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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

Karen Bookman Kaplan

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

A Portrayal of Ibn Ezra's Philosophical and Linguistic
Commentary on the Ten Commandments

is a translation and analysis of Ibn Ezra's commentary to the Decalogue as given in Exodus, Mrs. Kaplan brings a particular angle of vision to her study; holding a PhD in linguistics, she deals with the commentary as a system of techniques in the use of language as well as the exposition of a Biblical text reflecting Ibn Ezra's ideas. Beginning with a synopsis of the translation. Mrs. Kaplan presents her understanding of Ibn Ezra's method of interpretation. She then presents her translation of the commentary of the Ten Commandments together with her interpolated comments. Those comments are enriched by the quoted views of other scholars, so that Mrs. Kaplan's comments are in response to Ibn Ezra's text as she sees it and as others have seen it. She devotes a chapter to Ibn Ezra's method of revealing and concealing his meaning; her laying out his method constitutes an original contribution to Jewish scholarship.

Mrs. Kaplan has worked diligently to master the language and the thought of one of the great commentators on the Torah. She has presented the results of her studies in a clear and compelling fashion. It is with great pride in her achievement that I am delighted to recommend the acceptance of her thesis to the Faculty of Hebrew Union College.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Leonard S. Kravitz

April 6, 1992

A PORTRAYAL OF IBN EZRA'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND LINGUISTIC
COMMENTARY ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

KAREN BOOKMAN KAPLAN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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Referee: Dr. Leonard S. Kravitz

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CHAPTER ONE

A WINDOW INTO UNDERSTANDING IBN EZRA'S COMMENTARY

1.0 Introduction

When people ask me, "Who is Abraham ibn Ezra?" I place him between the two better-known reference points of Rashi and Maimonides, and add that he lived in the twelfth century. He was a rationalist thinker who shared much in common with other medieval philosophers. Like them, he believed that both astronomy and astrology were complementary sciences, the former specifying the positions of celestial bodies in the higher worlds, and the latter performing calculations on those positions to determine their impact upon human destiny in the lower world where we live.

Ibn Ezra had much to say that was radical if not heretical when it came to theological matters. Some scholars claim that because he was indigent and was at the whim of patrons, he was forced to cloak his real opinions in obscure argumentation (Zinberg, pp. 156-57. For other biographical information, see Ellenson, pp. 2-16). Kravitz vigorously defends the idea that ibn Ezra is purposely obscure to protect himself from charges of heresy (personal communication). Sirat, in contrast, cautions against rushing to read into ibn Ezra's indirect remarks "a little more boldness than he really intended,

especially on the question of biblical criticism." (p. 105) In other words, it is hard to know for certain how radical ibn Ezra would have been if he had felt free to speak his mind. And then again, we are assuming that he indeed did feel constrained to censor his thoughts. Maybe he was speaking freely and going as far as he wished. My intuition is that ibn Ezra had doubts about some of the beliefs of his time but wanted to ultimately conquer those doubts by pushing them to their logical limit and then placing the results in a neat rationalist box. In addition, he makes pietistic outbursts throughout his commentary-- at least in the commentary treated in this paper. Whether he made those under duress or were genuinely felt is open to question too. But intuition about his intentions is not enough. Like ibn Ezra, I see the need to analyze matters in logical steps. I do this in Chapter Three, where I outline the structure behind his argumentation. Given the insights gleaned from that process, I will draw conclusions about how covert or open and how radical or conservative ibn Ezra actually was.

Although ibn Ezra's style may be obscure in places and his name less well known to the average Jew, he ought not be dismissed as of passing importance. In fact, he is quite relevant to Jews of our time. He was uncomfortable with some of the same issues that plague us moderns, such as seemingly

unethical statements and inconsistent passages in the Tanakh. His strategy, unlike other sages of his time or before him, was to painstakingly analyze the biblical text at literal face value and not shrink away from the vexing problems which such analysis generates. As will be seen in the translation in Chapter Two, he squarely faces each difficulty and uses the tools of logic to explain each one to the fullest extent possible. Other sages commonly engaged in midrashic resolutions of problems. Ibn Ezra did this on occasion too, but the point is that modern Jews are likely to dismiss a midrashic or other symbolic device as a convenient way of dodging the biblical difficulty, as explaining it away. The rationalist approach strikes the modern as a more honest effort to deal with the "embarrassing" parts of the Tanakh. What we learn from ibn Ezra is how to mine the rationalist literal approach for all it is worth.

On another level, he is a kindred spirit to us in that he had to reconcile two worlds: the traditional Jewish one and the philosophical secular one. We can learn from him as we see how he tries to make sense out of both.

Finally, on a purely personal plane, I identify with ibn Ezra as my spiritual and intellectual predecessor. He was fascinated with language and devotes much of his commentary to linguistic analyses, such as the significance of an unexpected

grammatical form, or nuances in meaning or discourse structure. I have devoted much of my intellectual life to the discipline of linguistics, as represented by my doctorate in that field, and the linguistic commentary I make in this paper on ibn Ezra's beliefs and style of argumentation. As for the spiritual, I believe I share with him the act of textual analysis as one way to become closer to G-d and closer to understanding G-d's will. Undertaking the translation of his commentary to the Ten Commandments was for me a spiritual as well as an academic exercise as I identified with his thought processes and commitment to discovering G-d's reality.

The bulk of this paper consists of my translation of ibn Ezra's commentary on the Ten Commandments in Exodus, Chapter 20, verses 1-14. I say "my" translation with some hesitation, since I received the indispensable help of my mentor, Dr. Leonard Kravitz. An ancillary aid was Asher Wieser's Ibn Ezra, a book which converted the Rashi script to the standard Hebrew block script and added punctuation. He also provides footnotes, which are a recapitulation in modern Hebrew of relevant commentary in the Rabbinic Bible (mikraot gedolot).

Before presenting the translation itself, I will now make some prefatory remarks about ibn Ezra's assumptions as well as give a synopsis of the entire translation. This will anchor the reader more securely into the context of this man's world. As

a final task, I will explain my philosophy of language regarding the translation process, and the conventions I employ to render it as intelligible and fluent as possible.

A final chapter follows the translation. There I present an analysis of the structure underlying ibn Ezra's arguments. That is, I describe how he makes his points, and in some cases, how he hides his points. Thus this chapter is scientific in that it addresses the question, "how". In addition, I touch on a number of questions: What were his assumptions about language, and how did those assumptions affect his exegesis? Given his assumptions about language, philosophy and theology, in addition to the underlying structures of his arguments, how can all of that guide the newcomer who wants to read ibn Ezra in the original?

In ibn Ezra's commentary, one finds many kinds of material bound by recurrent themes. At one moment, he will discuss a specific work or phrase in the biblical text, and at the next, he is off and running with a philosophical discourse. Then, after touching upon the simple meaning of one verse, he will embellish it with his own homilies. For instance when he explains the commandment against swearing falsely, he launches into a long discourse about how terrible swearing falsely can be, all the while supporting his thesis with incidents throughout the Tanakh where swearing gets people into a lot of

trouble. So ibn Ezra alternates close linguistic analysis of the text with philosophical and homiletic discourse. This can even be seen in the synopsis below, where he begins with the language in the text, leads into philosophical and theological issues, and returns to language once again. His assumptions about language influence those other areas. Briefly, his assumption is that the text must be confronted at face value. But once it is understood, its theological implications may be raised. Clearly he does this when he talks of the First Commandment as being the foundation of all the others, since belief in G-d as expressed in the First must be presupposed in the rest of the Ten Commandments for them to make sense. Or when he deduces that because the First Commandment reads, I am your G-d "who brought you out of the land of Egypt", and not "created heaven and earth", that this wording implies creation is eternal and not created by G-d at some discrete point in time. Some of his other assumptions, such as the validity of astrology, surface in the synopsis below.

1.1 Synopsis of the Translation

Ibn Ezra begins his introduction to the Ten Commandments by raising a number of questions he plans to resolve; he is most intently concerned with discrepancies in the wording between the two versions of the Ten Commandments which appear in the Torah, namely, Exodus Chapter Twenty and Deuteronomy Chapter

Five. It is problematic to him in that discrepancies challenge the notion that the Torah literally contains the words of G-d. If it did, then one must explain why there are two versions of what G-d said. If one is a paraphrase and one a direct quote, Why would the former appear in a book that is supposed to consist only of G-d's words? This is the kind of question ibn Ezra raises and pursues a literalist approach to its logical conclusion. Other commentators asked that question as well, and their answer was that G-d pronounced both versions simultaneously. Ibn Ezra gives arguments against that traditional answer.

Up to this point, he has argued against ways to resolve the issue of how the Torah contains G-d's words yet has different versions of those words. But he has not yet replaced the traditional answer with one of his own, because first he felt it was necessary to go into his own philosophy of how language works, especially how it conveys meaning. He distinguishes between two entities: words and their meanings: "words are like bodies and their meaning like souls" (this and other quotes of ibn Ezra come from the translation in Chapter Two). Words are more superficial and variable. Using biblical quotes to illustrate, ibn Ezra proves that different words, and even variant spellings of a given word, can convey the same meaning. At this point, he switches to arguments on behalf of

taking the Ten Commandments as G-d's words, as "written with G-d's finger". One argument in favor is that the Commandments appear in a written, not an oral style. Also, some Commandments appear in the third person because they reflect G-d speaking in a royal grammatical form. That is, a king can refer to himself by using the third person pronoun. It does not mean someone other than the king is communicating.

Following some discussion of how the Ten Commandments should be numbered, ibn Ezra turns back to the problem of claiming that G-d spoke both versions simultaneously. He backs up his arguments with his view about different words meaning the same thing, and ends up with a non-literal explanation of the existence of the two versions. In particular, he dwells on why it says "Remember" in Exodus and "Observe" in Deuteronomy in reference to keeping the Sabbath. The answer is, when G-d said "Remember", the people heard its implication, that, they "heard" the other word "observe". So the means of remembering the Sabbath is to observe it. But in the meantime, ibn Ezra has discredited the belief that the whole Torah is literally G-d's words. He says the Ten Commandments in Exodus are G-d's words, but that in Deuteronomy they contain changes. Furthermore, the author of those changes was Moses. Ibn Ezra refers to Moses as saying this or that, without spelling out that he believes Moses, and not G-d, authored at least some of the Torah.

Ibn Ezra's next task is to provide a rational basis for obeying the Ten Commandments. He does this especially in reference to honoring one's parents. Along the way, he keeps pointing out how different words and word orders in the two versions have the same meaning, and that Moses contributed words to the latter version.

The discussion then moves from language to a typology of commands. Most have a rational basis, and some are obscure. The rational basis for the latter are hard to find, but whether found or not, all are ultimately rational. He gives a threefold typology: commands of the heart, of speaking, and of doing. Each of these further breakdown into positive and negative commands, and he gives some examples. He deems commands of the heart as the most important.

To conclude this introduction to the Ten Commandments, ibn Ezra speaks at length on his theological and philosophical ideas, including his belief in the nature of creation, the existence of multiple worlds in an astrological system, G-d's ability to overrule how the stars control our destiny, the primacy of the First Commandment theologically and mathematically, and how belief in G-d as implied in the other commandments.

Ibn Ezra's analysis of the individual Commandments and verses is reminiscent of modern critical studies of the Tanakh. He takes problematic words, finds other contexts in the Tanakh where the words are used, and comes to a conclusion. These problems can be linguistic or theological. If linguistic, he cites other contexts where the same word is used. If theological, he cites other contexts which take the same issue but treat it more directly or in more detail. For example, when he wants to know if children really must suffer from the sins of their parents, as Ex 20:5 seems to imply, he quotes Jeremiah and Ezekiel as proof that verse five implies otherwise. *

Occasionally, in this section where he goes verse by verse, he will go off on pietistic tangents, such as when he argues how grievous it is to swear by G-d's name inappropriately. He also will simply paraphrase a verse as he understands it, adding his own illustrative examples. For "You shall not murder" he gives examples of actions which themselves are not murder but which result in it, such as giving bad advice that will get someone killed.

By now, if the reader is still with me, the reader's appetite must be whetted to proceed to the commentary itself. But there is one final duty that remains, and that is to explain my method of translation and the assumptions involved. That is the subject of the final section of this chapter.

1.2 Assumptions and Procedures regarding the Translation

I am in agreement with ibn Ezra's assertion about the relationship between words and meaning. That is, different words, and different syntactic constructions, can express more or less the same idea. Thus I do not feel constrained to translate each word literally. Nor do I look at each word or phrase as an independent unit, but as part of the overall structure of the sentence, or even of larger discourse units. At the same time, I try to avoid the danger of not being literal enough. It is tempting to insert modern idioms and other phrasing that sounds common in English. But this must be done with care, because of two potential problems: One, is that the level of formality/informality of an idiom in English may be higher or lower than in the Hebrew. Second, and more serious, the attempt to be creative may result in being interpretive rather than simply rendering the meaning of the original.

As with all translation, the line between being faithful to the original and interpreting it is a fine one. Some people claim that the act of translation is itself interpretive. If that is true, then it is all the more essential to keep any further levels of interpretation to a minimum as much as our conscious processes permit. Even so, there is always the problem of our projecting our assumptions about ibn Ezra onto the translation. We have a view of the world as moderns, and

we have semi-conscious or un-conscious agendas of our own as we translate. In addition, we even have assumptions about modern and/or Occidental ways to present an argument. As much as possible, I try to present ibn Ezra's style as in the original. Once again, it is a matter of balancing the need to be faithful to the original yet intelligible in the other language, and intelligible to the readers of a different age. So we have transformations in language, time, and culture.

I have used two conventions to weigh the translation itself in favor of a literal expression of his language and style. One is parenthetical insertions. These merely fill in extra words to make sure the meaning is unmistakably clear. This includes filling in ellipses in the Hebrew and using nouns instead of pronouns. The parenthetical material is interpretive, but at a relatively trivial level. It is tied to making the language itself intelligible, and does not force me to add words in the translation itself which are not "really" there. The other convention I use is insertions of my comments in brackets. The purpose is frankly interpretive; the material in brackets functions as a supercommentary to ibn Ezra's commentary, much as sages of a later time commented on sages of an earlier time. (This is not to say I count myself a sage!) Bracketed material accomplishes various tasks, as needed: it reformulates ibn Ezra's arguments in a more modern style of discourse; it provides background information (for example,

about astrology) that helps the reader go into the medieval world, it amplifies allusions to other parts of the Tanakh, and it adds an evaluation or other reaction as to the cogency of ibn Ezra's arguments.

The translation below is divided into two sections: ibn Ezra's discussion of the Ten Commandments as a whole, with some attention to specific Commandments, and his more closely detailed step by step progression through each verse.

CHAPTER TWO

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S COMMENTARY ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

2.0 Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Ten Commandments in Exodus Chapter 20

This Torah portion raises difficult questions. Many sages have said that G-d uttered only the (first) two (of the Ten) Commandments. Here is their proof: It is written in the first Commandment, "I the Lord am your G-d" (v.2); and in the second, "For I the Lord your G-d am an impassioned G-d." (v.5) In the third Commandment it is written, "...by the name of the Lord your G-d." (v.7) Furthermore, in the same verse it says, "...one who swears falsely by His name." It does not say, "My

name." In the fourth (Commandment) it says: "For in six days the Lord made... therefore the Lord blessed..." (v.11) In the fifth it says, the land "which the Lord your G-d is giving you." (v.12)

[This is a grammatical proof. In the first two commandments, G-d is speaking in the first person. In all the other commandments, G-d is referred to in the third person: "The Lord" and not "I". "His name" and not "My name". This proof settles a debate between what verse one literally says and what some commentators have said. Verse one says that "G-d spoke all these words." (emphasis mine) That is, G-d uttered all ten commandments. The commentators, however, said that G-d uttered only the first two commandments. Therefore, because G-d is speaking in the first person only in the first two commandments, the commentators are correct.]

Here is another question: How is one to reckon "I am the Lord your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt...", (v.2) as (one of) the Ten Commandments, since He is the Commander and there are no positive or negative commands (being issued in this "commandment")?

There are harder questions than the foregoing. For one thing, (during the yearly Torah cycle) we read (the Ten Commandments) the first time in this particular Torah portion, the one

called *לחם שמע*, and a second time in the portion called *ואתחנן*. We see that from the verse which begins with "I" (v.2) through the end of verse 7, which ends with "one who swears falsely by His name", that there is no difference between the two portions. But from the beginning of verse 8, "Remember", through the end of the Ten Commandments, there are changes everywhere. In the first (Torah portion) it says "Remember" (v.8). In the second it says "Observe". (Deut. 5:12) [From now on, one should assume that citations from the "first" Torah portion will always be from Exodus chapter 20, and citations from the "second" from Deuteronomy chapter 5.]

Furthermore, in the second one finds the addition, "As the Lord your G-d has commanded you." (Ibid.) In the first it says, "or your cattle (v. 10) and in the second is the addition, "and your ox or your ass". (v. 14) The most difficult of all these (differences to explain) is that in the first one, it is written that the reason for the sabbath is that "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth." It goes on to say "therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day." (v.11) Not only do these verses not appear in the second portion, a different reason for the Sabbath is given: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt." And it concludes with "therefore the Lord your G-d has commanded you to observe the sabbath day." (v. 15)

[Now follows a list of the differences between the first and second Torah portion in reference to the Ten Commandments. The existence of differences was very problematic to the sages, who believed that every word was literally said by G-d. Below, Ibn Ezra will indirectly challenge their assumption by showing some absurd consequences which follow if one argues along rational lines rather than homiletic lines.]

In the first it is written, One receives a reward for honoring father and mother, which is, "that you may long endure". (v.12) Then in the second, the only things added are "and that you may fare well," (v.16) and for honoring father and mother "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you."

In the first it is written, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear..." (v.13) In the second it is written, "You shall not murder and you shall not commit adultery and you shall not steal and you shall not bear..." (v.17) [in JPS, "and" is not translated. I do so here to bring out Ezra's point how the second portion differs from the first in that the "vavs" are added.]

In the first it is written, עֵד שֶׁקָרָא ("false witness", v.1-3) and in the second, עֵד אֶלֶף (v.17) [In the Hebrew, the two versions are not identical even though according to the JPS translation the meanings are equivalent.]

In the first it is written, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife..." (v.14) In the second it says: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not crave your neighbor's house." (v. 18) The second has the expression, "his field" (v.18) but the first does not. In the first, the words, "his male or female slave" precede "his ox or his ass" (v. 14); while in the second, "his ox or his ass" precedes "his male or female slave." (v.18)

[In the extant Torah text, there is no difference in word order. There are three possible reasons for this: One is that the text he had was in fact different. The second is that a scribe made a mistake in copying Ezra's commentary. The third is that Ibn Ezra made a mistake.]

In the first it is written, "G-d spoke all these words saying". (v.1) But in the second, "The Lord spoke these words--those and no more-- to your whole congregation." (v.19)

[Ibn Ezra is referring to two differences in the second portion: one is that the indirect object, "your whole congregation", is added. The other is the reversed order of subject and direct object. In the second portion, the object, "these words", precedes the subject, "The Lord spoke". The JPS makes

the distinction in English by making the syntax more emphatic:
 "those and no more".

One may wonder why Ibn Ezra goes "out of order" in his list of differences by going back to the first verse in the first portion. The answer must be that he has listed this difference last because in referring to the second portion, he quotes the last verse relevant to the Ten Commandments.]

When we investigate the words of our sages of blessed memory to see what they said about the differences listed above, we discover that they said "remember" and "observe" were uttered as one commandment. This is the most difficult problem of all to explain. But G-d forbid that anyone claim they did not speak correctly about this matter, because our (current) knowledge is a mere trifle compared with theirs. Only people in our own generation think that the words of the sages (should be taken) in their everyday sense. This is not so, as I will explain at the end after I mention the difficulties (involved with doing so). When I conclude, I will explain the correct way to remove all the difficulties and questions which are in this portion.

It is impossible to utter "remember" and "observe" simultaneously except by means of a miracle. Moreover, one can

acknowledge that there is the question of why both words are not written as "remember and observe" in both portions.

[In other words, if both were uttered, why don't both portions reflect this? This leaves the fact of one word in one portion and the other word in the other portion unexplained.]

What can be made of the fact that in those same verses, if they were uttered simultaneously (in full) like the words "remember" and "observe", that the sages did not mention this as well?

[If we are going to say that the first word in each verse was uttered at the same time, then what about the rest of each verse? Were they uttered at the same time as well? Ibn Ezra is building a case against a literal interpretation of the sages by taking literalness to a reductio ad absurdum. At a deeper level, he may be ridiculing the sages if there is really no apparent reason not to take them literally. This reductio continues below.]

For it would be a more surprising miracle if many verses were spoken simultaneously yet did not have an equivalent meaning. (The sages only refer to) the (less extraordinary) miracle of two words with equivalent meaning being spoken simultaneously.

[A paraphrase of this may be that if we are in the business of mentioning miracles, why didn't the sages point out the far more noteworthy miracle of the simultaneous utterance of entire verses, where the meaning is not even synonymous? This is far more remarkable than the mere simultaneous utterance of two words. Again, at a deeper level, Ibn Ezra may be mocking the idea of miracles altogether by ranking them in terms of their degree of "miracularity".]

Also, how could G-d have said, "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you"? (Deut. 5:16)

[Leaving the problem of "remember" and "observe", Ibn Ezra now refers to other problems caused by comparing the two Torah portions.]

[Ibn Ezra implies what the sages said about this, that G-d uttered all the commandments. If so, then G-d would speak in the first person, as was argued in the beginning of this commentary on Exodus 20. He is still dealing with the same issue of simultaneity but tying it into his other argument about when G-d was speaking. He referred to verse 12 in Deuteronomy which contains the same phrase as verse 16, "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you". He also showed the transition between first to third person in Exodus as well. The transition began at verse 7 "His name". The two arguments

intertwine as follows: The sages claimed that G-d spoke "remember" and "observe" simultaneously. But as we saw before, since G-d is referred to in the third person from the third commandment on, we cannot say that G-d "said" anything, far less that G-d said "remember" and "observe" simultaneously. This is a kal vchomer argument: If G-d did not pronounce the commandment about Shabbat, then all the more so did he not pronounce anything simultaneously. Ibn Ezra does not leave arguments in isolation; he puts them together and sees what the logical consequences are.]

Furthermore, when before this (utterance of v. 16) did G-d stand at Sinai and speak about honoring father and mother? [Here, Ibn Ezra is catching the Torah, so to speak, in a self-contradiction. The tradition viewed the two versions of the Ten Commandments, one in Exodus and one in Deuteronomy, as said by G-d at the same time. But because of the grammar, the text implies that G-d said the version written in Exodus at one time, and Moses (or someone else) repeated them at a later time. This is so, because in Exodus it says, "Honor your father and mother..." all in the present tense. But in Deuteronomy it says, "כִּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ" "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you." "Commanded" is in the past tense, so the speaker of the commandment must be referring to an occasion prior to the current one when G-d had spoken that commandment. So once again, Ibn Ezra is trying to

show through logic that the Ten Commandments come in two forms and that is that. They are not magically somehow the same form.]

Notice that in the first portion, "He may do well for you" is not written. [Here, a more literal translation than the JPS is used to show Ibn Ezra's point.] If this is the case, that G-d uttered it (in the second) and did not (in the first), how does G-d say "you shall not commit adultery" with a vav (in the second, and without a vav in the first? Also, (how does G-d say) in the first, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house" (v.14) and in the second, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife"? (v.18) As another example, how does G-d say simultaneously "his male or female slave" and then "his ox or his ass" and then the reverse order in the second portion?

[Ibn Ezra is pointing out two logistical problems with supposed simultaneous utterances: One is the problem of the absence of a syntactic unit in one portion, and its presence in the other. How does G-d choose between including it or not including it? How can one simultaneously say and not say something? The other problem is the word order. How can one say a sentence with one order of syntactic units simultaneously say that sentence in reversed order of those units?]

All these things do not stand to reason. And the greatest of all the difficulties which I mentioned is that all the wonders that were done by Moses had at least a little natural aspect to them which the wise will understand. [I.e, they are somewhat believable miracles since they are connected to natural events in the world. In contrast, saying two words at once is impossible. Ibn Ezra's biting sarcasm follows as a result:] But behold this most wondrous of wonders, that G-d said "remember" and "observe" at the same time. This is what was more worthy of being written and explained in the Torah than all the other miracles and wonders that were recorded. Even if we were to say that G-d does not communicate as humans do, then how would the Jewish people understand the word of G-d, since if one were to hear "remember" and "observe" simultaneously, one would not understand either word. Even if (G-d were to say) one word like "remember", if one could not hear the "r" before the "m" and the "b", one could not understand what the speaker had said.

[Ibn Ezra is continuing along the line of logic that shows how problematic a literal interpretation of simultaneity would be. This now continues below. First, however, he speaks of the senses of sight and hearing generally. This relates to the preceding in that speech involves hearing.]

We know that the sense of sight is more highly valued than the sense of hearing, since we have absolute proof that when one sees lightening at one moment, then thunder will follow at the next moment. Thus only the eyes 'see it from afar' (anticipate it). The air gradually carries the sound to the ears, not reaching them until after a brief interval. And the speech sounds, with which one speaks, have their likeness inscribed in the air according to where they are found among the five places (of articulation in the mouth, such as the throat and lips) and not according to how they are recorded by one's hand. Thus all of the letter zayin enters the ear before kaf, vav, and resh (in) "זכור" ("remember").

Thus if one is talking about a miracle, that "remember" and "observe" were spoken simultaneously, how would the ears be able to hear this? If one were to say, it was also a miracle that the ears could hear two words at once, which ordinarily cannot even hear two speech sounds at once, then why didn't the sages of blessed memory mention the difficulty involved [in their claim about simultaneity]?

What can be done with the remaining difficulties, where differences between the verses (in the two Torah portions) do not share the same meaning as "remember" and "observe" do? (What can be done with) what was written in the second portion but absent in the first? Or how can one reconcile "You shall

not covet your neighbor's house" with "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife"? Finally, (what is one to do with the syntactic) reversals?

[He is getting repetitive here, possibly to drive home his point.]

I cannot explain to you all of the above until I explain the instruction of Hebrew. G-d, who is my witness and knows my intent, were it not for the necessity of my accounting for these difficulties, I would keep silent rather than go about mending the words of the sages.

SAID ABRAHAM (IBN EZRA) THE AUTHOR: Sometimes a pattern of a Hebrew speaker will clarify his words the most distinctly. Therefore sometimes they will say they need succinct words, so that the listener can understand their meaning. Know, then, that words are like bodies and their meaning like souls. The body is to the soul as a vessel (is to its contents). Similarly, the pattern of any sage in any language will safeguard its meaning. There will not be concern about changing the words as long as the meaning is the same.

[He is referring to sages who write in many different tongues depending where they are from. Ibn Ezra now proceeds to give examples of sentences whose words differ but whose meaning is

equivalent or nearly so. He selects his examples from the Hebrew Bible, which may be a veiled way of criticizing those commentators whose arguments of interpretation hinge on what he would call insignificant textual differences. This in turn questions their premiss that the Torah text came directly from G-d. If it did, How could variants exist if they were not there to express special differences in meaning?]

Thus I will give you some textual examples: G-d said to Cain, "You shall be more cursed than the ground. If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth." (Genesis 4:11-12) And Cain replied, "Since you banished me this day from the soil..." (Ibid., v. 14) [Both quotes amount to the same thing: Cain can no longer live off the land.] Who would be so lacking in understanding that they would think the meaning is not the same because the words are not the same?

(Here is another example :) Eliezer said (to Rachel) "Please let me sip..." (Genesis 24:17) And in 24:45 Eliezer said, "Please give me a drink." (Another example:) Moses said (to Pharaoh that G-d would slay all the Egyptian first-born "to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon..." (Exodus 12:29) [Actually according to masoretic text, Moses is not saying this. The text is reporting what G-d did. However, this does not affect Ibn Ezra's argument.] It is written, "to

the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones." (Exodus 11:5) [These mean the same in that both refer to persons of the lowest status.]

Moses mentioned the prayer in Deuteronomy, which he prayed for the Jewish people on account of the calf. It is not like the prayer mentioned in the portion **כִּי תִשָּׂא**, a prayer which no one has the capacity to understand.

In general, everything has variant (descriptions) such as Pharaoh's dream. Nebuchadnezzar and many others will come upon different words whose meaning is equivalent. [Ibn Ezra is playing on the similarity of meaning and language in Genesis 41:7-8 and Daniel 2:1. Both texts contain the expression, "his spirit was troubled". Both texts are about having a dream; In Genesis it is the Pharaoh, and in Daniel it is Nebuchadnezzar.]

When I tell you that sometimes I will take the short way (of writing words) and sometimes the long way-- as for example when one adds a nonradical letter or leaves it out-- the meaning of the word remains the same.

[I translate **אֶת מִשְׁרָת** as "nonradical letter" based on his comparison of this expression with root letters in his grammatical work, Sefer Tsachot, pp. 172-73., ed. Rodriguez.

Ibn Ezra had been talking about synonymous sentences and groups of words. Now he is talking about smaller units, equivalent variations of the words themselves. He will now give some examples.]

Compare where G-d says "וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן", "blue, purple" (Exodus 25:4) and where Moses says, "תַּכְלֵת אַרְגָּמָן", "blue, purple" (28:6).

[In the JPS, the English translation does not differ because of the vav, reenforcing Ibn Ezra's point that the meaning is unaffected by this variation. This also questions the assumption that G-d directly inspired the Torah because if G-d had, why would variant but synonymous statements, words and letters exist? How could Moses be an inaccurate scribe?]

Another example: G-d says "וְאַבְנֵי שֹהַם" "lapis lazuli" (Exodus 25:7) and Moses says, "וְאַבְנֵי שֹהַם" "lapis lazuli" (35:9).

And there are many other examples like these. Both ways (of writing) are correct, since what is written without the vav is the short way but does no harm. So too what is written with the vav, since it is added just for clarity. When one hears the vav pronounced in speech, no one asks what it means, or why the vav is missing (if not pronounced), or why it came to be written or why it is added, because all of these variations are right. It is apparent that one who pronounces (the vav)

does not ask about its meaning when written. If so, why is the meaning sought in a mute consonant which is not pronounced, like the ayin in the word לצלל? [One can claim the meaning of nach ha n'alam means "mute consonant" for the following reasons. In the Sefer Tsachot, he gives the hey of לצלל as an example of nach ha n'alam. He also contrasts this term with nach nir'eh, which he says is schwa. Alkaly (The Complete Hebrew Dictionary confirms this. He defines nach nir'eh as a sound pronounced as a schwa. The term nach ha n'alam is not listed, but he has the apparently synonymous nach nistar, defined as the vowel letters in non-vocalic Hebrew which are not pronounced but are used as a guide to reading.]

If so, why is (a word) written with a full vav or without one? [Apparently he is including the third possibility, a raised dot, in what he calls a full vav. His point is that it makes no difference whether a word is written with a vav or without one.] Our contemporaries will look for (differences in) meaning (in a word) with the full vav and (in a word) without one. And were they seeking for meaning in one form as opposed to the other? Were it the custom that they wrote all of the words (in question) one way (and not the other), I would have remained silent.

[I think Ibn Ezra is making fun of scholars who posit differences in meaning between the presence or absence of a nonradical vav but who write all the words in one way, either with or without the vav. If they write all the relevant words one way or the other, this denies that having the vav or not affects the meaning. If it did, these same scholars would use both forms systematically. But over and above his poking holes in the logic of the sages, his discussion of variants in the Torah text implies that he is looking at Torah as he would any other written material. He looks at text in a scientific way, treating it as an object of logical and linguistic analysis. This foreshadows the kind of Biblical criticism that is practiced today without apology and which is now taken for granted.]

I will now give you an example. One said to me, Write to my friend as follows: "אני פלונני אורבך לעולם" ("I so-and-so am your eternal friend.") I wrote "פלונני" and "אורבך" without the vav, always without. Reuben came and asked me, "Why did you write this without vavs?" I felt no need to write anything but what he said to me. I had no special desire that they be present or missing. Maybe Levy will come and get me to understand why I write as I do. I do not wish to write it long, as long as I say enough for the smart guy to understand. [The implication for the Ten Commandments is that Moses could

have written the words either with the vavs or without them; the meaning would be unaffected.]

Now I will explain to you the aforementioned questions. Know that the Ten Commandments, which are written in this portion, were all spoken by G-d, because it is written, "G-d spoke all these words, saying" (20:1)

[This is serious argumentation. In the beginning of his commentary on this part of the parasha, he presented arguments in favor of those who said G-d spoke only the first two Commandments. The arguments were grammatical. Now he is arguing from another perspective, from meaning and not grammar. He may be doing that to weaken the whole enterprise of taking differences so seriously as if to say, "You can argue it both ways. It's just a game." Another thing to note is that by not placing these opposing arguments next to each other, he is making his point more indirectly, and thus in a more hidden manner.]

They begin with "I" (v.2) and end with "anything that is your neighbor's". (v.14) Also, Moses said, when he mentioned the Ten Commandments a second time, "The Lord spoke these words-- those and no more-- to your whole congregation." (Deut. 5:19) This verse is not among them. [In Deuteronomy, that verse 19 smoothly leads into the next verses. In other words, the text

about the Ten Commandments, and the succeeding text are more closely connected. In Exodus, however, there is a more discrete break between the text of the Ten Commandments and what follows. And so maybe the point here is that the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments is more like a direct quote, and thus upholds the argument that they are literally the words of G-d.]

Furthermore, since all were written with G-d's finger, then G-d did say all of them. The tablets which were brought down, upon which are written the third, fourth and fifth Commandments, are not written in the manner of one speaking.

[I.e., they exhibit a written style, not an oral one. Footnote 31 says they do not look like oral quotes because they are not in the first person.] One must reply upon receiving this, that G-d is your Lord. Therefore He said, "You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your G-d." (20:7) Also this is supported by verse 11: "For in six days the Lord made.." Furthermore, it is the pattern of the Hebrew speaker to speak this way. [Ibn Ezra wants to explain that since G-d was speaking, there is a good reason that some of the Commandments are in the third person. G-d is speaking in a royal manner. Cf. the U.S. President when he refers to himself as "the President". Verses 7 and 11 are mentioned as examples of this royal third person. But Commandments 3-5 are singled out in reference to the tablets. "One of the techniques of hiding

one's view is to provide weak arguments! If both Decalogues were said by G-d, then G-d either says different things at different times-- G-d forbid!- or Moses, a fallible human being, said and wrote different things." (Kravitz, personal communication.) Both of these possibilities were considered to be radical, if not heretical, by the sages.]

It is written, "the fat of My festal offering shall not be left lying" (Ex 23:18) After that it is written, "You shall bring to the house of the Lord your G-d." (23:19) There are many examples like these. [He is continuing to give examples where G-d speaks in the third person. Here, G-d first speaks in the first person then switches to the third. Nevertheless, G-d is still speaking.]

The sages and I part company when they suggest that the Commandment "I" (v.2) is not one of the Ten Commandments. Some go on to say that "You shall have no" (v. 3) is the first Commandment, and "You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image" (v.4) the second. But that is incorrect. Is it of import whether the first Commandment is this verse or that, whether it is hidden or revealed, whether an intellectual belief or an act?

In the Commandment "Remember" (v.8) "you, your son or daughter" (v.10), its meaning is hidden or revealed. All of it is still one command (even though it spans more than one verse).

Others have said that "You shall not covet your neighbor's house" (v.14) is the ninth Commandment, and "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Ibid.) is the tenth.

[Ibn Ezra is now going to argue that "covet" is said twice to illustrate two meanings of that word, not two commandments. Both meanings have to do with wanting something. The first involves overt action to get it, such as by stealing. The other concerns thought alone. Apparently Ibn Ezra is saying that Moses needed to say "do not covet" twice to refer to these two meanings. By discussing the distinction between merely thinking as opposed to acting on one's thoughts, Ibn Ezra is anticipating his comments below on his tripartite division of commands into commands of the heart, commands of speaking, and commands of doing.]

You see that G-d sometimes says "You shall not covet," because coveting concerns two things. One comes from deeds like robbery and the like. (This is illustrated in the verse,) "No one will covet your land". (Ex 34:24) If this meant "coveting" in the sense of merely desiring it, the land of Israel would be considered a bad thing. (So it cannot mean that. It

must mean wanting to take possession of it.) The second meaning of "You shall not covet" is that of desiring something. Thus it was necessary for Moses to explain (it more explicitly as) "You shall not crave" (Deut. v.18) (in the second portion.) [Note that he says "for Moses to explain", which assumes that Moses authored the text. Again, this is radical, since the sages assumed that Moses was G-d's scribe, dutifully writing down each of G-d's words.]

But this too is nonsense, because why would one mention the robbery of the house alone and not the other things in it ? [He is now saying that the two senses of "covet" are not that clear and distinct after all.]

I will now present proof to you from the words of Moses that they (who disagree) did not speak correctly. G-d said, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." He also said, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." (Deut. 5:18) According to their view, the second (appearance of the phrase) "You shall not covet", which is written in this portion (Exodus) is taken in the sense of desiring another's wife, while the first (appearance of the phrase) is about robbing the house. Now Moses reverses these senses for he speaks with the words "You shall not crave your neighbor's house." [He is taking the Hebrew word for "crave" to mean coveting only in the sense of desiring but not acting upon it.] Then he speaks with the

words, "You shall not covet" to one who robs "your neighbor's wife." ["Rob" in the sense of having intercourse with her or literally kidnapping her.] Their reasoning is destroyed. The truth is, that the commandment "I" is the first as I had aptly explained it.

I will now speak about "remember" and "observe". Know that what retains the meaning are not the words themselves.

[As discussed above, Ibn Ezra knows that one can use different words to mean more or less the same thing. He gives examples below, which will lead to a non-literal explanation of the problem of "remember" and "observe".]

Our father Isaac said (to Esau) to make (a dish to his liking) "so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die" (בְּטָרֶם אִמּוֹת). (Gen. 27:4) Rebecca said to Jacob, that she heard that (Isaac) said, (so that) "I may bless you, with the Lord's approval, before I die" (לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי). (Ibid., v.7) (לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי) is like בְּטָרֶם אִמּוֹת. If this is so, then why is "with the Lord's approval" added (in v. 7)? The answer is, she knew that Isaac was G-d's prophet. The blessing was done in a prophetic manner. That is why she said, "with the Lord's approval" to Jacob. That is how she explained the meaning of the blessing. [Apparently this phrase is a veiled reference

to the fact that G-d is going to approve of the blessing going to Jacob instead.]

Thus Moses acted. [Like Rebecca, in the retelling which he did in Deuteronomy, words get added or subtracted.] For the Ten Commandments which are written in this portion are G-d's words without additions or diminutions. Nothing but those ten were inscribed upon the tablets of the Covenant. It is not as the Gaon said, that "remember" was on one tablet and "observe" on the other, with the Ten Commandments written according to the portion Va'etchanan (on the second tablet) being Moses' words.

The complete proof that it was written twice (is from the quote) "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you".

Know, the faculty of memory is at the back of the brain and that place is the region which preserves forms. [Fascinating. Ibn Ezra must be the first neurolinguist.] So memory includes preserving. Here all kinds of observing were being remembered. [Thus, he must be generalizing from the statement that the brain retains forms, to the statement that the brain retains ideas, such as ways of observing Shabbat.] The sense of "remember" is that of all the days of the week, the Sabbath should be set apart and remembered. All of this is to make sure we observe the seventh day so that we will do no work on it. This is how the meaning of "remembering" ends up implying

"observing". When G-d said "Remember", we understand that all the hearers took it in the sense of "Observe", as if (that word too) were said simultaneously (with "Remember").

[So here is the answer which agrees with the sages yet gets out of the reductio/traps caused by taking them literally. G-d only said "Remember", but the people heard the implication of "Observe" embedded in it as well as the actual word "remember". So, the way to remember Shabbat is to observe it. Now he goes on to tackle the problem of why "remember" is not said in the second portion as well.]

Moses did not need (to say) "remember" in the second (portion) because (it says in the first portion) "For in six days the Lord made..." (v.11) And in the beginning (of the command about Shabbat in the second portion) G-d said, "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you." (v. 12) By means of those words G-d said, as it were, "I indicated to you that what I commanded you in your Torah in Exodus 20 was the command "Remember" (v.8) through "hallowed it" (v.11)

[I.e, Moses refers back to what G-d "already said" in the first portion with the words, "as the Lord your G-d has commanded you." That phrase is as if Moses were in an imaginary dialogue saying, "As I had told you before in Exodus 20, this is what you must do. I am not going to repeat myself. The place where I already said it was from v.8 through v. 11."

The verse about "For in six days" is referred to because it states what it is that must be remembered, i.e., the reason for the Sabbath. This was stated in the first portion and does not need to be repeated in the second. Ibn Ezra now goes on to points unrelated to the issue of "remember" versus "observe".]

Since G-d commanded that male and female slaves were to rest on the Sabbath without explaining why, Moses gave his reason when he said, G-d commanded the slaves to rest so that you would be reminded of when you were slaves in Egypt and that "G-d delivered" (us to freedom). (Deut. 15:15) [As we saw many times before, Ibn Ezra is crediting Moses and not G-d with an innovation. Moses, not G-d added the explanation about the slaves for observing the Sabbath.]

Know that the eight things are all negative commands. The Commandment "Honor..." is a positive command. The discernment which G-d implanted in the human heart obligates us all to do good to one who did good to us. The child comes out into the world only because of his parents. They nursed and weaned him, raised and educated him, fed and clothed him. He is obligated to honor them his whole life, because they were the cause of his being alive upon the face of the earth.

[Ibn Ezra is explaining how the commandment to honor one's parents is rational. They did beneficial things for us, and we

should return the favor. Thus the command has a self-evident rational motivation.]

Therefore (for fulfilling the commandment to honor one's parents), his reward is to lengthen his life. Since G-d breathed his soul into him through his parents, who prepared his body, the command exists to honor one's parents, for he who does so honors G-d as well. That is how Moses explains it: "Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your G-d has commanded you." (Deut. 5:16)

The reward is for a positive command, but the punishment is for a negative command, as I will explain with the verse, "You must not partake of it, in order that it may go well with you..." (Deut. 12:25) [This is in reference to the prohibition from eating blood. The reward in this case is good health, since Ibn Ezra thought that eating blood was bad for the health. He states this in his commentary on Deut. 12:23. A problem, however, is that there is no Ibn Ezra commentary on Deut 12:24. Perhaps he never wrote it even though he had intended to, or it was lost through scribal error.]

Thus Moses said you are obligated to honor the progenitors "that you may long endure." (Ex. 20:12) This is a rational obligation. Moreover, G-d commanded that you honor them so that you will have an additional divine reward, namely, "in order that it may go well with you," (Deut. 25:12) for those

who obey G-d. [In other words, one gets two rewards for fulfilling this commandment: One is the more immediate one of getting reciprocal good from one's parents. The other is getting divine reward--maybe a bigger share of the world-to-come?- for doing the command for its own sake, as a way to obey G-d.]

Moses' words are as I explained Rebecca's (additional) words. (Genesis 27:41) That is, both cases are comparable.

וְאֶבְנֵי שָׂרָם and כִּי אֶבְנֵי שָׂרָם are comparable, [As discussed above, p.15] as are וְלֹא תִנָּאֵף, לֹא תִנָּאֵף and וְלֹא תִנָּאֵף versus שִׁקְרָה. (These phrases are) children of the same father. Likewise, תִּתְאַבֵּר and תִּחְמוֹד have issued from the same belly.

[This is his graphic way of reiterating his point that the phrases mean the same thing. The differences between the verses in the two portions were discussed above.]

G-d said, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house" , because anyone with common sense who acquires (a neighbor's) house, will then covet the wife, and then the male and female slaves, leading at last to the ox and donkey which plow his field. (more superficial level), his argument may be that in

general, one may tend to covet a house and field more than the

[Judging from the context of the following few sentences in Ibn Ezra's text, he is saying that G-d listed "house" before "wife" in Exodus because that is what one would expect the average person to covet first. This then would lead to coveting the entities within it, first the wife, then the other humans, and finally the animals. Thus the word order of Exodus, which is G-d's word order, reflects the order in which one may covet entities. As we will see, Moses' word order in Deuteronomy, which lists "wife" before "house", differs because he was thinking of the most likely sequence of entities that a bachelor would covet.]

If so, (the words) are arranged in one order in this portion, while Moses rearranged them in another order (in Deuteronomy). This is because (Moses was referring to) bachelors, who would covet the woman first and only later the house. This contrasts with the case where the words "house" and "field" precede "ox and the donkey" which plows. Then come the words "male and female slaves".

[This word order reflects neither parasha! In both, "slaves" precedes "ox and ass". Also "field" does not appear in Exodus. Possibly he is quoting from memory since the exact order and exact words do not affect his point.

On a more superficial level, his argument may be that in general, one may tend to covet a house and field more than the

animals, and then the animals more than the slaves. At a deeper level, saying that Moses "rearranged" the words in "another order" assigns an active role to Moses. He did not merely copy out what G-d said; he made some innovations. If so, then that is to say that not all of Torah is an exact replica of G-d's words, which was a radical assertion in his time.

Now, moving to a new problem, he goes on to explain a phrase which appears in Exodus but not in Deuteronomy.]

Included in the first portion (are the words) "or anything that is your neighbor's" because it is G-d who included it. Since Moses' words and G-d's words are co-mingled (in the second portion), that is why not all the words written in the first portion appear in the second. [Ibn Ezra may be referring to co-mingling only in the second portion, thereby not saying that Exodus as well as Deuteronomy does not reflect the specific words of G-d.]

The first Commandment is "I". Know that there are two kinds of commands. One kind, the majority, consists of the commands which G-d has implanted within the heart of all rational people.

[I.e, they stand to reason. Footnote 52 refers to these as the mitzvot understood through knowledge. The image of planting suggests that Ibn Ezra believes that G-d gave us the capacity to be rational; that G-d chose to make that a part of human nature.]

The only one of the Ten Commandments which does not fall into this category is the one about the Sabbath. Thus all intellectuals, of whatever language or nation, acknowledge from their own judgment (the commandments) are implanted within us. These will not be added to or subtracted from. Those are the ones Abraham observed along with other additional commands. [Such as circumcision.] G-d gave the Torah only to rational people; whoever is not a reasonable person cannot receive the Torah. [That is, one must have enough rational capacity to understand the Torah, which is itself rational.]

The second category of commands consists of the obscure ones. The reason for why they are commanded is unknown. G-d forbid that there be even one command that would contradict reason! We (Jews) alone are obligated to observe all that G-d commands, whether their secret (purpose) is revealed or not. If we find one command that seems to contradict reason, it is not correct for us to believe that it is to be understood in its literal meaning. [When a command does not seem rational if

taken literally, then a non-literal but rational interpretation must be sought.]

Only in the writings of the sages--may their memory be for a blessing--is the reason for such commands sought after. Suppose by way of example (we take one command) and if we do not find (an explanation) written (in the Torah), we search and search all we can. Maybe we can manage to make one up. [I.e., find a motivation for it.] If we cannot, we leave it, and we acknowledge that we do not know what (the motivation) was, as in "Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts," (Deut. 10:16) (Then we ask,) Did G-d command that we should cruelly kill? But we clearly know that all commands which are not made obligatory because of our rational judgment all have a secret behind them even if the reason is concealed from us. [Again, if the literal meaning does not seem rational, then a metaphorical or philosophical meaning must be found which is rational. Thus all commands are ultimately rational.]

The evidence for this is that the reason why they were commanded is written for some of them. As for example with the Sabbath, which is to remember the creation in the beginning. (For the command about) the festival of unleavened bread, the reason for it is, "so that you may remember" the hasty departure from Egypt. (Deut. 16:3) (Other examples:) "Befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

(Deut. 10:19) [There is the pattern: command plus explanation. Here are several more examples.] "You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed, else the crop...may not be used." (Deut. 22:9) "He shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the Lord has warned you, 'You must not go back that way again.'" (Deut. 17:16) "And he shall not have many wives." The text mentions why: "lest his heart go astray." (17:17)

[Clearly, through the irony of saying the motive of some commands are concealed, and then by giving many examples to the contrary, Ibn Ezra believes no such thing.]

It is not the case that a command is (just issued) for its own sake (and nothing more), as written in the law book of Simeon ben Kirah [an early code]. Let one go "and read it." (17:17) [I.e., read about the laws and get to understand them.] "Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows." (v.20) "Gather the people... that they may learn to revere the Lord your G-d." (31:12) There are countless commands like these. If this is true, then any intellectual whose eyes G-d has opened is able to know (the meaning of a command) from words of Torah.

All commands can fall into three categories. The first consists of commands of the heart, the second, commands of speaking and the third, commands of doing. [From the examples

below, the meanings of these will become clear.] There are two kinds of commands of the heart: positive and negative. Examples of positive precepts are: "Love the Lord your G-d." (Deut. 11:1) And attached to it (is the consequence,) if you fail to "reverence this honored and awesome Name... the Lord will inflict... (Deut. 28:58-59)

(Another example:) "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev. 19:18) Here is an example of a negative precept: You shall not hate your kinsman in your heart. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge." (Lev. 19:17-18) [Thus a command of the heart has to do with internal feelings and attitudes.]

There are also two kinds of speaking commands: positive and negative. Examples of the former include, recitation of the Shema, the grace after meals, the Priestly Benediction, the confession of tithing, and many like those.

[As footnote 59 shows us, this last refers to, e.g., "You shall declare... 'I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to...' (Deut. 26:13) The relevant verses continue through v. 16]

Examples of negative (speaking) commands: "You shall not bear false witness." (Deut. 5:17), "You shall not revile G-d." (Ex. 22:27) "You shall not insult the deaf." (Lev. 19:14) As for

the commands of doing, both positive and negative, examples of these abound and there is no need to go over them.

Commands of the heart are the most important of all the categories. Many sages have thought that the only aspect of idolatry (which "counted" as wrong) was the words of the idolater. [That is, the sages said there was no culpability in having thoughts about idolatry as supposed to saying them out loud.] But surely this is the most heinous of all evil thoughts. This one by itself is as bad as all the rest put together. [That is, idol worship is incorrect and is very bad in that it is incorrect about the most important thing of all, what G-d is. To put it more strongly, thought was not only idolatrous, but the worst of all idolatry since bad thought is in error, and prevents one from connecting to G-d's Active Intellect.]

[He now proceeds to give proof texts of how important thoughts of the heart are to G-d. The first example proves how much G-d hates bad thoughts; the others prove how much G-d values good thoughts. It is of note the number of supporting verses he cites. It is no wonder that thoughts, as opposed to actions, are highly valued to a rationalist like Ibn Ezra because the thoughts must be correct in order to make things "go well with you" in this world and the next.]

One can indeed see it is written, "six things the Lord hates... a mind that hatches evil plots." (Proverbs 6:16) And it is written, "As for your wanting to build a House for My name, you do well to want that." (Second Chronicles 6:8) "Do good, O Lord, to the good, to the upright in heart." (Psalm 125:4) "and may you be wholehearted with the Lord our G-d to walk in his ways." (First Kings 8:61) "I the Lord probe the heart, search the mind--to repay every man." (Jeremiah 17:10) "...the Lord sees into the heart." (First Samuel 16:7)

The First Commandment is the principle of all the nine commandments that are written after it, and it is the closest to a command of the heart. The meaning of this commandment is that one should believe without a doubt that for this is the honored Name that is written but not pronounced out loud. He alone is G-d. [This of course refers to the Tetragrammaton. Using the First Commandment as a springboard, he will now launch into some theological and philosophical ideas.]

Rabbi Yehuda the Levi of blessed memory, asked me, Why does it say, "I the Lord am your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (20:2) rather than say, for I made the heavens and the earth, and I created you."

[For Levi, the latter seems far more important and fundamental than the former because he was focused on the importance of

Jewish as opposed to general human history. Here we are at the beginning of this all-important part of the Torah, the Ten Commandments, and so the most important things should be said.]

This was my response to him: Know the levels of human beings are not equal in the way they believe in G-d. The rank and file believe what the ears hear, what the Master tells them. And above them are those who say they saw it written among the words of the Torah which G-d gave to Moses. If heretics were to come and undermine (their belief and) say, "There is no G-d", it would hurt them, they would be struck dumb because they would not know how to answer back.

[Most people "ha rabim" do not possess intellectual belief. At best, a few people rely on what the Torah says. Even fewer go beyond that level and operate with intellectual belief, that is, operate as philosophers. Getting back to Levy's comment, maybe Ibn Ezra is saying that if challenged, it would be far easier for the average Jew to defend the belief that G-d delivered them from Egypt rather than that He created them and the universe. What may be operating at a deeper level here is Ibn Ezra's own discomfort with the notion of G-d creating things at some point in time. As we will see below, he hints at the idea of an ongoing creation happening every day.]

those who are roused to study the sciences are like those who remove themselves from desire. They will recognize the creation of G-d in mineral, vegetable and animal, in the human body itself. They will see (evidence of) the work of G-d in each and every limb according to its history and know why each has a given proportion. Then their hearts will move them to study the spheres which is a work of G-d; it is the intermediate world which G-d founded.

[According to Husik's recapitulation of Ibn Ezra's philosophy, there are three worlds in his system. One is the highest world, which is eternal. It contains the Intelligences (i.e., angels) and the world soul. (The human soul is a part of this world soul.) The angels move the entities within the intermediate world, which is also eternal. This second world contains nine spheres, planets and fixed stars. Finally, we have our own world, the lower world, temporal and formed by the angels. It consists of the four elements, which combine to produce minerals, plants, animals and humans. The overall picture is of descending emanations from G-d. (pp. 190-91)]

Baron, by the way, notes that "the Intelligences" is a term from philosophy and that Jewish philosophers equated these with angels "to harmonize this doctrine with the teachings of Judaism." (p.93)]

They know the time when the sun or moon are darkened [eclipsed], and to what extent the sun will become darkened; They also know why the moon becomes dark and who causes it. All this they know from complete proofs in which no doubt resides. [This refers to astronomy.]

Intelligent people know G-d from the ways of G-d. [Footnote 65 reads this as, One arrives at knowledge about G-d via contemplation of G-d's creation; that is, one who studies philosophy.] Thus said Moses, "Pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You..." (Ex. 33:13) That is the reason the honored Name is stated in the First Commandment, "I the Lord am your G-d". [The issue is not belief in creation, but belief in G-d; how to gain access to Him.] This is a question which only the superior sages will be able to understand, as I already explained in the portion, **וְאֵלֶיךָ שׁוּבוּ** (the first portion in Exodus). For this is the one G-d who exists without changing, and there is none except G-d who resides eternally, no one like Him "having no successor." (Psalm 55:20) [Ibn Ezra may be hinting here about his position on creation. If G-d is unchanging and eternal, then no creation at a point in time could have taken place, because that would have involved a change on G-d's part.]

G-d established the highest world with His power. And the intermediate world came about through the power of G-d and of

His holy angels (who both exist) in the highest world. This (earth) is the lower world which was founded through G-d's will, and indirectly through the power of the two other worlds.

[Baron points out that medieval philosophers in general posited an intermediate world to solve a problem: If G-d is perfect, how could G-d create an imperfect world? Ans: "intermediary powers which, though sharing some of G-d's qualities, are nevertheless sufficiently removed from Him to mark the transition to our world of perdition." (p.91) This idea comes from the Neo-Platonists. So in the paragraph above, G-d's will "percolates" down through the intermediate world, which in turn releases that will to the lower world.]

Behold the commandment "I the Lord" will suffice for the intellectuals of whatever nations. "I the Lord" making heaven and earth nearly five thousand years ago is only acknowledged by Israel. The sages of the nations do not deny that G-d alone made heaven and earth, except that they say that G-d makes continually without beginning or end.

[Possibly the point here is that the general import of the first commandment is accepted by philosophers, but that the specifics of how long ago G-d fashioned the world is an issue for Jews in particular. (Kravitz, personal communication)]

Ibn Ezra's comments continue to be consistent with scholars' claims that his philosophy is Neo-Platonic. (E.g, see Levy, p. 10, and Husik, p.190.) Neo-Platonists viewed the creation of the world as eternal; it did not start up at some point in time. So in fact, it looks like Ibn Ezra agrees with the foreign sages rather than Jewish tradition.]

Behold, G-d made signs and portents in Egypt, then Moses brought them out to be (the people) of G-d. And so Moses said, "Has any (other) god ventured to go and take for himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts... as the Lord your G-d did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" (Deut. 4:34) The reason G-d did to Israel what He did not do to any other nation is that G-d created the intermediate world, which had its corresponding lower world according to what was in the disposition of the stars for all people, for good or for bad (fate).

[Sirat explains that Ibn Ezra's picture of the universe is that movements of the stars in the intermediate world affect events on earth. These movements are natural laws, whose ultimate source is G-d. (p.109) The idea of the lower world as "corresponding" may be the Neo-Platonic one that "the harmony of the world implies that everything in this world has a celestial image and that to every astral configuration corresponds a sublunar being..." (ibid., p. 94) As a final

point regarding the above and the paragraph below: Ibn Ezra believed that entire nations, as well as individuals, were affected for good or for ill by the stars. So Israel had a certain fate because of the influence of the stars in the intermediate world.]

Thus it is appreciated by us that G-d assigns to humans their lot. One sees that the array of stars for Israel resulted in a certain fate to remain as servants. [That is, Israel holds a privileged position in that G-d overrides the power of the constellations when it comes to Israel's fate.]

G-d, through His will, on account of the love of the patriarchs, renews the signs [miracles] in the lower world, (an act) which was not (accomplished) through the rule of the intermediate world.

[According to Sirat, the model here is that what happens in the lower world, our earth, depends on natural laws and upon movements of the stars. When G-d overrules these phenomena, which originate in the intermediate world, then at that time miracles can occur. (p. 109)]

He took Israel from the control of the constellations to be an (especially) assigned people. On account of this, our ancestors said: "Israel has no star (of influence). (Nedarim 32:1;

Shabbat 156:1) [Possibly an hyperbole to stress that we do have some measure of free will, as contrasted with the gentiles.] I will explain this further by way of examples from the portion Ki Tisa.

[Having said Israel is not influenced by the stars as much as other nations, Ibn Ezra now goes on to demonstrate G-d's power, and hence influence, as opposed to exclusively astrological influences.]

Because of the signs that G-d performed in Egypt, Moses said, "You have been shown that the Lord alone is G-d." (Deut. 4:35) All, the great and the small, (can) understand this; (even) sages who are not wise. (As further evidence) one can add the standing at Mount Sinai where the voice of G-d was heard, and therefore after that, "from the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you." (4:36) Lastly, the Torah says, complete knowledge, which one thinks over until it becomes certain in one's mind, is the knowledge that G-d alone is One, as it says, "Know therefore this day and keep in mind that the Lord alone is G-d." (4:39)

David said, "And you, my son Solomon, know the G-d of your father, and serve Him." (First Chron. 28:9) This is knowledge of the mind, not a pronouncement of the lips. Here one can mention to the intellectual "I, the Lord", and add, "who

brought you", which both intelligent and unintelligent alike will understand. [That is, on different levels. Everyone understands the reference to being led out of Egypt by G-d's power, but the intellectuals will get a deeper meaning.]

The Torah says, (I am) your G-d, who you are obligated to because I brought you out of the house of bondage to be servants to Me, and be a nation for Me. I will be your G-d. Moses makes a comment on this in the portion **שְׁמֹת**: "When, in time to come, your son asks you, What mean the exhortations... which...G-d has enjoined upon you?" (Deut. 6:20) The meaning of the question is, Why are we obligated to perform G-d's commands more than any other people? Surely he created all (peoples). I can now list three answers. The first is, "We were slaves to Pharaoh" (6:21) and G-d did this (gave us commands) for our great benefit.

Therefore we are obligated to observe all He commanded us, even when we do not know the meaning of His commands. [The motive for doing so is that we will benefit.] The second answer is, for these are the commands that are not for G-d's benefit, "but rather for our good all the days of our lives." (6:24) [In other words, what would be superfluous commands to other peoples end up being very worthwhile to Jews. But note a problem: what does not fit is that Ibn Ezra says that a command is ultimately rational, be it on a literal or non-

literal level, yet he now says observe a command without understanding it because you will benefit from it. Either he is deliberately being obscure or he is being pulled in two directions by his piety.] The third answer: "It will be to our merit before the Lord...to observe..." (6:25) That is, that we will become righteous enough to inherit a share of the world-to-come.

Those engaged in philosophical investigation of bodies have found ten essential categories, above which there are none others.

[This is a reference to Aristotle's ten categories: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, condition, position, action, and passivity. He now proceeds to list "substance" as basic to all the others.]

The first (Commandment) is the substance of everything and it endures (forever). The nine (other) commandments are all accidental but are all dependent on the first and are joined to and derived from it. This is because (the Commandment itself) is like basic principle. The first contains the means to reckon all ten, because all reckoning (of numbers) is derived from it. The whole of their reckoning will be found within it, because it is their foundation. [He is making an analogy with mathematics. In a base ten system, one is the basis of all the other numbers. Add zero to one and you get

ten; multiply any number by one and you get that number. So the First Commandment is to the others as the number one is to the other numbers.]

Be aware, this is the first commandment that G-d said, and it includes all (the kinds of) commands; of the heart, of speaking, and of doing. (This is so) because one who does not believe in G-d in his mind will not (perceive oneself as) commanded. [So belief in G-d is basic to all else, because without that, there would be no authority behind the commands and the whole system would break down. In effect, as Kravitz notes (personal communication), one has a G-d who acts as if there is a G-d.]

It is incumbent upon one to remember (G-d) on all occasions, to honor Him; because all that we do we would not do if it were not on account of the intrinsic importance of so honoring. What is more, one only restrains oneself from violating negative commands because of the glory of G-d alone. This is like the person who gives charity to the poor. But if his motives of giving were to honor the charity collector or to win people's praise (and honoring G-d were not his concern), then for such an almsgiver the honor of man would be greater than the honor of G-d. What, then, would he be able to give in order to get a reward from G-d?

"Ever since we stopped making offerings to the Queen of

(In contrast) he who secretly commits a sin is crazy to think that (the sin) will not be made known to the king, or that he will not be seen by people who know about it and who hold him in low esteem. For it is written, "Shall He who forms the eyes not see?" (Psalm 94:9) For G-d sees in secret what humanity cannot even see out in the open, because G-d knows our thoughts and secrets. Behold he who fears the king, who may die tomorrow and not be able to punish us, and we, who do not fear the true King, who breathed life into us in this world and the next. [For all his irony and sarcasm, Ibn Ezra does show a pious strain. He is in no way counting himself as outside the tradition.]

Gaon Rav Saadia, associated with Azharut [This is the name of a kind of poem, where the 613 commandments are given in order and in rhyme.] included all the commands in these Ten Words and discovered the commandments related to G-d in the first five Commandments in the Decalogue. As I have already explained, the First Commandment is the foundation of all the categories of commands, and after it is written that you shall have no other gods. He sins if he does not believe in almighty G-d; it is greater than the sin of idolatry. There are many who believe in G-d, yet make offerings and burn incense to idols, like those who burned incense to the (diety the) Queen of Heaven. They thought this would benefit them, as it says, "Ever since we stopped making offerings to the Queen of

Heaven..." we were lacking in everything. (Jeremiah 44:18) It says elsewhere, "Along with worshipping the Lord, they served their own gods." (2 Kings 17:33) We find another example: Na-aman [proper name] said, "When my master enters the (pagan) temple of Rimmon, he is leaning on my arm, so that I must bow low in the temple of Rimmon." (2 Kings 5:18) [This is about a servant who feels compromised about bowing to idols on account of his master.] In this case they acknowledge G-d but along with another divinity. Thus in this commandment G-d is referred to. [By mentioning "other gods", G-d is referred to in contrast as the one to worship.]

It is also implied in the Third Commandment, that one who swears falsely is a transgressor. (However) he minimizes the idolatrous (aspects of his crime). He is ashamed before the Revealed G-d; maybe he did that [swore falsely] out of anger or necessity. In his heart he believed in G-d, and he did not go along with another (who did not).

[This seems contradictory, but is not. Yes, it is a sin to swear falsely, but he is after all swearing by G-d's name and not by the name of some idol. Ibn Ezra says extenuating circumstances might have caused such a person to err. He is invoking G-d for a sinful purpose, but at least he is invoking G-d, not an idol.]

In the Fourth Commandment it is written, G-d rested on the seventh day, yet he who works on Shabbat denies the work of creation. This is a transgression more minor than, Do not swear falsely by His name.

[It sounds shocking (even to modern liberal me) to talk of violating Shabbat as minor in any way. But since Ibn Ezra hints at not believing in a creation which had a discrete beginning, then it would follow that one who observes Shabbat because they do indeed believe G-d created the world and then rested is in error. According to Ibn Ezra, they should believe that creation has been eternal and that G-d keeps it running, so to speak. Therefore, working on Shabbat is not such a huge sin after all, at least in comparison with swearing falsely. The former is about belief in creation; the latter about belief in G-d. So swearing falsely is a greater sin because it involves abusing belief in G-d by invoking G-d's name to lie. Above, when Ibn Ezra appears to mitigate the severity of even swearing falsely, he is doing so just in comparison to what would be even worse, namely, swearing in the name of an idol.]

In the fifth commandment, G-d is implied because G-d joined with one's parents in one's creation. If one does not honor them, it is like not honoring G-d.

The five commandments which remain all relate to humankind. The first (of these latter five) is the most serious; it involves separating the soul from the body (by killing someone). The other four after it do not concern the body. One --do not steal--concerns theft of money, and the one after that, of speech, and the one after that, of desire of the heart.

["You shall not steal" involves monetary theft; "You shall not bear false witness" is verbal theft, i.e. of justice from the falsely accused. Both "You shall not commit adultery" and "You shall not covet" involve potential or actual theft of the object of one's affection or sexual desires. (This brings to mind the cliché, "He stole her heart".) Apparently, Ibn Ezra did not try to list the categories of theft in the same order as the last four commandments, since the two pertaining to theft of the heart are not contiguous. It may be, however, that he listed monetary theft first because that is the most basic typical sense of the word "theft". The others are in some sense metaphorical.

Up to this point, Ibn Ezra has been speaking in general about the Ten Commandments. Now, he will comment on specific verses and specific words and phrases within those verses.]

2.1 Ibn Ezra's Verse by Verse Commentary

Verse 3: "You shall have no other gods beside Me". Scripture implies "G-d" as opposed to the thoughts of those who serve Him [who think erroneously that "elohim" means "gods"]. Here are several examples (of this human error): "The prophet Hananiah removed the bar from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, and broke it." (Jeremiah 28:10) [Hananiah had the mistaken notion that just as the bar broke, so would Nebuchadnezzar's yoke be broken. Thus, Hananiah tried to alter G-d's plans to have Nebuchadnezzar continue his rule.] "The men pursued them." (Joshua 2:7) [This refers to the story about a harlot in Jericho who hid Joshua's two spies and then purposely misled the king's men to "pursue them" in a direction where they would not be found. The king's men were trying to thwart G-d's will by capturing the spies and hindering Joshua's attempt to conquer Canaan. Thus as in the preceding example, we have a case of making a mistake. For the men to pursue them is as erroneous as running after other gods.]

"...of their father's house." (Josh. 2:1) / Consequently,

(A final example of a mistaken notion:) "Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me and brought me up?'" [Saul tried to get help from Samuel's ghost, who he had "brought up" from the dead. He sought advice about the attacking Philistines even though G-d had already decreed that they would win. Once

again, we have a story about a human being trying to tamper with the fate decreed by G-d. Not only that, belief in sorcery is also against G-d's ways; it assumes there are competing powers.] This is written according to what Saul thought, but this is not the place to explain it.

(We will now isolate) the meaning of "לְפָנַי" ("beside Me"). [He quotes verses with "לְפָנַי" in the same fashion that modern scholars do when using a concordance to see how a word is used in context in the Bible. The English equivalent of "לְפָנַי" is underlined for the reader.] "Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah", who was with him and saw him. (Gen. 11:28)

[In addition to pinning down the meaning of "beside Me", Ibn Ezra is alluding to a Midrash that G-d hastened Terah's death to ensure that people would not criticize Abraham for fulfilling G-d's command, "Go forth", leaving an aged father to do so.]

"So it was Eleazar and Ithamar who served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron." (Nos. 3:4) [Consequently, "You shall have no other gods beside Me" means, "I am your G-d--and I eternally exist in every place and I see what you do."]

Here is the meaning which follows "I am your G-d." [That is, can be associated with that phrase.] "I am always found everywhere. I see what you do. Do not associate with the people of other gods!" [That is, "Don't associate any other god with Me!" (Kravitz, personal communication)]

An intelligent sage once said, "Do not anger your Lord, while He can see you." [Feur translates this warning thus: "O servant! Do not brazenly anger your Master while he is watching--and G-d is always watching!" (p. 29)] Thus, this (relates to) the command, that is, "You shall have no other gods." It is a command of the heart as well as of the mouth. But (I myself, in distinction to the sage, say) there are no negative commands of the heart in the Torah except this one, because if a person says before witnesses, that he was about to murder or commit adultery, he should not be killed by his word alone if he then did nothing.

When it is said, "Let us go and worships other gods, Scripture commands, "take his life." (Deut. 13:10) (that is, even if he has not as yet done it.)

[Verses 7-8 suppose the guilty party out-and-out said, "Come let us worship other gods." So we have a clear case in verses 7-10 of someone committing the act of (potentially) enticing others into idolatry and what the punishment is.]

(Here is another reference to) the deed (and not the intention): "You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness" (Ex. 20:4) of wood or stone. And one must not make any kind of graphic representation of what is in the sky. It says this regarding what is up above the earth on all sides. But these are not images in the sky; these are just 48 forms.

["Forms" is a literal translation of "tsurot"; here, it most likely means "constellations". Astrological systems were based on many variables, including constellations through which planets passed, and those through which the planets did not pass. There are 12 constellations through which planets pass. (See under "Astrology", Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 474.) Possibly, then, the number 48 refers to the sum of the two kinds of constellations, 12 plus 36.]

Charlatans do things which are not real. [That is, which are not true.] Their dealings are close to idolatry.

[Ibn Ezra seems to be giving with one hand and taking away with the other. By making the distinction between "images" and "forms", Ibn Ezra is excluding astrological graphics from the Biblical prohibition against making artistic representations of images in the sky lest they lead to idolatry. But having said that, he rails against dishonest quasi-idolatrous

astrologers. This is not as contradictory as it sounds; it seems he is warning us against charlatans, who may very well cross the blurred line between idolatry and legitimate graphic representations.]

Verse 4: "What is on the earth below". That is, what is beneath the sky, the many images explained in the portion וְכָל חַיָּוְיָא. [Footnote 95 says this refers to Deut. 4:16-19, which gives lists of things on the earth such as "winged bird".] This prohibition holds for what is (both) upon and below the water. The text says, "in the waters under the earth," because the sea and the land are (both on) one ball. [That is, the water is under the sky as well as the land, because both sea and land are one sphere under it. Therefore, the prohibition applies to things beneath the sea as well as things upon the land since the sea is under the sky too.]

Verse 5: "You shall not bow down to them. As do astrologers who think they can bring down power from the heights to the need of one person below.

(you shall) not serve them. ("Not serving" means) you may not offer sacrifices or burn incense; it falls into the category of, you shall have no other god. Also there is the negative commandment,

"Make no mention of the names of other gods; they shall not be heard on your lips." (Ex. 23:13) And again, in the Book of Joshua: "Do not utter the names of their gods or swear by them; do not serve them or bow down to them."

(The meaning of) an impassioned G-d [JPS translation, with note that others translate it as, "jealous G-d".] is it is logical to ask, after G-d created and instilled life into you, How could you honor another (god) who will neither benefit nor watch over you?" The meaning of Alef Lamed (a name for G-d in the phrase, "an impassioned G-d") is to indicate G-d's power. G-d can avenge you at anytime and you cannot escape from Him.

[Ibn Ezra now moves on to the interpretation of the rest of the verse. He struggles with the apparent meaning that children suffer for the sins of their parents.] Jeremiah declared, "In those days, they shall no longer say, 'Parents have eaten sour grapes and children's teeth are blunted.' (31:29) [Adding the next verse makes his point very clear: "But (now) everyone shall die for his own sins: whosoever eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be blunted."] There can be no doubt where Ezekiel explains that G-d swore that "a child shall not share the burden of a parent's guilt." (18:20)

What does the phrase, "visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children" mean? The answer is that Ezekiel explains if a

father is evil and the son does not take after him, the child will not bear his father's guilt, because bearing the punishment is connected to one's enemies, as I have pointed out.

[This is based on a word play in the Hebrew. "אֲוִיָּא" means, "Those who (persist in) hate(ing) life." At the end of our verse five we get "אֲוִיָּא" "those who reject Me". The literal meaning is, "those who hate Me", the verbal form of "enemy". So it is as if the verse read, G-d will visit the guilt of the fathers upon those who hate Me, i.e., My enemies. In other words, it is as if the verse skipped the words, "upon the children" through the words, "fourth generations".]

The meaning of "זָכַר" has the meaning of "זָכַר" as in, "G-d took note of Sarah." (Gen. 21:1) which is like, "G-d remembered" her, for G-d has patience with a bad person who perhaps will repent from sin and begets a child who is better than she. But (as in our case, in verse 5) if the child takes after the parent, and the children of the third and fourth generation do so too, G-d will not hold off His anger. Consequently this applies to the fourth (as well as the third). Suppose this rejection of G-d had continued through all four generations, then the memory of all of them would perish. For G-d would remember what the father had done, as well as the son and the son's

son; thus G-d would not have patience with [hold off punishing] even the fourth son.

[Ibn Ezra is basing his arguments here on the assumption that G-d "remembers" those who do good, those who had a parent or grandparent who did good, those who repent, or those who have children who do good. The result of this remembering is that G-d will hold back His anger. The above is answering the question, Why does the verse say, "third and upon the fourth generation" and not just one number or the other? The answer is, that if G-d will remember people, even bad people, through the third generation, then the father of the fourth generation child will be remembered, and then the child will be linked in G-d's mind to that third generation parent. But if even that child is bad, the game is over and G-d will then have to punish him.

["Grandchildren" here is referred to as "sons". That (the latter) is the short way of doing it, for the words "third and fourth" are understood thus. [That is, he is answering the question, Why is "children" and not "grandchildren" written? The answer: having the words, "third and fourth" make the context so clear that having "children" and not "grandchildren" poses no risk of taking "children" literally. The reader is sure to take it as meaning "grandchildren".]

Verse 6: It is written, "showing kindness to the thousands."

But in Deuteronomy 7:9 it is written, "until the thousandth generation." People may think this poses a question [i.e., Why are the numbers different?] but it really does not, because it is written (in verse 9), If you will keep My commandments, then I will keep My covenant and the kindness which I promised to your forebears, the three patriarchs. That is, G-d keeps the covenant for those who love Him. "G-d who keeps His gracious covenant to the thousandth generation." (Ibid.)

Nevertheless, this parasha (פרשת) does say something different: "showing kindness to the thousands." The meaning here is that there is no end (to His kindness, which) is forever. This is the thing that will guide us in explaining two separate matters: The first is that G-d will be kind to those who love Him; their souls will endure forever, for a thousand thousands of generations. And the second is that G-d will bestow goodness without end upon their children, who are like them (loving and obedient to G-d). [Ibn Ezra now moves on to some proof texts for the existence of the two separate matters just mentioned.]

Thus did David say, "The Lord's steadfast love is for all eternity toward those who fear Him, and His beneficence is for the children's children" (Psalm 103:17). And so there can be no doubt that G-d's kindness is eternal for those who fear

Him, and that is why the children's children are included, as in, "His beneficence is everlasting" (Psalm 111:3), although one still is obliged to explain the children were in fact upright. That is why after that (the text in Exodus referring to G-d's kindness) it is qualified by the rider, those who keep His commandments.

In the portion ^{אשכנז} [See his commentary on 34:7, pp. 220-222 in the Wieser edition of Ibn Ezra.], I will explain to you how you go to a disposition which dispenses punishment (for the children of) the forebears, from a disposition which is merciful.

The word (in verse 6) ^{לואבי}, those who love Me-- refers to the kind ones; ^{ולשומרי מצותי} "those who keep My commandments" to the righteous. [As is traditional, Ibn Ezra is accounting for the presence of seemingly extraneous phrasing in the Bible by providing a midrashic nuance.]

Verse 7: "You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your G-d." ^{שם} "Name" is like ^{זכר} "mention". [Footnote 105 gives an example of a verse where these two words are synonymous: Ex. 3:15 says, "This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity."] The use of ^{שם} amounts to indicating that it is to be recited out loud, whereas ^{זכר} will be found in Hebrew used either in one's mind or

orally. [That is, one can take note of someone in one's mind, as a mourner recalls a loved one, or one can recite something with that word out loud, as in, "The memory of the righteous is invoked in blessing" (Proverbs 10:7). For this citation and others, see footnote 107, p. 135.]

In contrast, זכור is used only orally, as we find it for example in Psalm 16:4: "Their names [of other gods] will not pass my lips."

Now here is the meaning of זכור השם "to mention the Name". [That is, to remember G-d. Having made a distinction between how "name" and "mention" are used, Ibn Ezra now tackles a phrase where a form of both words are used together.] Since He is the true

G-d, then His word is true. Behold, if we were not to put His word into effect (through doing commands), it would be as if one were to deny G-d. [Since "HaShem" means "G-d" here, Ibn Ezra has moved on to a different subject, unconnected to the semantic issue of "name" versus "mention". He takes the opportunity for a show of piety: We "mention" G-d by carrying out the Holy One's commands. This is about a device whose

[Ibn Ezra now moves from commentary on the name of G-d to not swearing falsely. He is dealing with one part of the verse at a time. What follows are several examples of the serious results of taking an oath, and what happens as people follow

it or break it. In some cases, if they follow it, unanticipated cruel consequences can follow; in others, breaking an oath can have terrible consequences too.]

The custom of the Egyptians, which persists even to this day, is that if one swears by the head of the king and does not fulfill his oath, he is condemned to die. Even if he pays a fine in gold shekels he still will not live, because he openly treated the king with contempt. Since the king is flesh and blood, how many thousands upon thousands of times the more so must one be careful not to make a slip of the tongue and open his mouth to make his flesh sin by mentioning (G-d) in vain. [That is, to make an oath in the name of G-d and break it, or to swear unnecessarily.]

And here we saw (the results) after the people of Israel swore publicly about the matter of a concubine on the hill, and also there was (the matter of) Pinhas the priest, where we discover that those who made a needless oath were killed. [Footnote 110 explains that the reference to the concubine comes from Judges 21:1, which says, "None of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjaminite." This is about a Levite whose concubine was abused by Benjaminites. The other tribes of Israel sought revenge and went to battle against them. Each tribe took turns trying to overcome the Benjaminites but failed. Nevertheless, at an assembly convened by G-d where all

the tribes except Jabesh-gilead attended, G-d directed each ensuing tribe to do battle. Pinhas too was told he must fight; he had no way out of the oath the tribes made to do battle. The verse from Judges refers to not letting the tribe of Benjamin, which was finally defeated, repopulate with new children through marriage.]

Then there was the incident of the people of Jabesh-gilead, men, women and children.

[They were all put to death, except for virgin women. This happened after the tribes of Israel regretted their oath not to supply wives to Benjamin. The only way they could supply wives was to get them from a group who had not taken the oath. They gave the captured virgins to Benjamin. Thus they resorted to this cruel measure in order to get around the effects of the oath without breaking it.]

Such is not done even to Sabbath desecrators!. [Taking oaths needlessly ends up with even worse results than desecrating the Sabbath.]

Also we saw Saul tried to kill Jonathan his son, who did not hear his oath. [See First Samuel 14:23-45. Saul had made his troops swear not to eat "until nightfall" or else be cursed. Jonathan, a member of the troops but who was not in earshot

when his father made the oath, did eat. Saul nevertheless made ready to carry out his oath by killing him. Only by the troops' protest did Jonathan get spared.]

And we saw that G-d brought famine to the earth on account of Saul and his household, who breached an oath which the chieftains had made (to let the) Gibeonites (live). (Joshua 9:15) And this is why the bloody house (of Saul) was killed, "and G-d responded to the plea of the land". (Second Samuel 21:13-14) [Under false pretenses of being a people from a distant land, the Gibeonites came to Joshua and pledged to be his subjects. Joshua promised to spare their lives. Moreover, "the chieftains of the community gave them their oath." (Joshua 9:15) Later, Joshua found out they were the nearby Gibeonites. Nevertheless, although he consigned them to a lowly status, he kept his oath and spared their lives. But Saul and his household had tried to kill some of the Gibeonites, which David found out about when he asked G-d why there was a famine. David made amends to the Gibeonites for Saul's violation of the oath. After that, the famine stopped. Ibn Ezra's final Biblical illustration about oaths appears next:]

Solomon said to Shimei, Didn't I make you swear by the Lord? (First Kings, 2:42-43) [Solomon had told Shimei not to depart from Jerusalem or else he would die. He agreed by an oath not to travel. But three years later he did travel, and Solomon

then summoned Shimei and reminded him of his oath. So he was put to death for breaking it. However, this becomes complicated by the fact that David had sworn not to kill Shimei (see 1 Kings 2:8 and fill)-- and Solomon figured a way around it.]

As a rule, we do not find any mention of divine reward in the Ten Commandments except when it specifies (the reward) for honoring father and mother. [That is, your days will be prolonged.] Also, no punishment either is specified except in reference to idolatry (in verse 5, "visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children") and in reference to being culpable for swearing falsely by G-d's name. There are many who believe that swearing falsely is not such a grievous sin. But I will demonstrate to them that it is more serious than all the prohibitions that come after it. This is because killing and adultery, which are serious sins, are not possible to commit at any and all times due to fear of doing so. But one who becomes accustomed to swearing falsely, will swear oaths without number in one day alone. Thus one becomes so accustomed to this sin that one no longer even realizes when one has sworn.

If you were to reprove him by asking, "Why have you sworn now?" he would swear that he had not sworn because of his being so accustomed to it. They will have an oath preceding every word they utter, for this is for them a matter of

eloquence. Were there no sins in Jewry aside from this one, it would suffice to prolong the exile and to add a plague upon our plagues. I will show you the madness (of one who swears)--because the murderer, if he kills his enemies, fulfills his desire through revenge. The adulterer has his hour [i.e., has his fling?] and the thief finds things to suit his needs; even the liar tries to be agreeable or take revenge. But the one who swears to a lie when taking an oath is an unnecessary act. He curses the Name of heaven openly without any benefit which would be his.

Verse 8 "Remember"-- The meaning of "to sanctify it"; is that which is written, "six days you shall labor." (v.9) This is the meaning of זָכַר "he hallowed it" (v.11) when G-d rested from all His labor. [This is to say, Just as G-d sanctified Shabbat by refraining from work, so too do we.]

A further sense of "remembering" is to cling to the blessing of G-d as it is written in the section זָכַר (Genesis 2:1-3).

[Apparently, just as Torah portions are named after one of the first few important words, so too is a section. The mention of blessing occurs in verse 3: "G-d blessed the seventh day and declared it holy." G-d blessed it after His work was done, so one can see how remembering something and blessing something share features in common, such as looking back to events to

acknowledge them. Again, to bless something has a more active connotation than merely to remember something.]

G-d makes this (Sabbath) day holy and prepares it to accept the additional soul which (makes us) wiser than on other days; that is why it is written, "G-d blessed"(the day). [This notion of the "additional soul" on Shabbat comes from the Babylonian Talmud, Betsah 16a, and Taanit 27b. "A special soul... is given to man on the eve of the Sabbath, and leaves him again at its close." (Jewish Encyclopedia, p. 589)]

As I already explained (in my commentary on Psalms), this (point about the additional soul) is in the Song for the Sabbath Day. (Psalm 92:5)

We have seen that the Shmitta year (year of the rest for the land) resembles the Sabbath, because it too occurs in cycles of sevens; in this case years. G-d commanded they recite the Torah at the beginning of the Shmitta year to men, women and children, "that they may hear and learn...to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching." (Deut. 31:12) In this way, the Sabbath helps us to understand G-d's deeds and enlightens us about His Torah. Thus it is written, "you have gladdened me by Your deeds." (Psalm 92:5) All the other days of the week people are occupied with their needs, while this day it is proper to be by one's self and to reflect and rest in G-d's honor. Nor (by observing the Sabbath) will one occupy oneself

in vain with the concerns which have already happened or to take counsel of what to do in the future. This is as the prophet said, (if on the Sabbath you do) "not look to your affairs or strike bargains." (Isaiah 58:13) [Verse 14 gives the "then" clause: "Then you can seek the favor of the Lord."]

The custom in Israel was to go and stay with the prophets on the Sabbath, as referred to in, "'Why are you going to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath.'" (Second Kings 4:23) [A husband is asking his wife why she is visiting a "man of G-d" at what he considered an odd time, neither new moon nor sabbath. This one preceding sentence, "The custom..." is parenthetical. Ibn Ezra had just mentioned a citation from a prophet, and had been talking about the Sabbath, so he happened to remember the custom of visiting prophets on the Sabbath. He now moves back to another theme.]

As I mentioned above, the meaning of כָּל עוֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בַּשַּׁבָּת, "All who do work on the Sabbath" [paraphrase of Ex 31:14]] is to deny the work of creation but not to deny G-d. [Or better than "crea-tion" is the word "formation", since Ibn Ezra believed that the universe has existed eternally, not that it was created at some discrete point. Now Ibn Ezra tackles the interpretation of words about the Sabbath in the Deuteronomic version of the commandment about the Sabbath.]

Without a doubt the word "אתה", "you", (in Ex. 20:10) includes anyone who is commanded (any Jew). Thus this is the reference of "your son or your daughter", the minors in your households; you must ensure they do nothing (on the Sabbath) that is forbidden for you to do. (Deut. 5:14) And also, regarding "your male or female slave" (same verse) who are in your domain, you must ensure that he (the slave) keep it (the Sabbath) and not permit him to work for another person. If you do not do this, you transgress a negative commandment. This is as Moses explains, as I have mentioned. The following condition which the stranger may live with you. This is why it states, "The stranger who is in your settlements", who is not to do work on the Sabbath or on Yom Kippur. Thus it is written "the stranger" in the second. [The "second" refers to the second time the Ten Commandments are written, that is, in Deuteronomy. That the command is written two times corresponds to the two instances when a stranger may not work: on the Sabbath, and on Yom Kippur.]

Similarly, [sometimes when it refers elsewhere to the stranger, the stranger must obey the rules too, as for example in these two cases:] avoiding sins of the flesh and not committing the sin of eating blood. [For the former, footnote 128 cites Lev. 18:26, but see also verses 22-23. For the latter, see Lev. 17:10. After this brief digression about strangers observing rules in other cases besides for the Sabbath, Ibn

Ezra now returns to the importance of the Sabbath commandment in general.]

We saw in Jeremiah that he was strict about the commands of the Sabbath, and he goes on to explain that one be strict even though there was a decree to have Jerusalem destroyed. If Israel did go back to observing the Sabbath as it was commanded, the people would not have had to depart from their dwellings, and thrones for the kingship of the House of David would have been re-established [As related in Jeremiah, *ibid.* In other words, if the Jews had observed the Sabbath, they would not have been exiled, and Jerusalem would not have been destroyed.]

Verse 12 "Honor your father". As I indicated above, the first five commandments mention G-d. There as with the preceding four, it mentions (the name of G-d) saying, "The Lord your G-d." [This phrase legitimizes counting Commandments 1-5 as one group that are all directly connected to G-d, even though otherwise the fifth Commandment looks less related to G-d than the first four.]

The word לְעַמְּךָ "that you may long endure" is a transitive verb, because they (the acts that you do) will be the cause.

That the verb is transitive is evidenced elsewhere by, "that you may long endure" (Deut. 11:9) and "that you may have a

long life." (Deut. 22:7) Because of the commandment that you do, you will find yourself with prolonged life.

The text says, "on the land," (Israel) because this is when the people Israel will observe this command; they will not be exiled.

It is written, "Fathers and mothers have been humiliated" [within the land of Israel] (Ezekiel 22:7). Concerning the commandment of honoring one's father, one must not do the opposite (such as belittling or cursing one's father). For then the curser is culpable of death for the one who curses, because the hearers can hear a curse come out of his mouth, but the one who insults is not culpable, because the one insulting (his parents) can do so in private. Therefore Scripture commands that it (the evidence) be words of cursing, because in all the writings they are secret. [The general idea is that there is public and private dishonoring of parents, but the former is much worse and merits punishment because it shames them publicly.]

Verse 13. You shall not murder. (You shall not do so, either from) bodily force or your speech, (such as by) testifying falsely in order to kill someone, or killing through slander, or by maliciously giving bad advice that you know will get

someone killed. If a secret is revealed to you that can save someone from death if you reveal it to him, then if you fail to reveal it, you are the same as a murderer.

You shall not commit adultery. Most have thought that it is not adultery except when it is with a man's wife (a married woman), since we find (it in that context) written in Lev. 20:10, "committing adultery with his neighbor's wife." Now what does it mean to say this [that is, "neighbor's wife"] after it already says, "committing adultery with a man's wife" (ibid.)? [That is, the two phrases mutually reenforce each other to suggest that adultery occurs only if the woman is married.] But the majority opinion is not the correct explanation. Written above (i.e. above v.10) is, "If any man curses his father or his mother, he shall be put to death; he has cursed his father and his mother-- his bloodguilt is upon him." (v.9) This means, that it is a grievous sin to insult one's parents, the ones who begot you.

[Ibn Ezra is arguing that the repetition serves to underscore the seriousness of the sin, not to make the referent of "insulting one's parents" more specific. He argues likewise for an adulterer. It is not a question of excluding some people from the category of adulterers, but rather a question of how serious a sin adultery is.]

And likewise for, "committing adultery with his neighbor's wife," for he is obligated to love his neighbor as himself. [And what would violate this trust more than to have intercourse with that neighbor's wife?!]

The Word "commit adultery" is like "זנות", "sexual immorality". You can see it is written, "Indeed, the land was defiled...as she committed adultery with stone and with wood." (Jeremiah 3:9) [The context here is that the prophet is comparing a wayward Israel worshipping idols to a whore. Thus an adulterer is faithless to G-d and goes to worship another.] But it is not suitable to publicize such an abomination.

Rabbi Saadia the Gaon said, sexual immorality takes place to many degrees. He who is at the least serious degree cohabitates with the virgin or the widow. He who is at the next degree cohabitates with his wife when she is a nidah [has menstruation], who after a few days would have been permitted to him (to cohabit with). A more serious degree than this is (to cohabit with) another man's wife when it could be that he would die (leaving her). She would then have been permitted to him. [I.e, because she would have been a widow.] The next degree is (cohabitating with) the Canaanite woman who is not of the teaching of Israel. If she does not have offspring, then she possibly could convert and become a wife. But if she does have offspring, that in itself is idolatry.

[I think this means a Jew is not to marry a convert who has unconverted offspring. This mixed family unit may end up leading the husband into worshipping idols the kids still worship.]

The next degree of severity beyond that one is homosexuality, which never has a time when it is allowed. Worse than this is what is outside the species: one who cohabitates with a beast. The Gaon knew how to distinguish (among these types of sexual immorality) because all these are sins which result in being cut off from the Jewish people, according to the portion לְוִי (Lev. 16-18). And aside from this is the division (of categories of sexual immorality pertinent to) the mother, the sister, and the daughter. [That is, as formulated by the Gaon and Lev. 18, all these sexual prohibitions are written from the man's perspective. One cannot assume the list and its degrees of severity would be the same for a woman. It is of note that having said that, Ibn Ezra does not attempt to make such a corresponding woman's list.]

You shall not steal. "Theft" means taking money in secret. There is a kind of stealing that deserves the death penalty, namely, kidnapping an Israelite, even if only a young boy or a stammerer. Monetary theft (is still theft,) whether openly or not, whether by false accounting, measure, or weight. And this is the word which includes one who steals the heart, as

Absalom did. [In Second Samuel 15:6 we read, "Absalom won away the hearts of the men of Israel." Absalom was trying to win the support of the people. In 15:1-6, Absalom heard cases that King David was supposed to have heard. He told each person with a case that his "claim was right and just." (v.3)]

You shall not bear false witness. For many years I searched my mind to get the sense of why it says "עד שקר" ("false witness") and not "עדות שקר" ("false testimony") I am now of the opinion that the text speaks of false testimony as if it were written, Do not answer if you are a false witness. The meaning of this word [עד] is as in the sense of, "you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely." (Lev. 19:11)

We find the word "ענות" (testify against) with the letter "bet", as for example in, "he has testified falsely against his fellow man." (Deut. 19:18), and without a bet for example in, "G-d hears and humbles those who have no fear of Him." (Psalm 55:20; the word in question is "humbles".) And the meaning of the words "ענה בם" is like that of in the phrase "לא נגענוך" "we have not molested you." (Gen. 26:29) (That is, the same as the other grammatical form), "לא נגענו בך", "we have not molested you."

[He is distinguishing among different grammatical forms of ayin-nun-hey and their corresponding meanings. Again, he is comparing the form with the letter "bet" and the one without.

The form in the Ten Commandments is the basic form, unadorned by prepositions or suffixes, and means, "testify against." Ibn Ezra cites the example from Deuteronomy to prove it. The other examples listed above have other meanings because even though they come from the same root, they are in non-basic forms.]

The one who testifies falsely may receive the death penalty. He is the one about whom it is written, "You shall do to him as he schemed to do to his fellow." (Deut. 19:19)

Verse 14. You shall not covet. Concerning this commandment, many people wonder how anyone could exist who does not secretly covet beautiful things, anything that is pleasing to the eye. And so I will illustrate with a parable: Know that a villager who has common sense, if he sees the king's beautiful daughter, will not fantasize about lying down with her, because he knows it would never be possible. Nor let it be thought that this villager is one of those crazy ones, who wishes he had wings so he could fly in the sky, because that could never happen. [The villager knows that having the king's daughter is as impossible as having wings.]

Likewise, there is no man who desires to lie with his mother, even if she is beautiful, because he had been trained since his youth to know she was forbidden to him. [Ibn Ezra was not born yesterday. We all know that training does not mean

incest will not happen, but it cuts down on its frequency.] Thus anyone who is wise needs to know that a beautiful woman or money cannot be found by wisdom or knowledge, but he will receive only what G-d parcels out to him. As Ecclesiastes says, "For sometimes a person whose fortune was made with wisdom... must hand it on to be the portion of somebody who did not toil for it." (2:21) [To clarify the context, I quote almost the entire verse.] The sages said, Life and food do not depend on merit but rather on luck. (Moed Katan 28:1). On account of this, he who is wise will neither crave nor covet. Since in his heart he knows that G-d has forbidden him his neighbor's wife, she is even more unobtainable in his eyes than the king's daughter in the mind of the villager; thus he rejoices in his lot and does not go aching after what is not his due. He realizes that G-d does not want to give those things to him. He cannot get them by force or by thinking about them, or by plotting for them. Therefore one should trust in one's Creator, who supports us and does what is good in His eyes. With this, we finish the commentary on the Ten Commandments.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW IBN EZRA MAKES (OR OBSCURES) HIS ARGUMENTS

3.0 The Underlying Structure of Ibn Ezra's Argumentation.

As explained in Chapter One, an analysis of the structure of ibn Ezra's argumentation will aid us in seeing how he makes his points, how he obscures them, and how his assumptions about language affect his treatment of biblical text. The commentary translated in Chapter Two has an overall structure: Several arguments are set loose at once, all interrupting each other. Let me illustrate this pattern with a model: Suppose there are three arguments, A, B, and C, and each of those contains three steps. The first step states the issue, the second gives a traditional answer, and the third gives ibn Ezra's answer. Argument A goes through Step One and Two and stops dead in its tracks. Argument B goes through Step One and it too stops. Argument A comes back on the scene to finish up with Step Three. Then Argument C enters the picture, going through Steps One and Two. Then Argument B reenters and goes through Steps Two and Three. Finally, Argument C is taken up again and goes through its Step Three. Now all the arguments are completed, but were interrupted by other arguments before being "allowed" to finish.

In such a system, the reader has to keep track of several arguments simultaneously, and recall what the earlier steps were. This then, is my thesis: Ibn Ezra can obscure his argumentation by having several arguments interrupt each other such that all the steps of a given argument are not immediately in sequence of each other. Rather, the material of other arguments, or other material such as pietistic remarks, intervene between one or more steps and the next.

The steps, to be more precise, commonly amount to four, and typically have the following content: Step One states a problem in the biblical text. Step Two lists solutions proposed by "the sages" derived from the tradition. Step Three contains ibn Ezra's rebuttal to those solutions, and Step Four contains ibn Ezra's new answer as backed up with biblical support.

I will now go through two of his extended arguments to illustrate my thesis. My putting the steps of his arguments in sequence readily suggests how ibn Ezra can be made easier to study for the neophyte: "reconstitute" the steps of his arguments in immediate sequence of each other, minus the intervening material. The two examples below demonstrate how to do this.

In Reber's retelling of the story of the blind men touching an elephant, we get the rest of the story. The story's innovative answer: The elephant is round. The story's innovative answer: The elephant is round.

The first extensive argument deals with the discrepancies between the two versions of the Ten Commandments, especially his discussion of "Remember" and "Observe". Step One raises this issue: If both versions are G-d's words, why is the word "Observe" substituted for "Remember"? This substitution, and other changes such as deletions, grammatical variations and additions, all pose the same problem. Step Two follows in sequence: The sages explain that G-d said both words simultaneously. Step Three is begun, but not completed, with ibn Ezra giving one counter-argument: It is not physically possible to pronounce two words simultaneously. Then, intervening material appears here, concerning which of the Ten Commandments were direct quotes from G-d and which were not, depending on what person the pronouns are in each. After that, ibn Ezra returns to Step Three with additional counter-arguments: Even if G-d could pronounce both words at once, the human ear could not understand what G-d had said. Then, he begins Step Four with a claim: different words can convey the same basic meaning. He supports this with biblical examples. Intervening material appears about the correct numbering of the Ten Commandments, and then we are back to Step Four. He gives more biblical illustrations of his claim about words and their meanings. The examples show the same incident repeated twice, as in Rebecca's retelling of how Jacob got Isaac's blessing. Finally, we get the rest of Step Four, ibn Ezra's innovative answer: The word "Remember" implies the word

"observe", and so in this abstract sense, the Israelites "heard" both at once. Moreover, he becomes very explicit about what his steps entail: "Words are arranged in one order in Exodus while Moses rearranged them in another order." Thus he challenges the traditional belief that both versions are literally the words of G-d.

The second argument selected for analysis is ibn Ezra's discussion about creation. Step One, raised in the context of several issues relating to the First Commandment, consists of a question: Why does the First Commandment refer to G-d freeing us from Egyptian slavery rather than to G-d's role as creator of the universe? It is problematic in that the latter description seems so much more fundamental and important. Ibn Ezra seemingly skips right to Step Four, with a pat answer: Freedom from slavery is an easier concept for the average unlearned Jew to accept, and to defend against the challenges of heretics. This is not a true Step Four, because ibn Ezra comes out with a far more substantial answer later. Maybe it is more accurate to call it Step Two, since it gives an answer that does not oppose the tradition. (Step Three does not appear in the argument.)

Ibn Ezra then presents related, but intervening, material about what intellectuals do understand about the world, G-d's nature, and the connection between intellectuals, the world,

and G-d's nature. Then, quite explicitly, he goes back to Step Four by mentioning a non-Jewish answer: "G-d makes continually without beginning or end." But ibn Ezra does not say he agrees with that answer, which would amount to saying G-d did not create the universe at a discrete point in time. He then switches back to intervening material about the astrological and astronomical model of the world, and continues other arguments begun earlier, such as the rational basis of all commands. Then he suddenly throws in a statement which takes us back to Step Four: Swearing falsely is a more serious sin than working on the Sabbath. The former tampers with belief in G-d; the latter "denies the work of creation". He says nothing more until the second section of his commentary, when he gets back to the command to keep the Sabbath: "The meaning of, all who do work on the Sabbath, is to deny the work of creation but not to deny G-d." The answer, Step Four, is at the least ambiguous. Either ibn Ezra believes in eternal existence of the universe, completely against the tradition. Or he is vacillating, or he is making a list of priorities: we do not know about creation, but we must be one hundred percent sure about believing in G-d. The last statement in his commentary on the Ten Commandments reflects that third possibility, since he instructs us to trust in G-d and in G-d's goodness.

Space does not permit more examples, but the reader can see by inspection how ibn Ezra makes his case in less extended or

less controversial arguments. He presents the steps more in sequence, and gives example after example from the Tanakh to substantiate his claims and to poke holes in other people's claims.

3.1 Concluding Remarks

I now turn to questions raised in Chapter One. With the insights gleaned in Chapter Two and the section above, some answers will now reward my patient reader. One group of those questions was in the "how" category: How Does ibn Ezra advance his arguments? How do his strategies come into play? To determine his most fundamental strategies, we can look at some of the shorter arguments that have little or no intervening material. After that, we will look at some more complex arguments to see how these strategies are applied.

One of his straightforward arguments starts with the claim that, "commands of the heart are the most important of all the categories." (Above, p. 48.) That is, what we think is more important than what we say or do. That is his first move, to bluntly state his claim. Immediately after, he gives the opposing view held by the sages as applied to a specific example. The sages thought idolatry consisted only of words spoken aloud, as when one prayed to an idol. They did not "count" private idolatrous thoughts as wrong. Ibn Ezra

restates his assertion in terms of this specific case: "Surely this is the most heinous of all evil thoughts." (Ibid.)

His next task is to prove his assertion and disprove the sages. He does so by citing numerous examples from the Tanakh which show how important thoughts are to G-d, such as, "The Lord sees into the Heart." (First Samuel 16:7) The examples are so numerous, and come from all over the Tanakh, that Ibn Ezra's position seems unassailable. The only potential way to dispute it would be to find counterexamples in the Tanakh. Apparently, such are not cited in the tradition. The strategy, then, is to "over prove" his point by giving more examples than necessary.

This method, stating a claim, stating the opposing claim of the sages, and giving biblical examples to prove his claim, can be seen throughout Chapter Two, especially in the second section where he proceeds verse by verse. Or even more simply, he may make only his claim and go directly to the biblical support. See for instance, his commentary on Verse 6 in Section 2.1. Ibn Ezra never goes on too long without stopping to quote from the Tanakh, as if the Tanakh were a continuation of his thoughts, and his thoughts a continuation of the Tanakh! Thus he uses what is most valued in the tradition, the Tanakh, to advance ideas which are innovative or even counter to the tradition.

In Section 3.0 above, we looked at the strategies ibn Ezra employs when he wants to be indirect. This happens when he touches upon opinions that could be seen as heretical. We saw that his main strategy for being indirect was to pursue several arguments simultaneously. Thus, part of one argument intervenes between parts of another argument. In that way, one or more steps of one argument interrupt another. In addition, the intervening material sometimes does not consist of another argument. Instead, it can consist of other distracting material, such as pious thoughts, homilies, or general statements of his philosophy that only tangentially relate to any of the arguments. This happens in the extended argument analyzed in Section 3.0 about creation. After he gives his initial answer, that freedom from Egypt is easier for the masses to accept and defend than creation of the world, he talks about G-d's creation as a part of scientific study. People "will recognize the creation of G-d in mineral, vegetable and animal... they will see evidence of the work of G-d in each and every limb according to its history... Their hearts will move them to study the spheres which... G-d founded." (p. 51) This is a general statement of his philosophy of the structure of the world. This is distracting material in that it veers off the question at hand, even though it refers to creation. Thus it falls into the kind of distracting material that is not itself another argument. Then comes material that strays even farther from the issue; it is

about knowledge of G-d's nature. By now, even though this material does contain hints about creation, the reader has probably forgotten the original question, which was, why does the First Commandment refer to freedom of slavery and the creation of heaven and earth? After a few more statements about the structure of the earth, the intervening material ceases when he states, G-d "making heaven and earth nearly five thousand years ago is only acknowledged by Israel. The sages of the nations... say that G-d makes continually without beginning or end." (p. 54) So the reader must persevere through much distracting material before encountering this explicit statement of a heterodox view. And even then, ibn Ezra does not come out and say he agrees with it or not.

As just mentioned, homiletic or pious material can interrupt an argument. Ibn Ezra claims that the First Commandment is indeed a command. "It includes all the kinds of commands, of the heart, of speaking, and of doing." (p. 59) Before clarifying this further, he gives a homily on the importance of obeying G-d: "He who secretly commits a sin is crazy to think that the sin will not be made known to the king... For it is written, 'Shall He who forms the eyes not see?' (Psalm 94:9) (Ibid.) After that, he returns to the issue of the First Commandment as "the foundation of all the categories of commands." Even in the intervening material, the same pattern underlying much of his commentary persists: a claim (one must

obey G-d) and support from the Tanakh ("Shall He who forms the eyes not see?")

I now turn to a final question, the one which drove me to devote this thesis to the commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra: What are his assumptions about language, and how does his view affect his approach to biblical exegesis? It is clear, from his statement that words are like bodies and their meaning like souls, that language itself is a superficial system as he sees it. Not only that, language is arbitrary. It consists of grammatical variants (like the presence or absence of some vavs) which do not affect the meaning. The unvarying, non-superficial realm is not in language as it is produced, but in structures stored in the brain: "The faculty of memory is at the back of the brain and that place is the region which preserves forms." (p. 38) This is quite reminiscent of the modern-day linguist Noam Chomsky, who is famous for positing superficial and deep structures in language.

This view on ibn Ezra's part, that different words or grammatical forms can express the same sense, led him away from midrashic analysis, which does assume the utmost importance to lexical and grammatical variations. Thus one would imagine that to ibn Ezra, midrashic approaches mistake the superficial level for the deep level, the body for the soul. Thus it follows that ibn Ezra wants to base his arguments on the

deeper level, the meaning which is abstracted from two or more variants. Taking that meaning, ibn Ezra can then argue about its religious consequences. Thus he is not stuck with two words, "Remember" and "Observe". Instead, he winds up with one meaning, that of "setting apart". "The sense of 'remember' is that of all the days of the week, the Sabbath should be set apart and remembered. All of this is to make sure we observe the seventh day so that we will do no work on it. This is how the meaning of 'remembering' ends up implying 'observing'". (p. 38) So ibn Ezra is able to cut through the midrashic paradoxes of claiming that G-d said two words at once. He puts a new angle on the problem that does no violence to the literal interpretation of the text, namely, that "Observe" represents an implication of "Remember". What is simultaneous is not the pronunciation of two words, but the co-existence of two concepts in the brain.

Despite the wonderful world ibn Ezra opens to us, he nevertheless may seem forbidding, even cold. I pointed out in the beginning my emotional reaction of feeling pushed into a corner by his "overly proved" arguments. But then, his search for a fail-safe system to get at the truth drew me in. Ibn Ezra wanted to be unhampered by irrelevant differences of superficial form and get at the essence of biblical text. Getting at essences, in turn, clears the way to obtaining more knowledge about G-d. That, after all, was the name of the game

for the Jewish medieval philosopher. For Jews today, his approach hands us the tools to reach G-d via our intellect. This serves as a complement to the tools we more readily acquire which forge emotive linkages with the Holy One.

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