all continue to find in
in the text of Rashbam the
bekhol yom, the insights that
y by day into the simple, and
ng of the texts.

Northern France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the site of considerable Jewish literary creativity. Most of this literary activity took the form of exegetical works-- commentaries on either the Talmud or the Bible. While neither of these types of exegetical works were invented in Northern France, they flourished there in an unparalleled manner. Never before were commentaries produced having a similar scope-- encompassing the entire Bible and Babylonian Talmud. Never since, even to this day, have any other commentaries gained the popularity among later Jewish readers that the Northern French commentators, especially Rashi (1040-1104), achieved.

Many explanations could be provided for this popularity. Unlike some previous commentaries, such as those of Sa'adiah Gaon, Northern French exegetical works were written in Hebrew and, as such, were accessible to both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewry. Unlike some contemporary exegetical works, such as those of Abraham ibn Ezra, readers did not have to be acquainted with such secular disciplines as philosophy

or astrology in order to understand Northern French exegesis. Unlike some later exegetical works, such as those of Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), readers did not have to be initiated into the esoteric field of Jewish mysticism in order to appreciate fully the meaning of the works.

Northern French Bible commentaries achieved their popularity precisely because they were commentaries, and little else. In an age when commentaries were used as a vehicle for discussing almost any field of secular or religious knowledge,¹ it was refreshing to find commentaries that were short and to the point.² Not only foreign disciplines were excluded from these works. Northern French exegetes felt no need to include the often lengthy midrashim in their commentaries. Midrashim were accessible to readers in other forms, since "the rabbis already collected them in Bereshit Rabba' and other midrashic works."³

Midrashim were excluded, partially or totally, from Northern French exegetical works not only for reasons of stylistic economy. Northern French exegetes strove to uncover the plain meaning of scripture (*peshat*). They felt that midrashim often were irrelevant, and

¹. See Abraham ibn Ezra's tirades against this phenomenon in the introductions to his two commentaries on Genesis, Weiser's edition, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 1-2 and 138-9.

². To my mind, even Abraham ibn Ezra himself was not innocent of the charge that he leveled against other exegetes. (See previous note.) Cf. e.g. his commentaries ad Ex. 3.15 and 20.1. In the works of Rashi and Rashbam, nothing approaches the length or the obscurity of those passages.

³. Rashi ad Gen. 3.8.

perhaps even counter-productive, to such an enterprise.¹

While Rashi may have been the first exegete to set out to write a *peshat* commentary on the Bible, he ended up producing a hybrid of *peshat* and midrash.² His grandson Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam; c. 1085- c. 1174)³ attempted to better his grandfather's work;⁴ he produced a commentary that is almost entirely free of midrashic influence.

This book will present, for the first time, a translation of that commentary of Rashbam to one biblical book. Detailed line-by-line notes will help the reader understand Rashbam's commentary and analyze his exegetical methodology.⁵

¹. See e.g. Rashi ad Is. 26.11 and other passages collected by Melamed, *Mefarshe ha-migra*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 360-1. See also Rashbam ad Gen. 1.1 and 37.2.

². Segal, *Parshanut ha-migra* (Jerusalem, 1952), p. 64 and Melamed, *ibid.*, p. 359.

³. See M. Berger, *The Torah Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir*, doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1982, pp. 6-7.

⁴. See Rashbam ad Gen. 37.2.

⁵. There are two previous studies of Rashbam in book form: David Rosin's *R. Samuel B. Meir als Schrifterklärer* (Breslau, 1880; henceforth RSBM) and M. Berger's previously mentioned dissertation. There is one generally accepted critical edition of Rashbam's Torah commentary, ed. by David Rosin (Breslau, 1881/2). This edition and that of A. Bromberg (Tel-Aviv, 1964/5) contain some annotations. The reader will note that the purpose and scope of those annotations are considerably more limited than those of my notes. There is one extant traditional super-commentary to Rashbam's

While both Rashi and Rashbam liberated their exegesis, each to his own extent, from the confines of midrashim, neither saw himself as attacking the foundations of halakhic Judaism. Neither confined his novel exegesis to the Torah's narrative passages; even the non-halakhic *peshat* of legal passages finds a small place in Rashi's work and a much larger place in Rashbam's work.¹ Perhaps understandably, it is the more liberated and daring Rashbam who provides the more

commentary, *Qeren Shemuel*, by Solomon Ashkenazi of Posen, which was of little value in this enterprise. (See Rosin's analysis, RSBM, pp 42-46). Other studies that deal with Rashbam's commentary include: S. Poznanski, "Mavo" 'al *hakhme sorfat mefarshe ha-miqra*," in his edition of Eliezer of Beaugency's Commentary to Ezekiel (Warsaw, 1913), pp. XXIX-L; E. Melamed, *Mefarshe ha-miqra* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 453-513; M. Segal, *Parshanut ha-miqra* (Jerusalem, 1952), pp. 69-72; S. Esh, "Variant Readings in Medieval Hebrew Commentaries: R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam)," *Textus 5* (1966), 84-92; A. Margaliot, "*Ha-yahas she-ben perush ha-Rashbam leferush ha-Ra'va 'al ha-torah*," in *Sefer 'Asaf*, ed. by U. Cassutto (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 357-369; E. I. J. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Medieval Bible Commentaries," *JJS* 11 (1960), 111-135; E. Touitou, "*Al shitate shel Rashbam beferusho la-torah*," *Tarbis* 48 (1979), 248-273; and *idem*, "*Shitato ha-parshanit shel Rashbam 'al rega' ha-mesiut ha-historit shel zeman*," in *Studies in Rabbinic Literature Bible and Jewish History*, ed. by Y. Gilat, Ch. Levine and Z. Rabinowitz (Ramat-Gan, 1982), pp. 48-74. See also James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven, 1981), esp. pp. 172-181 and David Weiss Halivni, *Midrash Mishnah and Gemara* (London, 1986), esp. pp. 105-107.

There is also a long exchange between S. Japhet and A. Grossman on the authenticity of Rashbam's commentary to Ecclesiastes in *Tarbis* 44 (1975), 72-94; 45 (1976), 336-340; 47 (1978), 243-8 and 48 (1979), 172. Japhet published together with Robert Salters an annotated edition of the disputed commentary, under the title, *The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qoheleth* (Jerusalem, 1985).

¹. E.g. Rashi ad Ex. 23.2 and Rashbam ad Ex. 13.9.

explicit defense of the validity, and even primacy, of the midrashic process.¹ Rashi presumably does not have to declare his belief in the midrashic process; his frequent reliance on midrashim proves that he recognizes their validity. Rashbam, on the other hand, must emphasize that his innovative "plain" interpretations of biblical texts have no ramifications for the practice of halakhic Judaism. Midrashic exegesis, for Rashbam, does not represent the true plain meaning of the text. Yet it does represent the primary meaning intended by the divine Author.

Why, then, would Rashbam have attempted to write a *peshat*-like commentary on the Torah? Some scholars have seen the entire phenomenon of Northern French *peshat* exegesis, including Rashbam's commentaries, as a natural outgrowth of traditional Jewish scholarship. It was, they would claim, the careful study of Talmudic texts that led Rashbam and others to apply the same critical tools to the study of the Bible. This enterprise naturally yielded *peshat*-like commentaries.² But this does not provide a full explanation of the phenomenon, as E. Touitou has shown. Such an understanding, writes Touitou, explains neither why the phenomenon of *peshat* exegesis did not begin in France before the eleventh century, nor why it died out by the

¹. Comm. ad Gen. 1.1, 37.2 and introduction to Ex. 21. Cf. Rashi ad Ex. 6.3.

². E. Lipshitz, "Rashi," in *Sefer Rashi (Jerusalem, 1956-7)*, p. 266 and M. Segal, *Parshanut ha-miqra* (Jerusalem, 1951-2), p. 62.

thirteenth century.¹ Touitou also makes short shrift of Segal's claim that the persecutions of the thirteenth century led to the decline of *peshat* exegesis. Why then, asks Touitou, did other forms of Jewish literary creativity flourish in the thirteenth century?²

Touitou's own theory relates the sudden growth and decline of *peshat* exegesis to novel developments in Jewish-Christian polemics in the twelfth century.³ He claims that "Rashbam's commentary is directed precisely against Christian polemical tactics."⁴ While Rashbam declares explicitly only three times that a particular interpretation of his is polemically motivated, Touitou claims that the entire commentary is, implicitly, polemical.⁵

Touitou also claims that Rashbam's commentary-- particularly its emphasis on *peshat*-- is strongly influenced by the Christian exegetical works of his times. Both Jewish and Christian contemporary commentaries are, according to Touitou, products of the so-

1. E. Touitou, "*Shitato ha-parshanut shel ha-Rashbam*," in *Studies in Rabbinic Literature Bible and Jewish History*, ed. by Y. Gilat, Ch. Levine and Z. Rabinowitz (Ramat-Gan, 1982), pp. 50-1.

2. E.g. responsa and liturgical literature. See Touitou, *ibid.*, citing Segal, *ibid.*, p. 77.

3. See e.g. A. Funkenstein, "*Ha-temurot bevikkuah ha-dat she-ben yehudim lenoserim ba-me'ah ha-12*," *Zion* 33 (1967-8), pp. 125-144.

4. Touitou, *ibid.*, p. 67.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

called "twelfth century Renaissance,"¹ in that they re-emphasize the literal meanings of biblical texts and attempt to confront the problem of the conflict between traditional exegesis and rational knowledge.² According to Touitou, Rashbam's commentary is to be seen, somewhat paradoxically, as both an emulation of and a polemic against Christian exegesis of his day.

Touitou's claim that Rashbam's commentary should be seen as a primer for intellectual Jews involved in polemics³ is quite attractive but leaves some questions unanswered. Touitou himself emphasizes that a major component of medieval Jewish polemics is defending the validity of the observance of the commandments of the Torah.⁴ Can Rashbam's commentary, with its innovative abundance of non-halakhic exegesis of legal passages in the Bible, be seen as a defense of the halakhic system from Christian attacks? If this book were truly written for polemical purposes, would it not be playing into the hands of Christian polemicists who, ever since the first century,⁵ have claimed that traditional rabbinic exegesis distorts the true meaning of the biblical text?

1. On the twelfth-century Renaissance, see especially S. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1970) and M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago, 1968).

2. Touitou, *ibid.*, pp. 54ff. See also M. Berger, pp. 327-329.

3. Touitou, *ibid.*, pp. 52, 62 and 63.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 69ff.

5. E.g. Matthew 15.3-9.

Touitou has identified well many clearly polemical passages in Rashbam's commentary. However, some that he labels polemical are not so obvious. For example, Rashbam writes¹ that the reason the Bible records the entire story of the descent to Egypt is to prepare the reader for Moses' chastising words (Dt. 10.22), "Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all." Touitou somehow finds even here an anti-Christian polemic. Since the reason Moses chastised the Israelites was in order to encourage them to observe the commandments of the Torah, accordingly, claims Touitou, Rashbam's comment is to be seen as claiming that the ultimate purpose of the end of Genesis is to prepare the ground for later exhortations to observe commandments. Even this interpretation is then to be seen as a supposed refutation of Christian antinomianism.²

Touitou's arguments may be somewhat overstated but generally his emphasis on polemics and his description of similarities between Rashbam's works and those of his Christian contemporaries are points well taken. I intend to show in my notes many examples of relationships, polemical or otherwise, between Rashbam's exegesis and that of contemporaneous and earlier Christians. Rashbam was, in fact, the first Jewish exegete to quote and refute Christian exegesis.³

¹. Comm. ad Gen. 37.2.

². *Ibid.*, p. 70 and *idem*, "Al shitato shel Rashbam," *Tarbis* 48 (1978-9), pp. 255-6. See also his farfetched argument concerning *bikkurim*, there.

³. Poznanski, "Mavo'," p. XLVIII and A. Grossman, *Hakhme 'ashkenaz ha-rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 16.

Still, to my mind, that is not the dominant theme of his commentary.

Since *peshat* is the avowed aim of Rashbam's commentary,¹ it would be useful to examine closely those textual explanations of Rashbam which he himself describes as *peshat*. There are a total of 127 such pericopes in that part of his Torah commentary that has survived.² Of these, only in five cases is his interpretation the same as Rashi's.³ Only in fifteen places is his *peshat* interpretation not relevant to Rashi.⁴ In 107 of these places, Rashbam labels as *peshat* an interpretation which disagrees with Rashi's, either totally or partially.

These 107 pericopes can again be divided into three sub-categories. Two such pericopes can be seen as refinements of Rashi's exegesis, either explaining Rashi's comment further⁵ or collapsing two alternate explanations of Rashi into one.⁶ In nine of these

¹. See e.g. Rashbam's commentary, introduction to Ex. 21, Rosin's edition, p. 113.

². I have excluded from my count some few instances where Rashbam uses the word *peshat* as meaning "interpretation," not "the plain interpretation." See e.g. Gen. 49.10, *ufeshat zeh teshuvah la-minim*.

³. Comm. ad Ex. 16.31, Ex. 17.14, Ex. 26.26, Dt. 4.19 and Dt. 6.5.

⁴. Comm. ad Gen. 1.5, 20.16, Ex. 3.22, 12.2, 21.18, 28.4, 29.4, Lev. 11.3, 12.4, Num. 11.35, 13.2, 17.23, 36.6, Dt. 21.14 and 25.9.

⁵. Comm. ad Ex. 30.25.

⁶. Comm. ad Lev. 16.2.

cases Rashbam argues only in part with Rashi, either accepting only one of two explanations offered by Rashi, or accepting Rashi's comment as one of two *peshat*-like possibilities.² In the grand majority of these cases, 96 in all, Rashbam labels as *peshat* an interpretation that is in total disagreement with Rashi's.³

In short, 75% of the time that Rashbam uses the word *peshat* in his commentary he is diametrically opposed to the interpretation offered by Rashi. Eighty-four percent of the time he is to some degree in opposition to Rashi.

It is my contention that opposing Rashi's commentary is Rashbam's primary goal in his own commentary. Notwithstanding Rashbam's occasional positive comments about Rashi (which are almost always couched in

¹. Comm. ad Gen. 25.28, 32.16, 33.20, 37.17, 38.15, Ex. 6.14, 26.14, Dt. 5.19.

². Comm. ad Num. 13.22 s.v. *vayyavo*'.

³. Comm. ad Gen. 1.1, 1.11, 18.8, 24.23, 25.1, 25.17, 25.19, 26.5, 32.7, 32.29 (referring to Ex. 4.14; vs. Rashi, there), 33.7, 33.18, 34.25 (vs. Rashi ad 18.1), 36.24, 36.39, 37.2, 37.28, 37.36, 38.24, 41.45, 45.1, 45.12, 45.28, 46.8 (vs. Rashi ad 46.15), 49.9, 49.15, 49.16, Ex. 3.11, 3.15, 4.14, 6.16, 10.23, 11.4, 13.9, 14.30, 15.16, 18.2, 18.11, 20.6 (vs. Rashi ad Dt. 7.9), 21.6, 21.10, 21.28, 21.34, 22.4, 22.6 (vs. Rashi ad 22.8), 22.13, 25.30 (vs. Rashi ad 25.29), 28.4, 28.38, 29.9 (vs. Rashi ad 28.37), 30.34 bis (both vs. Rashi), 32.19, Lev. 4.3, 4.17, 6.13, 6.23, 7.18, 10.3, 11.36 (vs. Rashi there and ad vs. 34), 11.40, 15.11, 16.6 (vs. Rashi there and ad 16.11), 16.10, 18.9, 19.3, 19.26, 23.43, 24.15, 25.21, 26.19, Num. 12.1, 13.22 s.v. *lifne*, 21.18, 24.17, 30.2 bis (both vs. Rashi), 30.11 (vs. Rashi ad vs. 7 and 9), 35.32 (vs. Rashi ad vs. 25). Dt. 1.1 three times (all vs. Rashi), 7.10, 10.6, 17.8, 18.8, 22.15 (vs. Rashi ad vs. 17), 23.20, 25.6, 27.12, 28.57, 28.67, 32.10 and 32.14.

generalities, rarely referring positively to any specific interpretation offered by Rashi),¹ the evidence will show that the vast preponderance of Rashbam's interpretations are directed against Rashi.

That Rashbam disagrees with Rashi is, of course, not a new discovery. Some scholars, however, have attempted to play down the extent of the disagreements and highlight the points of agreement.² Others simply note that Rashbam both rejects and accepts elements of Rashi's commentary, without attempting to find the dominant pattern.³ The careful reader will see the large number of instances in which my notes point out a disagreement between Rashi and Rashbam that was not noted by either Bromberg or Rosin.⁴

Still, not all of Rashbam's commentary is meant as a refutation of Rashi's. To return to the example of those interpretations which Rashbam himself labels *peshat*, one does find five such interpretations that are in total agreement with Rashi. In some of these examples, both Rashbam and Rashi reject a standard rabbinic interpretation,⁵ while in others they both

¹. Comm. introduction to Ex. 25, Ex. 28.6, end of Exodus, introduction to Lev., and Num. 34.2 (Rosin's ed., pp. 123, 131, 144, 145 and 196).

². See e.g. Rosin, RSBM, pp. 68.71; idem, Introduction to the Commentary, pp. XXIII-XXIX; and Bromberg, pp. 10-12.

³. E.g. M. Berger, pp. 196-205.

⁴. In fairness, it should be noted that Rosin undertook in his introduction p. XXIX, to note such disagreements only "most of the time."

⁵. E.g. ad Ex. 16.31, rejecting Yoma 75b.

follow the traditional rabbinic exegesis.¹ Still, the evidence will show that the vast preponderance of Rashbam's commentary is opposed to that of Rashi.

Many interpretations offered by Rashbam oppose classical rabbinic exegesis. Still, just as Rashbam is not always against Rashi, so he is not always against traditional rabbinic exegesis. M. Berger has correctly shown that, at times, even when Rashbam opposes Rashi, Rashbam is following a traditional Jewish exegetical tradition.² It does not follow, though, that Rashbam " . . . is essentially not more 'anti-rabbinic' than was Rashi."³ Again the evidence supplied in my notes will prove that Rashbam rejects rabbinic interpretations much more often than Rashi does. Granted he does not oppose every traditional interpretation and every interpretation offered by Rashi. Nevertheless the number of points of disagreement is impossible to ignore.

While Rashbam and Rashi disagree on the interpretation of so many passages, there are still many points of methodological agreement between them. M. Berger's dissertation has made important contributions to both Rashi scholarship and Rashbam scholarship, particularly by showing the great extent to which Rashbam's exegetical methodology is derived from Rashi's.⁴ Rashbam, for the most part, did not invent

¹. E.g. ad Dt. 6.5, following Sifre and Berakhot 61b.

². Pp. 199-204.

³. *Ibid.*, p. 205. See also p. 199.

⁴. E.g. pp. 77-85 and *passim*.

his methodologies. He used Rashi's own methodologies to free the biblical text, even more than Rashi had, from the confines of traditional exegesis. Rashi may have begun the enterprise of *peshat* and perhaps even given the term a new meaning,¹ but he still peppered his commentaries with hundreds of *midrashim*. Rashbam did not.

Why did Rashbam label some 127 of his comments as being "according to the *peshat*?" M. Berger suggests that "according to the *peshat*" means "that this interpretation is *peshat* only-- i.e. that it has no *halachic* ramifications."² I would suggest a different explanation. Since Rashi was the first exegete to pride himself on having written a *peshat* commentary,³ and since 84% of Rashbam's self-labelled *peshat* commentaries dispute those of Rashi, Rashbam might be saying: "This interpretation is the *peshat*, not the interpretation of my grandfather, though he set out to write a *peshat* commentary."

Rashbam had no desire to supplant Rashi's commentary. At times, he refers his readers directly to it.⁴ At other times, even when Rashbam does not refer to Rashi it is impossible to read Rashbam's commentary as an

¹. See Raphael Loewe, "The 'plain' Meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis," in *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies*, ed. by J. G. Weiss (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 140-185.

². P. 309. It is unclear whether Berger offers this interpretation for all cases where "according to the *peshat*" is written.

³. See e.g. his commentary ad Gen. 3.8 and Rashbam ad Gen. 37.2.

⁴. E.g. ad Ex. 28.6 or Num. 34.2.

interpretation. I shall attempt to provide such information in my notes.¹

My translation and notes shall then serve the previously stated goals-- isolating polemical anti-Christian passages in Rashbam and documenting the extent of Rashbam's agreement with and opposition to both Rashi and traditional Jewish exegesis. In addition I will examine the degree to which Rashbam's comments agree with the later conclusions of modern critical scholarship and will compare Rashbam's knowledge of Hebrew grammar to that of his predecessors,² his contemporaries, and modern scholars.

Note on the Text of the Commentary

No complete manuscript of Rashbam's Torah commentary has yet been found. Both the first printed edition

¹. Neither Bromberg nor Rosin notes that any of these four passages opposes an earlier interpretation.

². According to Poznanski, "Mavo'," p. XLXII following Porjes, MGWJ (1883), p. 181, Rashbam's knowledge of grammar was superior to that of his predecessors.

Japhet and Salters (Hebrew edition, pp. 15-16) recently drew the attention of the scholarly work to the existence of a grammar book, *Sefer dayqut*, penned by Rashbam, that was once edited by Ludvig Stein and published in an obscure journal, the *Jahrbuch des Traditionstreuen Rabbinerverbandes in der Slovaakei* (Trnava, 1923), on the basis of one manuscript. (That manuscript is still available today in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin.) As Stein argued, there can be no doubt that that grammar book was authored by Rashbam. I have tried to point out in my notes many of the parallels between Rashbam's Torah commentary and *Sefer dayqut*. All references to *Sefer dayqut* in my notes refer to the page numbers in the *Jahrbuch*.

³. For a detailed analysis of the text history, see RSBM, pp. 22-57 and Rosin's introduction, pp. XXXII-XLI.

independent work; he is assuming the reader's acquaintance with Rashi's commentary.¹ In my notes I shall attempt to point out the various types of connections between Rashbam's work and that of Rashi, connections that are rarely made explicit and that might be overlooked.

Unless the reader is vigilant for possible ways in which Rashbam's commentary is opposing traditional exegesis or Rashi, he might gloss over many interesting nuances in Rashbam. One might read Rashbam's commentary on *veyirdu* in Gen. 1.26 simply as a lesson in grammar without realizing that it undermines the midrash offered by Rashi.² One might see Rashbam's commentary to Lev. 12.2 as simply pointing out that this verse, like many others,³ "generalizes and then particularizes" without noticing that such a reading cuts the ground from under a famous Talmudic midrash on how the sex of the fetus is determined.⁴ The reader of Rashbam's commentary to Ex. 20.6 might not know that Rashbam is dismissing a question asked by Rashi in Deuteronomy (7.9). The reader of Rashbam's commentary to Ex. 22.23 might not realize that Rashbam's three word comment takes the wind out of the sails of Rashi's

¹. See e.g. comm. ad Gen. 36.39, and my notes there. See also M. Berger, p. 197.

². See similarly comm. ad Gen. 30.38.

³. See Melamed, *Mefarshe ha-migra*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 464-5.

⁴. Berakhot 60a. See also Rashi ad Gen. 46.15.

The Book of Genesis

Moses our teacher wrote this book of Genesis together with the whole Torah from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He.

It is likely that he wrote it on Mount Sinai for there it was said to him, *Come up to Me unto the mount, and be there; and I will give thee the tablets of stone and the Torah and the commandment which I have written, to teach them.*¹ The tablets of stone include the tablets and the writing that are the ten commandments. The commandment includes the number of all the commandments, positive and negative. If so, the expression *and the Torah* includes the stories from the beginning of Genesis [and is called *Torah* – teaching] because it teaches people the ways of faith. Upon descending from the mount, he [Moses] wrote the Torah from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the account of the tabernacle. He wrote the conclusion of the Torah at the end of the fortieth year of wandering in the desert when he said [by command of G-d], *Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Eternal your G-d.*²

This view accords with the opinion of the Talmudic sage who says³ that the Torah was written in sections.⁴ However, according to the sage who says that the Torah was given in its entirety,⁵ everything was written in the fortieth year when he [Moses] was commanded, *Now write ye this song for you and teach it unto the*

(1) Exodus 24:12. (2) Deuteronomy 31:26. (3) Gittin 60 a. The name of the authority is Rabbi Yochanan. (4) When a section was declared to Moses, he immediately wrote it down. When all the sections were completed, he compiled them together into one Torah. Rashi, *Ibid.* (5) Resh Lakish is the authority who maintains that Moses wrote the whole Torah at one time after all sections had been given to him intermittently during the forty years and were properly systematized in his mind.

*children of Israel; put it in their mouths,*⁶ and, as he was further instructed, *Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Eternal your G-d.*²

In either case it would have been proper for him to write at the beginning of the book of Genesis: "And G-d spoke to Moses all these words, saying." The reason it was written anonymously [without the above introductory phrase] is that Moses our teacher did not write the Torah in the first person like the prophets who did mention themselves. For example, it is often said of Ezekiel, *And the word of the Eternal came unto me saying: 'Son of man,'*⁷ and it is said of Jeremiah, *And the word of the Eternal came unto me.*⁸ Moses our teacher, however, wrote this history of all former generations and his own genealogy, history and experiences in the third person. Therefore he says *And G-d spoke to Moses, saying to him*⁹ as if he were speaking about another person. And because this is so, Moses is not mentioned in the Torah until his birth, and even at that time he is mentioned as if someone else was speaking about him.

Now do not find a difficulty in the matter of Deuteronomy wherein he [Moses] does speak about himself — [as he says,] *And I besought the Eternal;*¹⁰ *And I prayed unto the Eternal,*¹¹ — for the beginning of that book reads: *These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel.*¹² Thus throughout Deuteronomy he is like one who narrates things in the exact language in which they were spoken.

The reason for the Torah being written in this form [namely, the third person] is that it preceded the creation of the world,¹³ and, needless to say, it preceded the birth of Moses our teacher. It has been transmitted to us by tradition that it [the Torah] was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire.¹⁴ Thus Moses was like a scribe who copies from an ancient book, and therefore he wrote anonymously.

(6) Deuteronomy 31:19. (7) Ezekiel 3:16–17; 12:1, etc. (8) Jeremiah 1:4. (9) Exodus 6:2. (10) Deuteronomy 3:23. (11) *Ibid.*, 9:26. (12) *Ibid.*, 1:1. (13) Shabbath 88 b. (14) Yerushalmi Shekalim 13 b. See also Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:2.

However, it is beginning of Gen in Deuteronomy] the Holy One, pronounced all t them with ink manner of the c that is, the crea informed him c concerning the Ezekiel]¹⁷ and transmitted about these] together world: the force and the rational creation, their disintegration of teacher was ap explicitly or by "Fifty gates [de and all were tra Thou hast ma [Concerning thi the world there that there is or of the minera understanding p earth, and simi creeping things gate of underst rational soul |

(15) Deuterono is explaining the [Jeremiah] prono The rational soul of "those of the (20) Psalms 8:6.

s he was further
n the side of the

n to write at the
oke to Moses all
en anonymously
loses our teacher
he prophets who
said of Ezekiel,
: 'Son of man,'⁷
ternal came unto
ory of all former
periences in the
Moses, saying to
on. And because
til his birth, and
else was speaking

of Deuteronomy
as he says,] *And
Eternal,*¹¹ – for
he words which
euteronomy he is
ge in which they

is form [namely,
of the world,¹³
es our teacher. It
[the Torah] was
ground of white
from an ancient

etc. (8) Jeremiah
L, 9:26. (12) *Ibid.*,
). See also Rashi on

However, it is true and clear that the entire Torah – from the beginning of Genesis to *in the sight of all Israel*¹⁵ [the last words in Deuteronomy] – reached the ear of Moses from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, just as it is said elsewhere, *He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book.*¹⁶ G-d informed Moses first of the manner of the creation of heaven and earth and all their hosts, that is, the creation of all things, high and low. Likewise [He informed him of] everything that has been said by prophecy concerning the esoterics of the Divine Chariot [in the vision of Ezekiel]¹⁷ and the process of Creation, and what has been transmitted about them to the Sages. [Moses was informed about these] together with an account of the four forces in the lower world: the force of minerals, vegetation in the earth, living motion, and the rational soul. With regard to all of these matters – their creation, their essence, their powers and functions, and the disintegration of those of them that are destroyed¹⁸ – Moses our teacher was apprised, and all of it was written in the Torah, explicitly or by implication. Now our Sages have already said:¹⁹ "Fifty gates [degrees] of understanding were created in the world, and all were transmitted to Moses with one exception, as it is said, *Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels.*"²⁰ [Concerning this statement of the Sages] that in the creation of the world there are fifty gates of understanding, it is as if it said that there is one gate of understanding pertaining to the creation of the minerals, their force and their effects, one gate of understanding pertaining to the creation of the vegetation in the earth, and similarly, as regards the creation of trees, beasts, fowl, creeping things and fish, that there pertains to each of these one gate of understanding. This series culminates in the creation of the rational soul [for the gate pertaining to this latter creation]

(15) Deuteronomy 34:12. (16) Jeremiah 36:18. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, is explaining the manner in which he wrote down his master's prophecies: *he [Jeremiah] pronounced all these words*, etc. (17) Ezekiel, Chapter 1. (18) The rational soul in man is not subject to destruction. Hence Ramban writes of "those of them that are destroyed," not all. (19) Rosh Hashanah 21 b. (20) Psalms 8:6.

enables man to contemplate the secret of the soul, to know its essence and its power in "its palace" [namely, the body]²¹ and to attain [that degree of understanding] which is alluded to in the saying of the Sages:²² "If a person stole, he [who has the aforesaid understanding] knows and recognizes it on him; if a person committed adultery, he knows and recognizes it on him; if one is suspected of having intercourse with a woman in her state of uncleanness, he knows and recognizes it on him. Greater than all is he who recognizes all masters²³ of witchcraft." And from [that level of understanding] a man can ascend to the understanding of the spheres, the heavens and their hosts, for pertaining to each of these there is one gate of wisdom which is unlike the wisdom of the others. The total number of different gates as ascertained by tradition is fifty less one. It is possible that this fiftieth gate concerns a knowledge of the Creator, blessed be He, which is not transmittable to any created being. Pay no regard to the Sages' saying that ["Fifty gates of understanding] *were created*,"²⁴ for that statement relates to the majority even though one gate was indeed not created. This number [49] is clearly alluded to in the Torah in the counting of the *Omer*,²⁵ and in the counting of the Jubilee,²⁶ the secrets of which I will disclose when I attain thereto by the Will of the Holy One, blessed be He.

Everything that was transmitted to Moses our teacher through the forty-nine gates of understanding was written in the Torah explicitly or by implication in words, in the numerical value of the letters or in the form of the letters, that is, whether written normally or with some change in form such as bent or crooked letters and other deviations, or in the tips of the letters and their crownlets, as the Sages have said:²⁷ "When Moses ascended to heaven he found the Holy One, blessed be He, attaching crownlets

(21) See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Deuteronomy 32:2, which states that the body is the palace of the soul. (22) Heichaloth Rabboth 1:3. (23) "Masters"; in Heichaloth Rabboth: "kinds." (24) Since the fiftieth gate of understanding was never transmitted to any created being, how could the Sages say that fifty "were created"? The answer is that the statement relates to the majority of the gates. (25) Leviticus 23:15: *Seven weeks shall there be complete....* (26) *Ibid.* 25:8. (27) Menachoth 29 b.

to certain lette
these for?' He
mountains of l
this?' He [Rab
Moses on Mour
except from m
be traced] to M

Based on th
Rabbah³⁰ con
delegation from
Book of *Tagin*
to everyone. In
are in the Tora
of the letters a
which the Sag
Hezekiah's sec
themselves but
meanings, whic

There, in the
have also said
covenant,³³ w
Genesis, which
commanded yc
ten commandn

(28) *Ibid.* Mose
Akiba sitting wit
but was not able
But then he hear
this?" See now
Ibid. (30) Not fo
and see also my
matter. (31) Isaia
interpretation is
(creation) and *b*
Talmud." Thus t
the interpretator
taken to refer t
commandments.

...d, to know its
body]21 and to
uded to in the
[who has the
on him; if a
es it on him; if
an in her state
a. Greater than
ift." And from
scend to the
heir hosts, for
isdom which is
er of different
is possible that
ator, blessed be
Pay no regard
standing] were
ity even though
[49] is clearly
r,25 and in the
ll disclose when
l be He.

teacher through
n in the Torah
cal value of the
whether written
ent or crooked
etters and their
es ascended to
ching crownlets

...ich states that the
(23) "Masters";
e of understanding
ages say that fifty
the majority of the
lete.... (26) *Ibid.*

to certain letters of the Torah. He [Moses] said to Him, 'What are these for?' He [G-d] said to him, 'One man is destined to interpret mountains of laws on their basis.' "28 "Whence dost thou know this?' He [Rabbi Akiba] answered them: 'This is a law given to Moses on Mount Sinai.' "29 For these hints cannot be understood except from mouth to mouth [through an oral tradition which can be traced] to Moses, who received it on Sinai.

Based on this tradition, the Sages have said in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*³⁰ concerning King Hezekiah [when he was visited by a delegation from the king of Babylon]:³¹ "He showed them the Book of *Tagin* [crownlets]." This book is known and is available to everyone. In it is explained how many crownleted *alephs* there are in the Torah, how many *beths*, and the [frequency of the] rest of the letters and the number of crownlets on each one. The praise which the Sages bestowed on this book and the disclosure of Hezekiah's secret to the delegation were not for the crownlets themselves but rather for a knowledge of their essence and their meanings, which consist of many exceedingly profound secrets.

There, in the Midrash *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*,³² they [the Sages] have also said: "It is written, *And He declared unto you His covenant*,³³ which means: *He declared unto you* the Book of Genesis, which relates the beginning of His creation;³⁴ *which He commanded you to perform, even the ten words*,³⁵ meaning the ten commandments, ten for Scripture and ten for Talmud.³⁵ For

(28) *Ibid.* Moses said to G-d: "Show me this man." G-d showed him Rabbi Akiba sitting with eight ranks of disciples. Moses sat down in the eighth rank but was not able to follow the discussions, a fact which deeply grieved him. But then he heard the disciples asking Rabbi Akiba, "Whence dost thou know this?" See now in-text of Ramban. (29) Now Moses was content. *Ibid.* (30) Not found in our text. See, however, *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 3:3, and see also my Hebrew commentary, p. 4, for further reference on this matter. (31) Isaiah, Chapter 39. (32) 1:28. (33) Deuteronomy 4:13. (34) The interpretation is based upon the similarity between the words *b'riyah* (creation) and *b'ritho* (His covenant). (35) "Ten for Scripture and ten for Talmud." Thus the Oral Law is made equal to the Written Law. The basis for the interpretation seems to be the extra word *la'asoth* (to perform), which is taken to refer to the Oral Law since it teaches us how to perform the commandments.

from what source did Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite³⁶ come and reveal to Israel the secrets of the behemoth³⁷ and the leviathan?³⁸ And from what source did Ezekiel come and reveal to them the mysteries of the Divine Chariot?¹⁷ It is this which Scripture says, *The king hath brought me into his chambers,*³⁹ meaning that everything can be learned from the Torah.

King Solomon, peace be upon him, whom G-d had given wisdom and knowledge, derived it all from the Torah, and from it he studied until he knew the secret of all things created, even of the forces and characteristics of plants, so that he wrote about them even a Book of Medicine, as it is written, *And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall.*⁴⁰

Now I have seen the Aramaic translation of the book called *The Great Wisdom of Solomon*,⁴¹ and in it is written: "There is nothing new in the birth of a king or ruler; there is one entrance for all people into the world, and one exit alike. Therefore I have prayed, and the spirit of wisdom was given to me, and I have called out and the spirit of knowledge came to me; I chose it above scepter and throne." And it is further said there: "It is G-d alone Who gives knowledge that contains no falsehood, [enabling one] to know how the world arose, the composition of the constellations, the beginning, the end and middle of the times, the angles of the ends of the constellations, and how the seasons are produced by the movement of heavens and the fixed positions of the stars, the benign nature of cattle and the fierceness of beasts, the power of the wind and the thoughts of man, the relationship of trees and the forces of roots; everything hidden and everything revealed I know."

(36) Job 32:2. (37) *Ibid.*, 40:15. See following note. (38) *Ibid.*, 40:25. The Behemoth and the Leviathan are mentioned in G-d's response to Job (Chapter 40) and are not found in Elihu's speeches. Rabbi David Luria (in his notes to the Midrash) amends the text of the Midrash to read: "the secrets of the winds and the rains." These are mentioned by Elihu in Chapter 37. (39) Song of Songs 1:4. (40) I Kings 5:13. (41) One of the books of the Apocrypha. In Weisel's Hebrew edition, Verses 4-6 in Chapter 7 come close to the text here mentioned.

All this Solon in it — in its si and its letters ar

Scripture lik wisdom excelled is to say, he enchanting, for replenished fro Philistines.⁴³ (T of the children divination of bi Solomon was b Egypt, and in tl Book of Egypt versed in the r Thus the Sages Land of Israel. wise man, and world. Why was of beauty, G-d was perfected. Foundation Sto Solomon knew it he planted p he says, *And I f*

We have yet comprised of N letters of the v divided in a d

(42) I Kings 5:1 Bamidbar Rabba Nebuchim III, 2 Ezra refers to i Kedoshim 10. Yithro 87a: "The Hebrew comment:

the Buzite³⁶ come
both³⁷ and the
name and reveal to
it is this which
is chambers,"³⁹
Torah.

and given wisdom
and from it he
studied, even of the
rote about them
spoke of trees,
the hyssop that

book called *The*
written: "There is
is one entrance
Therefore I have
me, and I have
me; I chose it
there: "It is G-d
hood, [enabling
position of the
of the times, the
the seasons are
fixed positions of
creatures of beasts,
the relationship
and everything

(38) *Ibid.*, 40:25.
David's response to Job
David Luria (in his
read: "the secrets of
Ezra in Chapter 37.
One of the books of
in Chapter 7 come

All this Solomon knew from the Torah, and he found everything in it — in its simple meanings, in the subtleties of its expressions and its letters and its strokes, as I have mentioned.

Scripture likewise relates concerning him, *And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east.*⁴² That is to say, he was better versed than they in divination and enchanting, for this was their wisdom, as it is said, *For they are replenished from the east, and with soothsayers like the Philistines.*⁴³ (The Sages similarly said:⁴⁴ "What was the wisdom of the children of the east? They knew and were crafty in the divination of birds.") *And all the wisdom of Egypt*⁴² means that Solomon was better versed in sorcery, which is the wisdom of Egypt, and in the nature of growing things. As is known from the Book of Egyptian Agriculture,⁴⁵ the Egyptians were very well versed in the matters of planting and grafting different species. Thus the Sages have said:⁴⁶ "Solomon even planted peppers in the Land of Israel. How was he able to plant them? Solomon was a wise man, and he knew the essence of the foundation of the world. Why was this? [It is written] *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, G-d hath shined forth.*⁴⁷ Out of Zion the whole world was perfected. How is this known? Why was it called 'the Foundation Stone?' Because the world was founded from it. Now Solomon knew which of its arteries extends to Ethiopia, and upon it he planted peppers, and immediately it produced fruits, for so he says, *And I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit.*"⁴⁸

We have yet another mystic tradition⁴⁹ that the whole Torah is comprised of Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and that the letters of the words separate themselves into Divine Names when divided in a different manner, as you may imagine by way of

(42) I Kings 5:10. (43) Isaiah 2:6. (44) Pesikta of Rabbi Kahana, *Parah*. Bamidbar Rabbah, Chapter 19. (45) Mentioned in Rambam's *Moreh Nebuchim* III, 29-30. Ramban also mentions it further, 11:28. Abraham ibn Ezra refers to it in his Commentary to Exodus 2:10. (46) Tanchuma, *Kedoshim* 10. (47) Psalms 50:2. (48) Ecclesiastes 2:5. (49) Zohar *Yithro* 87a: "The whole Torah is the Name of the Holy One, etc." See also my Hebrew commentary, p. 6 for a broader discussion of this matter.

example that the verse of *Bereshith* divides itself into these other words: *berosh yithbare Elokim*. This principle applies likewise to the entire Torah, aside from the combinations and the numerical equivalents of the Holy Names. Our Rabbi Shlomo [Rashi] has already written in his commentaries on the Talmud⁵⁰ concerning the manner in which the Great Divine Name of seventy-two letters is derived from the three verses: *And he went*,⁵¹ *And he came*,⁵² *And he stretched out*.⁵³ It is for this reason that a Scroll of the Torah in which a mistake has been made in one letter's being added or subtracted is disqualified [even though the literal meaning remains unchanged], for this principle [that the whole Torah comprises Names of the Holy One, blessed be He], obligates us to disqualify a scroll of the Torah in which one letter *vav* is missing from the word *otham* — of which there are thirty-nine fully-spelled ones in the Torah — [despite the fact that the same word appears many times without a *vav*], or if he [the Scribe] were to add a *vav* to any of the other deficient ones [that is, words which could be written with an additional *vav* but are not so written]. So it is in similar cases even though it matters not one way or another on cursory thought. It is this principle which has caused the Biblical scholars to count every full and defective word in the Torah and Scripture and to compose books on the Masoretic text, going back as far as Ezra the Scribe and Prophet,⁵⁴ so that we should be heedful of this, as the Sages derived it from the verse, *And they read in the book in the Law of G-d, distinctly; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*.⁵⁵

It would appear that the Torah "written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire"¹⁴ was in this form we have mentioned, namely, that the writing was contiguous, without break

(50) Sukkah 45 a. (51) Exodus 14:19. (52) *Ibid.*, Verse 20. (53) *Ibid.*, Verse 21. (54) Megillah 15 a. Malachi (the prophet) is identical with Ezra. (55) Nehemiah 8:8. The Sages' interpretation is found in Nedarim 37 b: "*And they read in the book in the law of G-d*, this means the written text; *distinctly*, this is the Targum [translation]; *and they gave the sense*, this has reference to the division in verses; *and they caused them to understand the reading*, this means the punctuating signs [or accents], and some Rabbis say that this is the *Masoreth* [the traditions regarding the full or defective words]."

of words, which Divine Names explicit the Torah our teacher and commandment rendition which Cabala⁵⁶ writes [namely, the each other, at three letters at masters of the

And now, I question me concerning shall conduct scholars to bring and the afflict festivals, and to and with some give grace⁵⁸ to unto us and be in the sight of

Now behold counsel to all any thought regarding the make known comprehended contemplation

(56) Literally, whole body of the Torah. Here, however system of mystical esoteric thought. particular Sabbath an abbreviation wisdom or the C

these other
 s likewise to
 re numerical
 [Rashi] has
) concerning
 y-two letters
 l he came,⁵²
 Scroll of the
 etter's being
 eral meaning
 whole Torah
 bligates us to
 av is missing
 : fully-spelled
 word appears
 ere to add a
 ; which could
 ten]. So it is
 or another on
 d the Biblical
 he Torah and
 st, going back
 we should be
 se, *And they
 they gave the*

tters of black
 form we have
 without break
 id., Verse 20.
 he prophet) is
 etation is found
 G-d, this means
 nd they gave the
 caused them to
 or accents], and
 arding the full or

of words, which made it possible for it to be read by way of Divine Names and also by way of our normal reading which makes explicit the Torah and the commandment. It was given to Moses our teacher using the division of words which expresses the commandment, and orally it was transmitted to him in the rendition which consists of the Divine Names. Thus masters of the Cabala⁵⁶ write the letters of the Great Name I have mentioned [namely, the Name containing seventy-two letters] all close to each other, and then these are divided into words consisting of three letters and many other divisions, as is the practice among the masters of the Cabala.

And now, know and see what I shall answer to those who question me concerning my writing a commentary of the Torah. I shall conduct myself in accordance with the custom of the early scholars to bring peace of mind to the students, tired of the exile and the afflictions, who read in the *Seder*⁵⁷ on the Sabbaths and festivals, and to attract them with the plain meanings of Scripture and with some things that are pleasant to the listeners and which give grace⁵⁸ to the scholars. And may the gracious G-d *be merciful unto us and bless us*⁵⁹ so that we shall *find grace and good favor in the sight of G-d and man.*⁶⁰

Now behold I bring into a faithful covenant and give proper counsel to all who look into this book not to reason or entertain any thought concerning any of the mystic hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of the Torah, for I do hereby firmly make known to him [the reader] that my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Cabalist

(56) Literally, "reception." In the Talmud the word *cabala* denotes the whole body of the oral tradition in contrast to the written word of G-d, the Torah. Here, however, as well as in later Hebrew usage the word denotes the system of mystic lore and philosophy which constitutes a distinctive body of esoteric thought. (57) The portion of the Torah assigned for reading on a particular Sabbath or festival. (58) The Hebrew word *chein* (grace) is here an abbreviation for the Hebrew words *chochmah nistarah* [the hidden wisdom or the Cabala]. (59) Psalms 67:2. (60) Proverbs 3:4.

speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient.⁶¹ Reasoning about them is foolishness; any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit. *Let him not trust in vanity, deceiving himself,*⁶² for these reasonings will bring him nothing but evil as if they spoke falsely against G-d, which cannot be forgiven, as it is said, *The man that strayeth out of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the shades.*⁶³ *Let them not break through unto the Eternal to gaze,*⁶⁴ *For the Eternal our G-d is a devouring fire, even a G-d of jealousies.*⁶⁵ And He will show those who are pleasing to Him wonders from His Torah. Rather let such see in our commentaries novel interpretations of the plain meanings of Scripture and Midrashim, and let them take moral instruction from the mouths of our holy Rabbis:⁶⁶ "Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into that which is more powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things."

(61) The Hebrew is *Mekabel mevin*, which may also mean "an understanding Cabalist," thus suggesting that the recipient too has already been initiated into these mysteries to a lesser degree. (62) Job 15:31. (63) Proverbs 21:16. (64) Exodus 19:21 and 24. (65) Deuteronomy 4:24. (66) Bereshith Rabbah 8:2.

Bereshith

1 I. IN T
said: The Tor
with the vers
months,¹ whic
then is the re
nations of the
took unto you
they [Israel] r
Holy One, ble
according to H
to us."

This is a h
[Rashi] in his

One may of
Torah with the
the root of fai
the world was
religion and ha

(1) Exodus 15
commandments
laws became ince
first commandm
(Buber), *Bereshith*
thinks the worl
create the worl
places (e.g., see
blessings or imp
of the Torah ar
believes that the
English work, R:

רשב"ם

- (1) Why were the פירושים of the Northern French commentaries (רש"י, רשב"ם, R' Yosef Cairo etc.) so popular in the 11th and 12th centuries?
- (2) What is רשב"ם's point about רש"י's commentary that he makes at בראשית לז:ב ?
- (3) What is E. Touito's position regarding רשב"ם and polemics?
- (4) What is Lockshin's question on this position? (pg. 15)
- (5) רשב"ם is not a Christian polemic, according to Lockshin, what does his commentary address?
- (6) What is רשב"ם's general position on מדרשים and how does this relate to his opinion of פירוש רש"י ?

רמב"ן

- (1) From the beginning of רמב"ן's introduction how can you see how his commentary differs from that of רש"י, אבן עזרא, and רשב"ם ?
- (2) What is the extent to which רמב"ן is willing to go in deriving information from the תורה ?
- (3) What would רמב"ן say about deriving תורה messages from codes ?
- (4) In what way does רמב"ן expect to bring peace of mind to the students, tired of the exile and afflictions?
- (5) What are רמב"ן's 2 hallmarks of his פירוש to ספר בראשית ?

אבן עזרא

- (1) What types of פרשנות does אבן עזרא reject in his introduction to his פירוש ?
- (2) What are some of אבן עזרא's novel insights in ספר בראשית ?
- (3) What does אבן עזרא mean by " דיברה תורה כלשון בני ישראל בני אדם " with regards to anthropomorphisms ?
- (4) What is the object of אבן עזרא's Sabbath Epistle אגרת השבת ?
- (5) What has led many Orthodox Jewish scholars to avoid אבן עזרא's commentary ?
- (6) How was אבן עזרא's approach to מדרשים consistent with that of שמואל הנגיד ?
- (7) What was אבן עזרא's relationship with רבינו תם ?
- (8) Why would some scholars debate אבן עזרא's role in Biblical criticism? What did קרני אור (Yehuda Krinsky) say about this ?