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Don Isaac Abravanel: His Life and
His Introduction to the
Neviim haKishonim

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Don Isaac Abravanel: His Life and His Introduction to the *Neviim*
haRishonim

by Gabriella Arad Burrows

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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Rabbi Martin A. Cohen first introduced me to the life and work of Isaac Abravanel in his Sephardica class, which he taught at the college. His passion for and wisdom of Abravanel and this time period inspired me to take this subject on as my thesis topic.

The goal of this thesis is to transport the reader back to the time of Abravanel – to know his life and theology and therefore better understand his writings. In our studies of Jewish texts, it is always important to know the context before delving into the written words. Where did this writer live? Who did he work for? What events occurred during his lifetime? I therefore, first researched Don Isaac Abravanel's life in various sources including that of BenZion Netanyahu. I studied his life and his theories as explained by several authors and then I began to translate Abravanel's introduction to the prophets. This was the most intriguing aspect of the thesis for me. Because I knew of the events that occurred during his lifetime (including the expulsion of the Jews from Spain) I was able to get a peak into this brilliant man's thoughts. I studied the questions that he asked – and he asked many. I placed his writings on the backdrop of his life. The thesis is therefore divided into three parts: 1) Abravanel's life and works 2) A partial translation of Abravanel's introduction to the Prophets and 3) An analysis of the two.

I believe that this thesis could contribute immensely to clergy. Abravanel lived through a most exciting, chaotic and sometimes oppressive time in Jewish history. His work teaches us how to take the circumstances that are placed before us, combine them with our sacred and Rabbinic texts, and then develop our own stance and theory on the situation. Especially now, in an unstable world filled with war and conflict, Abravanel's life and work gives hope and even a few answers to the many questions that we have.

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Preface

I would first like to thank my parents, Michael and Tirza Arad, who enjoyed working on this thesis just as much as I did. Thank you for not only helping me with the translation of Abravanel's work but for also taking an interest in his work.

To my husband, Rabbi Josh Burrows, who knows what it takes to complete a thesis – thank you for supporting me in all that I do and reassuring me that it would get done some way or another. I would not have made it through Rabbinical school if I did not have you right by my side.

To my beloved teacher of life, for life, thank you thank you thank you. We all know that this thesis (and the one that came before it) would not have been completed without your passion, your support, and most importantly, your patience. It is a bittersweet moment for me – on the one hand it is nice to be done. On the other hand, I will miss our weekly conferences. I will have to write a doctoral thesis next. Thank you for allowing me to soak in all that you have to offer. You are a gift to all who cross your path and I look forward to many more years together as colleagues and friends. Of course you will forever be my teacher.

Introduction

During my studies at Hebrew Union classes, I had several classes that dealt with Sephardica, Medieval philosophy, and the Jews in the Renaissance. I was intrigued with this period in our history, particularly the infamous expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Rabbi Martin Cohen first introduced me to the life and work of Isaac Abravanel in his Sephardica class which he taught at the college. His passion for and wisdom of Abravanel and this time period inspired me to take this subject on as my thesis topic.

While working on this thesis, I was transported back to the time of Abravanel and the Jews of that period. I knew that before I could translate Abravanel's work, I had to have a better understanding of his life and surroundings. One thing I learned from Dr. Cohen is that it is useless to read anything without knowing the context. In order for me to have an understanding of Abravanel's work, I had to have an understanding of his life and the time in which he lived.

Abravanel, in his theory on man, wrote that man lives in two worlds – the material world and the spiritual world. This definitely held true for Abravanel. He lived in the world of politics and the world of Jewish text, the world of the Jewish struggle and the world of his own struggle, in the world of his spiritual journey and the journey of the kings he worked for. He went from land to land, country to country, rebuilding his fortune time and time again and earning the respect of many leaders (of all faiths) that he came in contact with along the way. His people looked to him for guidance while the leaders of the countries in which he resided looked to him for financial gain. Above all though, Abravanel never used his political ties for his own gain. At times when his people suffered, he was offered leniency and opportunities that others were not. Never

did he choose his own gain over that of his people. God and the Jewish people, their struggle and history, mattered to him more than all the gold and silver in the world (as was written in his work).

What impressed me most about Abravanel was his own struggle with God. He questioned God's motives. He wondered how a man who gave so much to his people, a man who followed God's ways, could suffer such great loss. He wondered why God allowed His people to suffer time and time again. Abravanel constantly asked questions and proceeded to answer them for himself. Each time new questions arose, he struggled to answer them. At a time when many of his people gave up hope (many converted), Abravanel struggled through it, and continued to ask the important questions. His wisdom allowed him to understand that he was a link to the generations that came before him and those that would follow. It seems that the more he suffered, the deeper he delved into Judaism and all that it had to offer,

Why is this an important thesis topic for me and why do I believe that it holds importance for all of us? We are living in what I believe to be a difficult and confusing time— a time of religious turmoil and battle — a time of disaster and doubt. And while I know that much worse has happened in history, my generation is experiencing turmoil for the first time and we need to find ways in which to live through it. Not only can we look to our Tanakh for help but we can also look to the texts of those Jewish commentators and philosophers that came before us. Abravanel witnessed struggle and lived it. He teaches us that when times are hard, rather than letting go of God, we should cleave even stronger to Him. He teaches us that as Reform Jews, we can involve ourselves in worldly matters while still holding strong to our faith and beliefs. He allows us to live in both

worlds and demonstrates that Reform does not mean faithless, uneducated, or lazy. We see through him that one can live in both worlds, and in fact, that is what we are meant to do as humans. I believe that we can learn a great deal from Abaravanel's life and his work. I look forward to reading more of his work, this time not for the sake of a thesis, but for the sake of my own spiritual gain.

Translation of the Introduction to the Prophets (Pages נ to נ)

My name is Isaac. I am the son of a distinguished father, Don Judah, a man of many parts and great fame in Israel. Judah was the son of Samuel, the grandson of another Judah, the great grandson of Joseph and the great-great grandson of yet another Judah - all from the Abravanel clan, all luminaries of the people Israel, all descended from the lineage of Jesse the Bethlehemite and the Davidic line. Don Judah, of blessed memory was a leader¹ and commander-in-chief of his people.

I was living quietly in my treasured ancestral estate, in a house full of God's blessing in the glorious city of Lisbon, a metropolis² of Portugal. God had sent His blessing³ upon it, filling it with blessing, with ample stores of wealth and honor and all the amenities of life. There I built a house with spacious porches⁴. My house was a

-
1. The term nagid was utilized in the Iberian peninsula from the Muslim period on to designate a governor or military commander of Jews. It had a rank immediately below that of the term Nasi which was first utilized for Chasdai ibn Shaprut who was appointed to the position of Nasi or prince over the Jewish community by Caliph Abd al-Rahman III (912-961), shortly after Abt al Rachman assumed the position of Caliph of the United Cordovan Caliphate in the year 929. The term Nagid was utilized by people like Samuel HaNagid during the period after the breakup of the United Cordovan Caliphate when al Andalus disintegrated into some thirty one different states, each of whose leaders was called an Amir and thought of himself as a miniature Caliph. Accordingly the Jewish leaders of this era were known not by the title Nasi but by the title Nagid. Samuel HaNagid who was head of the Jewish community of the area of Granada was also general and chief of the Ermir's army.

2. Samuel II 20:19

אֲנִי שְׁלָמִי אֶמְנִי יִשְׁרָאֵל אֲתָהּ מְבַקֵּשׁ לְהַמִּית עִיר וְאָם בְּיִשְׁרָאֵל לָמָּה תִּבְלַע

נִחַלְתָּ יְהוָה

I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel; why will you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?

3. Psalm 133:3

4. Jeremiah 22:14

הָאָמַר אֶבְנֶה-לִּי בַּיִת מְדוֹת וְעֲלִיּוֹת מִרְוָחִים וְקָרַע לוֹ חַלּוֹנִי וְסָכַן בָּאֶרֶץ וּמִשׁוֹחַ בְּשֶׁשֶׁר

Who said, I will build a wide house and large chambers; and cuts out windows; and it is covered with rafters of cedar, and painted with vermilion.

venue for scholars, a place for consultation⁵ and a center for the dissemination from books and from scholars of goodness and manners and the knowledge of fear in God. As with the avatars of old⁶, the walls of my house swelled with wealth, purpose, and charity, power and might, learning and greatness.

And flourishing in the royal palace was Don Afonso⁷, a powerful king⁸, whose realm extended from sea to sea and who prospered in all his endeavors; a king who from his throne of judgement, dispensing kindness and justice and right throughout his land; a deeply religious king who shunned evil⁹ and always sought the welfare of his people; a king surpassingly wise and instructive in royal councils. He had eaten from the tree of knowledge¹⁰ and absorbed charm and savoir-faire.

5. Mishne Avot 1:4

יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה ויוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים קבלו מהם. יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה אומר יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים. והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם. והוי שותה בצמא את דבריהם

Jose B. Jo'Etzer used to say: Let thy house be a **house of meeting for the sages** and suffer
thyslf to be covered by the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst.

6. Genesis 6:4

הנפלים היו בארץ בימים ההם וגם אחרי כן אשר יבאו בני האלהים אל-בנות האדם וילדו להם הנמה
הגברים אשר מעולם אנשי השם:

There were Nefilim in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them, the same became **mighty men of old**, men of renown.

7. Afonso V (1438-1481)

8. Psalms 72: 8

וירך מים עד-ים ומנהר עד-אפסי-ארץ:

May he have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth

9. Isaiah 59:15

ותהי האמת נעדרת וסר מרע משתולל וירא יהוה וירע בעיניו כי-אין משפט:

And truth is absent; and he who **departs from evil** makes himself a prey; and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

10. Genesis 2:9

ויצמח יהוה אלהים מר-האדמה כל-עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת

As a result, God made sure that king Afonso did not lay a hand on the "tree of life."¹¹ As the king's wealth grew, God inspired his people to provide sustenance for the Jews and empower them to achievement and security.

Under King Afonso's protection I fulfilled my dreams and aspirations. I was close to him and he sought my advice. As long as he lived, his palace was open and progressive.¹² But there ensued a time of trouble and confrontation¹³ for his entire people and for Israel, God's inheritance, the children of Jacob¹⁴ His chosen one. There was a day when the king fell sick. As he lay on his bed, violence erupted¹⁵ and continued all winter and summer, all day and all night. And then shortly, through his window leaping

טוב ורע

And out of the ground made the Lord God every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

11. Proverbs 3:18

עץ-חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותמכיה מאשר

She is a **tree of life** to those who lay hold on her; and happy is every one who holds her fast.

12. Daniel 4:26

לקצת ירחיו תרי-עשר על-היכל מלכותא די בבל מחלף הוה

At the end of twelve months **he was walking in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.**

13. Kings II 19:3 and Isaiah 37:3

ויאמרו אליו כה אמר ה'קדו יום-צרה ותוכחה ונאצה היום הזה כי באו בנים עד-משפך וכה אין ללדה

And they said to him, Thus said Hezekiah, **This day is a day of trouble, and of reviling, and blasphemy;** for the children have come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring them forth.

14. Psalm 105:6

זרע אברהם עבדו בני יעקב בחייו

O seed of Abraham, his servant! O children of Jacob, his chosen!

15. Judges 5:27

בין רגליה כרע נפל שקב בין רגליה כרע נפל באשר כרע שם נפל שדוד

At her feet he bent, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bent, he fell; where he bowed, there he **fell down, bereft of life.**

into its palace came death, the mother of all the living¹⁶ and picked up the knife to slay its son¹⁷. And it slew, as death always does. Then a spirit passed over this land with demonic power, like chaff winnowed from a threshing floor¹⁸ or smoke bellowing from a chimney¹⁹ leaving the daughter of Zion like a booth in a vineyard with no measure of support.²⁰ The divine image left them and they sulked in fasting, crying and wailing.²¹ Mourning and sorrow increased for the daughter of Judah and as for me, all that I had become and owned was stripped in this misfortune. My pain was like that of a mother in childbirth.²² I lost my identity and was no more than dust and ashes.

16. Genesis 3:20

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הִוא הִיְתָה אִם כָּל-חַי

And Adam called his wives name Eve; because she was **the mother of all living**

17. Genesis 22:10

וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת-בְּנוֹ

And Abraham stretched out his hand, **and took the knife to slay his son**

18. Hosea 13: 3

לָכֵן יִהְיֶה כַעֲנַן-בֹּקֶר וְכַטֹּל מִשְׁפִּים הַלֵּךְ כַּמָּץ וְיִסְעַר מִגֶּדֶן וְיִכְעֹשׂן מִאֲרָבָה

Therefore they shall be like the morning mist, and like the dew that passes away early, like the **chaff that is driven by the wind out of the floor**, and like the smoke from the chimney

19. Hosea 13:3

לָכֵן יִהְיֶה כַעֲנַן-בֹּקֶר וְכַטֹּל מִשְׁפִּים הַלֵּךְ כַּמָּץ וְיִסְעַר מִגֶּדֶן וְיִכְעֹשׂן מִאֲרָבָה

Therefore they shall be like the morning mist, and like the dew that passes away early, like the chaff that is driven by the wind out of the floor, **and like the smoke from the chimney**

20. Isaiah 1:8

וְנוֹתְנָה בַת-צִיּוֹן כַּסֵּפָה בְּכֶרֶם כַּמְלוּנָה בְּמִקְשָׁה כְּעִיר נְצוּרָה

And the daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, like a besieged city

21. Esther 4:3

וַיִּבְדֹּל-מִדִּינָהּ וּמִדִּינָהּ מִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיָּדֹתוּ מִגִּיעַ אֵבֶל וַיִּזְלַל לַיהוּדִים וְצוּם וּבְכִי וּמִסָּפֵד שֶׁק

וּמִכָּל-רֶגֶל

לְרִבִּים:

And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, **there was great mourning among the Jews**, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes

22. Jeremiah 4:31

כִּי קוֹל כְּחוֹלָה שְׁמִיעֹתַי צָרָה כַּמְבִּינָה קוֹל בַּת-צִיּוֹן תִּתְיַפֶּנָּה תִּפְרֹשׁ בִּפְיָהּ אוֹי-נָא לִי כִי-עֵינֶיהָ נִפְשִׁי לְהִרְגִים:

Afonso was succeeded by his son, Don João, a new king with a different agenda.²³

He determined to hate his princes and alienate his servants and he became estranged to all people who had been close to his father: the courtiers and the provincial lords who with integrity and respect had held privileged positions in the kingdom and who had become like his own flesh and bone. Yet, he rejected them saying, "All of you deserve to die because you have conspired against me to deliver me and my country to the rulers of Spain." He arrested a prince and a grande second to the king who had been his close confidant and he slew him with the sword. His own surviving brothers fled because they were afraid when they saw that their star had set and their leader, the prince of their ancestral house had died, and recognizing that they were dead men,²⁴ they abandoned their homes and property and they disappeared. The king seized all that they had and destroyed what was left of the royal seed.²⁵

For I have heard a voice as of a **woman in labor**, and the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, sobbing and spreading out her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul faints before the killers.

23. Exodus 1:8

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חֹדֶשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדָע אֶת-יֹסֵף

And there arose up a **new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph**

*Afonso V (1438-1481) son of King Duarte (1433-1438) was six years old when he succeeded to kingship at the death of his father. His reign witnessed great strides in the expansion of the Portuguese empire.

João II (1481-1495) was coreuler with his father Afonso V during the last four years of his reign and life. He was forcefully dedicated to the centralization of his reign. In the process, he fought successfully to reduce the power and prerogatives of the upper nobility who conspired against him. João crushed the conspiracy, had its leader, Duke Braganza, beheaded, and frightened many other nobles and courtiers into flight.

24. Genesis 14:10

וַעֲמַק הַשְּׂדִים בְּאַרְצַת חֶמֶר וַיִּסְּוּ מְלָכָיו-סֹדֹם וְעֹמֹרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ-שָׁמָּה וְהַנֶּשֶׁאִירִים הָרָחָב נָסוּ

And the valley of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and those who remained **fled to the mountain (MARTIN WILL ADD MORE)**

25. Nachum 1:12

כֹּה | אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי-שָׁלֹמַיִם וְכֹן רִבִּים וְכֹן נְגוּזָה וְעֶבֶר וְעִנְיָן לֹא אֶעֱנֶה עוֹד:

The king also became angry at me even though there was no violence on my hands and no deceit in my mouth²⁶ because from the very beginning, in better times, my devotion to the princes who were now being persecuted was strong and my opinion was highly regarded by them.

This "Lord of the earth," spoke harshly about me. He hated me with unusual passion and he included me among the conspirators saying that the conspirators and their circles would not act without my prior knowledge and that I was in league with them. Then wicked men, planning to entrap me in order to appropriate all my possessions, plotted against me with their scheming fangs. They accused me of what I had not initiated or even conceived. Amidst this confusion, the king sent a delegation of wicked messengers to me saying, "The king has ordered you to come quickly without hesitation." So, in compliance with his command, I set out on my journey to him in my innocence. But while on the way, I was intercepted by a man who told me go no further. Flee for your life because we are living in perilous times. And when I heard the ubiquitous slander that there is a plot against you and when with my own eyes²⁷ I saw the world

Thus says the Lord: Though they are at peace, and many, they will be cut down, and it shall pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more
26. Job 16:17

על לא־חַמַּס בְּכַפִּי וְתַפְלִיתִי זָכָה:

Though no injustice is in my hands, and my prayer is pure
Isaiah 53:9

וַיַּתְּנוּ אֶת־רָשָׁעִים קִבְרוֹ וְאֶת־עֹשֵׂי־רָעָה בְּמִתְּוֵי עַל לֹא־חַמַּס עָשָׂה וְלֹא מִרְמָה בְּפִי

And they made his grave among the wicked, and his tomb among the rich; although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth
27. Job 19:27

אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי | אֶחְזֶה־לִּי וְעֵינַי כֹּאן וְלֹא־זֶר כֵּלֹו כְלִיתִי בְּחֻקִּי

Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another; though my insides are consumed.

turned upside down²⁸ with no truth, kindness, or fear of God in the land²⁹, and with righteous and noble people cut down before their time³⁰ and though they had done no wrong³¹, deprived of all they had and leaving their possessions to others. I said to myself, "Whither should I go? I know that man and the way he thinks."³² He was a nice person but graded by greed on the signal of his superiors, he was out to wreak destruction and take the spoils³³. With the king's anger, his angels of death, and his enormous power, this man was despoiling me and no one could say to him what are you doing? What good will gold and silver now do to me? My pursuers will become my destroyers.³⁴

28. Babylonian Talmud Mas. Pesahim 50a

עולם הפוך ראיתי, עליונים למטה ותחתונים למעלה. אמר לו: בני, עולם ברור ראית

I saw a topsy-turvy world, the upper class underneath and the lower on top.

29. Hosea 4:1

שמעו דבר-יהוה בני ישראל כי ריב ליהוה עם-יושבי הארץ כי אין-אמת ואין-חסד ואין דעת אלהים בארץ. Hear the word of the Lord, people of Israel; for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land

30. Psalm 16: 3

לקדושים אשר-בארץ הם ואדירי כל-תפארתם:

As for the holy ones who are in the earth, they are the excellent, in whom is all my delight

31. Job 30:2

גם-כח ידיהם למה לי עלימו אבד כלח

What could I gain from the strength of their hands, men whose vigor is gone?

32. Kings II 9:11

ויחזא נצא אל-עבדי אדניו ויאמר לו השלום מדינך בא-המשגג הזה אליך ויאמר אליהם אתם ידעתם את-האיש ואת-שיחו:

Then Jehu came out to the servants of his lord; and one said to him, Is all well? Why did this madman come to you? And he said to them, you know the man, and his way of talking.

33. Proverbs 1:19

כן ארחות כל-בצע בצע את-נפשו בעליו יקח

So are the ways of every one who is greedy of gain; it takes away the life of its owners

34. Isaiah 10:6

בגוי חנף אשלחתי ועל-עם עברתי אצוני לשלל שלל ולבז בז ולשימו מרמס בחמר חוצות

What memories I had of my field and vineyards, my houses laden with delights.

This man deceived me and entrapped me and destined my wealth for his master's scheme. How wonderful it would have been for me to enjoy my life instead of being robbed all my days.³⁵ Therefore, to make a long story short, let me say that I forsook my inheritance, my wife, and children, who God had graciously given me and everything else that I possessed. I fled alone while it was still night and I went on my way³⁶ drawing strength from my misfortune. My downfall came suddenly like the wind which scatters the chaff³⁷ and I fled naked as a babe³⁸.

At dawn an order was issued from Pharaoh's house and runners hastened³⁹ at his command saying, "Pursue him and catch him." Their sole object was to fells me. His

I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my anger will I give him a charge, **to take the plunder, and to take the prey**, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

35. Psalm 133:1

שיר המעלות לדוד הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד

A Song of Maalot of David. Behold, **how good and how pleasant it is** for brothers to dwell together in unity!

36. Jeremiah 12:7

עזבתי את ביתי נקשתי את נחלתי נתתי את ידודות נפשי בבר איבדיה

I have forsaken my house, I have left my heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

37. Job 21:18

יהיו כתבו לקניירות וכמץ נגבתו סופה

Are they like stubble before the wind, and **like chaff that the storm carries away?**

38. Job 19:20

בעורי ובבשרי דבקה עצמי ואתמלטה בעור שני

My bone cleaves to my skin and to my flesh, and **I have escaped by the skin of my teeth**

39. Esther 3:15

הרצים יצאו דחופים בדבר המלך והדת נתנה בשושן הבירה והמלך והמן ישבו לשותות והעיר שושן נבוכה

The couriers hurried out by the king's command, and the decree was given in Shushan the capital. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was in consternation

operatives came together and proceeded in my pursuit. Their houseman and their satrap riders pursued me toward the desert all day and all night. But with God's mercy, he did not allow them to hurt me. So I left Egypt, that is the kingdom of Portugal, and I came to the kingdom of Castile, to a border town called Segura de la Ordeon.⁴⁰ And when the king saw that he could not hunt me down, as I went in God's direction, he grew angry with me and labeled me his enemy. He grabbed all I had accumulated, silver and gold and princely treasures of great market value. He took everything I had, real and moveable, until I had nothing left. On the day when all this happened and a warrant was issued for my arrest, I cried out from the bowels of hell.⁴¹ Save me oh King. What good does it do you to oppress me?⁴² Will the judge of the earth do right?⁴³ Why have you afflicted your servant?⁴⁴ Tell me, why do you trouble me?⁴⁵ Examine me oh Lord and look at what I have done. You will that I have committed no transgression. But like a deaf vipe, He closed His ear⁴⁶ and did not stay his hand from destruction. I waited for

40. MARTIN WILL GIVE INFO

41. Jonah 2:3

וַיֹּאמֶר קִרְאֵנִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁמָעֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן שְׂוֹעָתִי שָׁמָעָה קוֹלִי

And said, I cried to the Lord out of my distress, and he heard me; **from the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice**

42. Job 10:3

הֲטוֹב לָךְ | כִּי-תַעֲשֶׂה כִּי תִמְאֵס יָגִיעַ בְּכַיִּיד וְעַל-עֲצַת רָשָׁעִים הוֹפְעָתָ

Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and shine on the counsel of the wicked?

43. Genesis 18:25

חָלַלָה לָךְ מַעֲשֵׂה | בְּדַבֵּר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית צַדִּיק עִם-רָשָׁע וְהָיָה בְּצַדִּיק כְּרָשָׁע חָלַלָה לָךְ הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט:

Be it far from you to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, be it far from you; **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**

44. Numbers 11:11

45. Job 10:2

46. Psalm 58:5

justice but got destruction for equity I got declamation.⁴⁷ But since all I could see was violence and conflict⁴⁸ and its perpetrators persistently pushing on to the point of my destruction, my feet hardly able to move on⁴⁹, I cried out to god for help but He said nothing.⁵⁰ My hopes were drained⁵¹ and my thoughts obsessed with questions like: Why has God treated me like this? Why he dealt with me so uncharacteristically. In all my life had I not been one to heal breaches⁵² that people should break me time and time again? Did I not cry out to go with heaviness of spirit⁵³ that God should so harden His spirit by

חמת-למו כדמות חמת-נהש כמו-פתן חרש ואטם אזנו:

Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stops its ear;

47. Isaiah 5:7

כי כרם יהוה צבאות בית ישראל ואיש יהודה נטע שעשועיו ויבקו למשפט והנה משפח לצדקה והנה צעקה
For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

48. Exodus 5:13

והנגשים אצים לאמר בלו מעשיכם דבריו ביום בואו באשר בהיות התבן:

And the task masters hurried them, saying, Fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw

49. Psalm 73:2

ואני כמעט נטוי ונטיו כגלי באין שפכה לשפכות אשרי

(K) But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well near slipped.

50. Job 19:7

הן אצעק חמס ולא אענה אשוע ואין משפט:

Behold, I cry out Violence, but I am not heard; I cry aloud, but there is no justice

51. Psalm 73:2

ואני כמעט נטוי ונטיו כגלי באין שפכה לשפכות אשרי

(K) But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well near slipped.

52. Isaiah 58:12

ובנו ממד חרבות עולם מוסדי דוד-דוד תקומם וקרא לך גדר פנץ משובב נתיבות לשבת:

And those who shall be of you shall rebuild the old ruins; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, **The repairer of the breach,** The restorer of paths to dwell in.

53. Job 30:25

אם-לא בכיתי לקשה-יום עגמה נפשי לאביון

Did I not weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?

thrusting me into the hands of my hard-hearted master? Did I ever step out my door with an evil intent that God should snap from my tent the sources of my generational security pulling them from me like a shepherd's tent?⁵⁴ Did I ever inappropriately derive lies or deceit from the books I studied, the books of faith and law which I prize more than gold and the finest gems, that God should take these books and leave me without learning? Did I ever fail to open my home to the downtrodden that God should punish me by sapping my strength and allowing the times of my iniquity to overtake me? Whom have I oppressed and whom have I ever robbed⁵⁵ or ever coveted that I should be threatened with my life?⁵⁶ Is my record so blatant that my subordinates can complain? Why then does God not answer me when I cry out for help? But my thoughts answer me. They say, "Why are you terrified and depressed? Stop blaming God and glory in Him."⁵⁷ Why do you cry out to God saying, "What is my transgression and what is my sin that you pursue me?" God is righteous because you have transgressed God's word. Did you think

54. Isaiah 38:12

דִּירִי נִשָּׁע וְנִגְלָה מִנִּי כְּאֹהֶל רֹעִי קִפְדָּתִי כְּאַרְגַּח חַי מִדֹּלָה וּבְצַעֲנִי מֵאִם עַד־לִילָה תִּשְׁלִימֵנִי

My dwelling is plucked up, and removed from me as a shepherd's tent; I have rolled up my life like a weaver; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you make an end of me

55. Isaiah 58:7

הֲלוֹא פָרַס לָרֹעֵב לֶחֶמְךָ וְעֲנִיִּים מְרוֹדִים תְּבִיא בֵּית כִּירְתָּרְאָה עֲרֹם וְכִסִּיתוֹ וּמִבְשָׁרְךָ לֹא תִתְּעַלֵּם

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring the poor, who are cast out, to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?

56. Job 30:16

וְעַתָּה עָלַי תִּשְׁתַּפֵּךְ נַפְשִׁי לְאַחֲזוֹנִי יָמִי־עֹנִי

And now my soul is poured out within me; the days of affliction have taken hold of me

57. Psalm 37:7

יָסֹם לִיהוָה וְיִתְחַלֵּל לוֹ אֶל־תִּתְחַר בְּמַצְלִיחַ וְרָכּוֹ בְּאִישׁ עֲשֵׂה מְזֻמּוֹת

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil schemes

you were special⁵⁸ in forgetting God who created you and have you not forgotten the teaching of your God? You did not seek guidance from the book of God but reduced your study of sacred texts by turning to the evanescence of secular work, choosing a foreign language of beguiling words⁵⁹, conversing deceitfully with kings and counselors of the world who will perish at their appointed time. How, therefore, is it that they are perishing but You survive? For the gold and silver, all the precious things you have, perished. You have pursued the vanity of greatness and power and if you have forgotten the name of your God, you also will be forgotten and all that you have and own will be forgotten⁶⁰. But if, on the other hand, you earnestly seek out God and focus His Torah day and night⁶¹, if you seek it like silver and graciously implore the Almighty in

58. Job 1:10

חַלָּא אַתָּה וְאַתָּה שָׂכַת בְּצִדּוֹ וּבְצִדּוֹ בֵּיתוֹ וּבְצִדּוֹ כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ מִסָּבִיב מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי בִרְכָתְךָ וּמִקְנֵהוּ פָּרָץ בְּאֶרֶץ:

Have not you made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are increased in the land.

59. Exodus 5:9

תִּכְבֹּד הָעֲבֹדָה עַל-הָאֲנָשִׁים וְיַעֲשׂוּ-בָהּ וְאַל-יִשְׁעוּ בְּדִבְרֵי-שָׁקֶר

Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labor in it; and let them not regard vain words

60. Isaiah 49:15

הֲתִשְׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עִילָהּ מִרְחֶם בֶּן-בֶּטֶן נָם-אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחנָה וְאֶנֶּכִי לֹא אֲשַׁכַּחךָ

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, even they may forget, but I will not forget you

61. Numbers 9:21

וַיֵּשׂ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה הָעָנָן מֵעַרְב עַד-בֹּקֶר וְנִגְעַלָה הָעָנָן בַּבֹּקֶר וְנִסְעוּ אוֹ יוֹמָם וְלֵילָה וְנִגְעַלָה הָעָנָן וְנִסְעוּ

And so it was, when the cloud abode from evening to the morning, and the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed; whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

goodness⁶², God will again rejoice in you as He has rejoiced with your forbears⁶³. And if oppressors have raised their hand against you, God's hand will not be withheld from saving you. If you have stumbled in your iniquity⁶⁴, the Lord, God will indeed help you toward a good outcome. And if strangers have invaded your inheritance⁶⁵, all who hurt you will be ashamed and embarrassed and you will rejoice in God and glory in the Holy One of Israel.⁶⁶

As a result of these considerations, I took courage and focused on the following: I had thought my ways to be the right ways for a person, any ordinary individual. I thought about⁶⁷ catastrophe which has befallen us and said, Why should I have more

62. Job 8:5

אם-אתה תשחר אל-אל ואל-שדי תתחנן

If you will seek God, and make your supplication to the Almighty;

63. Deuteronomy 30:9

והזיתוך יהנה אלהיך בכל | מעשה ידך בפרי בטןך ובפרי בהמתך ובפרי אדמתך לטובה כי | ושוב יהנה לשוב עליך לטוב כאשר-שש על-אבותיך

And the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in every work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your land, for good; for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, as he rejoiced over your fathers;

64. Hosea 14:2

שובה ישראל עד יהנה אלהיך כי כשלת בצונך

O Israel, return to the Lord your God; for you have stumbled in your iniquity

65. Psalm 79:1

מוזמר לאסף אלהים באו גוים | בנחלתך טמאו את-היכל קדשך שמו את-ירושלם לעיים

A Psalm of Asaph. O God, nations have come into your inheritance; your holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.

66. Isaiah 41:16

תזרם ורוח תשאם וסערה תפיץ אותם ואתה תגיל ביהוה בקדוש ישראל ותהלל

You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the stormy wind shall scatter them; and you shall rejoice in the Lord, and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel

67. Psalm 73:16

ואחשבה לדעת זאת עמל היא [הוא] בעיני

grief? Is it not that all these evils befell me because I did not have God with me? I did not have God within me and the scoundrels oppressed me because I strayed from your Torah⁶⁸. I am fortunate because I have been chastised so that I could learn your statutes.⁶⁹ Better is the teaching of your lips and a thousand pieces of gold and silver.⁷⁰ And although God has said, "You shall be a wanderer on the earth⁷¹," I have been a stranger in a foreign land and God separated my brethren from me, yet on the other hand, here God has connected me to wise and learned people, colleagues who seek me out. The Teaching of God is perfect, renewing life; the decrees of God are enduring, making the wise simple⁷²

They wanted my explanations on the sections of the books of the early prophets, eagerly anticipating it like the sweetness of honey.⁷³ They have encouraged me and have asked

When I pondered how I might understand this, it was too wearisome for me
68. Psalm 119:51

וְיָדִים הִלִּיצוּ עִדְמָאד מִתּוֹרַתְךָ לֹא נִסִּיתִי:

The arrogant have had me greatly in derision; but I have not turned away from your Torah.

69. Psalm 119:71

טוֹב לִי כִי-עֲנִיתִי לְמַעַן אֶלְמֹד חֻשִׁיד:

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes.

70. Psalm 119:72

טוֹב לִי תוֹרַת פִּיךָ מֵאַלְפֵי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף

The Torah of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver

71. Genesis 4:12

כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה לֹא-תִסָּף תֵּת-כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נָע וְנָד תִּהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ:

When you till the ground, it shall not henceforth yield to you her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer shall you be in the earth.

72. JPS translation of Psalm 19:8

תּוֹרַת יְיָ תָמִיד מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ עֲדוּת יְיָ וְנֶאֱמָנָה מְחַיֶּימַת פֶּתִי

The Torah of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple

73. Judges 14:18

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּטָרָם יָבֹא הַחֲרָסָה מִן-מִתּוֹק מִדְּבַשׁ וְיָמָה עוֹ מֵאֲרִי וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לוֹלֵא חֲרָשְׁתֶּם

me to undertake a commentary to the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings as they clearly transcribed my words and explanation⁷⁴. They did so because the explanations they had were few and unsatisfactory. And now that I have found time to do God's work, I have chosen a stand on the threshold of God's house and to perform this holy service. I have cleansed my hands of my malaise to do the commentary to these four books, the work of King, the Lord, blessed be He, is His name. And I have decided to preface the commentaries with a strong, general, introduction with two essays as follows:

The first essay deals with the general division of Holy Scripture. As you know, our holy sages, of blessed memory, divided the Holy Scriptures at first into three sections and called them respectively Torah, Prophets, and Writings. And it is appropriate that we should know why they were called these names and what is the essential difference between them to which their names attest.

Now I have observed that these books attained their names in one of three ways. First, from the perspective of their essence and content. Accordingly the first section is called Torah according to its essence because its order and method of teaching show us proper behavior and includes all of the mitzvot. Or the books can be named from the perspective of the agent, that is the compilers of these books, namely the prophets of God, in the case of the Prophets. Or, number three, they can be named from the standpoint of their form or manner of transmission whether oral or written in a book, as evidenced by the fact that the third section is accordingly called Writings.

Now if we say that all the holy books, Torah Prophets and Writings were so named from the first perspective that which is on the basis of content, the question arises

בְּעֵינֵי לֹא מִצֵּאתֶם חֵדָּתִי

And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, **What is sweeter than honey?** and what is stronger than a lion? And he said to them, If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle

74. Psalm 119:126

עַתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת לִי הָיָה הַפֶּסֶד בְּתוֹרָתְךָ

It is time for you, Lord, to act; for they have made void your Torah

as to why the second section is called Prophets. It would have been fitting for these books to be called prophecies or accounts of the future because that would be the appropriate name according to their content. And why would the books of the third section be called Writings? It would have been fitting that they be called Holy Spirit or Words of Holiness which is the name that points to their essence.

And if we should say that their names pertain to them only in connection to the second perspective, in their relation to their performers and writers, the question would therefore arise as to why the first section is called Torah? It would have been fitting that it should be called Giver of the Torah or Lord of the Prophets or the Torah of Moses. And why are the books of the third section called Writings? It would have been fitting for them to be called Speakers through the Holy Spirit since such names designate their composers. And if we lean toward another possibility, namely that their names derive only from the manner of their delivery the question arises as to why the first section is called Torah and the second Prophets, they too should more properly from the manner of their delivery have been named Writings since they included words given in writing and not orally, as our sages say in conformity with the dictum, that matters that are in writing should be communicated orally. And in general, I opine that the word Prophet comprehends also the Torah and the books of the other Prophets. Therefore it would have been fitting for the Torah to have been called Prophets just like the other section is called Prophets. It would have been fitting also that all the holy books be called Writings since all of them were committed to writing. Why therefore do we designate the first section with a special name with which the other two sections cannot be associated? And why do we call the second section with a name that separates it from the third yet connects it with the first? And why would we call the third section with a general name which the three sections and all the holy writings share?

There is yet another question: if Torah contained a narrative section dealing with events past and a prophetic section with things yet to be and a religious section with

Mitzvoth, why therefore did its name derive from only the part dealing with the mitzvot and not from the other parts? It would have been more appropriate for it to be called Prophecy which is a name that encompasses all the parts.

I found no scholar dealing with this matter except for Ephodi in his book on grammar.⁷⁵ He says there that the collection of holy books is a distinct metaphor for the Holy Temple and the entire world. It paralleled that of the Holy of Holies which contained the tablets and the Torah scroll inside and the cherubim above with their wings spread wide upwards. It is as well a metaphor for the intellect, the blessed God, and the holy angels.⁷⁶ And corresponding to them was the godly Torah which emanated from God to Moshe Rabbeinu.

And the second part of the Temple was the Holy Sanctuary, the site of the table and the candelabra and the golden altar. And this is a metaphor for the world of the spheres and pure rain.⁷⁷ And correspondingly came the book of the Prophets, since they were emissaries of God, their prophecies were mediated by their Active Intellect activated by heavenly motion. And just as the aforementioned teacher says the third section of this Holy Temple was the enclosure or the courtyard, containing its sacrificial altar, the laver and its stand. This is a metaphor for the lower world, the ephemeral world of the here and gone. And corresponding to it is the third division of the Holy Books, the Writings, which were transmitted by the Holy Spirit – because the level of the Holy Spirit is lower than the level of prophecy. Therefore, the rank for the sections corresponded necessarily to their heavenly position and it would therefore be inappropriate to change their order shifting last to first and first to last. Nor did he feel compelled to give a reason for the question.

And if indeed the words of the great sage (who dismissed all objections I raised) are correct and did not bother to give any reason, why then did our sages, of blessed

75. This reference is to the Ma'aseh Efod

76. Ma'aseh Efod Vienna, 1865, page 11

77. Ibid

memory arrange the names of the parts of the Holy Writings in this way – Torah, Prophets, and Sacred Writings? This is the explanation we are looking for. It seems to me that our sages, of blessed memory, intended for these names to provide a comprehensive title for each of these parts and the highest level attainable to us in each. So why did they call the first part Torah? Because they wanted to distinguish the book of God's teaching from the rest of the Holy Books because of its exaltation above the others in the quality of its divine influence and because it could not be distinguished from them in historical narration. Many of the prophets, in addition to our lord Moses, narrated past events. It cannot be distinguished from them in the telling of the future because the rest of the prophets also gave warnings retrospectively and prospectively. The only fundamental essential distinction in the Torah were the Mitzvoth given through our lord Moses whereas no Mitzvoth at all were given through any other prophet. Therefore, because of this special distinction and its eminence they called this book containing the divine commandments Torah. In this way, it is separated from and exalted above all the other holy books.

And as far as the books of the prophets are concerned, they are called prophets not to differentiate them from the book of Torah, because they were already differentiated from in the sense that it was Torah, but they were so called so as to denote its cachet and also to distinguish them from the Writings, and to show that the compilers of the Writings were not prophets. Those who composed the books of the Sacred Writings were not prophets even though they spoke through the Holy Spirit. Therefore their writings are not called prophecies even though the books of Chronicles contain prophecies uttered by prophets. The composer of that book was not among the prophets and therefore that book does not belong in the collection of the Prophets whose books are so called because their composers were prophets.

Now the aforementioned Rabbinic sage in chapter 35 Section II of his book writes that Moses our teacher was not just called a prophet; that he was not included with the other prophets by name and definition because of the big difference between them; and that the name "prophets" points to the superiority of those books which distinguishes them from the Writings. And we can also say that these books were not titled Prophecy since they are comprised primarily of accounts of events that occurred during those times, like most of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings and part of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And since this does not constitute a prediction of the future, they were not called prophecies because that is a special name for accounts of the future as I shall explain in the second essay when I consider the form of these books. Besides, by their distinctiveness, these books succeeded in attesting that the authors were prophets.

Now, regarding the books that speak through the Holy Spirit, they were called Writings, not to distinguish them from the Torah, because they were already differentiated from the Torah by name, nor from the Prophets because they were already distinguished by agency that points to the name Prophets. They were rather so called in order to delineate their position with respect to the degree of their divine inspiration; that is the level of its speakers derived not from seeing or hearing the words of the living God but from their being on the plane of the holy spirit just as the Rabbi mentioned in chapter 45, Section B, where he says "It will induce a person to speak or compose songs and praises or words of wisdom in a miraculous way." They were therefore called Writings for they were written in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, then, the intention in the name Writings was not to declare that its contents were committed to writing rather than transmitted orally but that rather they were written in the Divine Spirit and on that level. Further the Divine Spirit was with them only in their composition, in their language, and concept, and not in a different way and that was the lofty degree by which they were

called Writings. For as I said, the names of these sections point to their highest level of perfection and for that reason all the questions are superfluous according to the sages. Their position in this discussion becomes clear: it is founded on the level of the holy books and their value, and that therefore the book of the Torah is called Torah to point to its worth which is the value of the mitzvot and nothing else.

Indeed, the Christian sages divided the holy books into four sections— a Torah section, namely the five books of Moses, a narrative, namely Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Daniel, Ezra, and Esther and a prophetic section consisting of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, the Twelve (minor prophets) and the latter part of the book of Daniel and they included within it the book of Psalms and Psalms was accepted because King David, of blessed memory, was a prophet of the highest rank. And they included as well an instructional part including Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. These sections and were called *legales historiales* of the prophets as they spoke [wisdom literature]. Yet this division does not reflect the order of the books, for the books called narratives are also included in the name of the prophets and the ones called instructional were formed by the divine spirit and were not like the books of Aristotle.⁷⁸ Nor does Scripture attest as it does in the case of the Prophets that the divine word was revealed to David to make David eligible for inclusion among the prophets, but rather [it implies] that his words in the book of Psalms were of the level of the words of prophecy as they were spoken. And therefore the words of the sages, blessed be they, are correct in so far that they exalted him because of the degree of divine emanation through which the holy books were created in three categories. From their perspective they divided the holy books into three parts, Torah, Prophets, and Sacred Writings from the point of view which I have mentioned.

⁷⁸ Aristotle's writings were, of course, premised on the primacy of reason. Like their Muslim and Christian counterparts, Medieval Jewish philosophers struggled to compromise Revelation and Reason. Many of those who weighed in on Revelation did not abandon the use of reason but subordinated it to Revelation. The learned and rationalistic Abravanel allied himself with this group.

And besides this division, I added another organization for the holy books based on the time of their writing and composition. I will divide them also into three other parts. The first part deals with writings and compositions before Israel entered the Holy Land, that is the Torah put by Moses before the people of Israel in the desert before their entering the Holy Land. The second section includes the books that were written while they were in the Land before the Exile and the destruction of the Temple. These are the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, books of Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the scrolls of Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.⁷⁹ These prophets prophesied what was written by the Writings and transmitted by the sages as understood in the Seder Olam, chapters 19 and 20, in the days of the Kings of Israel and Judah. From that period came the books of Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes which were composed by David and Solomon in the Divine Spirit in the land of Israel in those days.

Indeed, all these books were written and composed before the destruction of the Temple while Israel was on the land. They formed part of the second section. The third section of the holy books included the books written and composed after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel from their land. They are the books of Ezekiel, the scroll of Ruth, and the book of Ezra and Chronicles which he also wrote in the prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachai, for even though they prophesied in the land of Israel, it was after the destruction and Exile of Israel, when they returned under God's limited visitation through the instrumentality of Cyrus, King of Persia⁸⁰ and therefore they accordingly belong to this third part. Indeed the book of Job, if it was written by Moses our teacher according to the sages' [baba batra, page 14B and page 16A] it would have belonged to the first part. And if Job lived in the days of the Judges, as the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, it would have been included in the second part. If he had

⁷⁹ In the Septuagint of Conise, these books have a different order.

⁸⁰ See Isaiah 45

lived in the days of Esther and Ahasuerus , as was the opinion of Rabbi Joshua ben Korha or was one of the repatriates of the exile and the school in Tiberius, as was the opinion of Rabbi Johanan, his book would have been included in the third part. In the end, all the holy books were divided into those which were written before Israel's arrival in the land, those that were written when they were in the land, and those which were written after they went into the first Exile from the land. And what follows for us in the case of those four books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings was that the beginning of the time of their accounts corresponded with the time of the entrance of Israel with Joshua into the chosen land that God had given them. And the end of their account corresponds to the time of their departure into the exile of King Zedakaiah. And with this we know that these four books include most of the rest of the holy books, the Prophets and the Writings, since the books of the aforementioned prophets in the second part are prophecies that the prophets prophesied from the days of the kings of Judah and Israel by prophets mentioned in the book of Kings and included also in the book of Writings mentioned in the same section that I mentioned, as they were composed and written with the holy spirit from those kings in their days. And if one should say why weren't all the prophecies and the words of the Holy Spirit and from the Prophets and the Writings included into the accounts of the kings of those days just like the prophecies of Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha, and the rest of the prophets mentioned in the book of Samuel and the book of Kings, everyone in the place and the time of the king at the time of their prophecy. And why weren't these books connected by them to the prophecies of those prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the like? And why were all the more so Obadiah and Jonah and the rest of the prophets only few of whose prophecies are extant given their own books and separate books, while independent books were not collected for the prophecies of Samuel and Gad the seer, and Nathan the prophet, and Elisha and their words are dispersed within [other] books. I will now give the answer, namely the prophecies and songs of wisdom which come in the books of the prophecies and the books of the Psalms of David and the Song

of Solomon were not written into the books and into the stories of the kings that came contemporaneously for two reasons. One is not to burden the work of the readers who could not get to the point of the stories because of the length of the prophecies and multiple songs and large philosophical essays that would have interrupted them. They [the compilers of Scripture] therefore opted to write the stories separately, compact and consequent, one after the other without interruption and they organized separate books from the prophecies of the prophets of those days and a special book for the songs of David and his Elders. So the books that spoke through the Holy Spirit which were uttered at the time were organized according to the content and their required diversity.

And the second reason is that the four books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings were compiled separately initially for the account of the Judges and the Kings and their history. And, therefore, the only prophecies that were included in them were those relative to matters pertaining to those judges and kings and their record. Because they were essential to knowing the story, it was appropriate and necessary that they be connected with them and included in them.

And therefore as to the account of the prophets insofar as they do not contain prophecy and the story of the miracles which they performed in the time of the kings since they did not contain prophecies they were also included in these books from the perspective that they all related to those kings. However, the rest of the prophecies that the prophets prophesied that were unrelated to the stories of the kings and were not necessary to be written in them were not included in those books whether they included many or few prophecies or matters relating to those prophets and their prophecies and the prophecies of the nation, they are not part of the genre of the stories of the kings and their affairs. Thus, the level of these four books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, at the time of their composition is clarified. That was what I wanted to make clear in this first story. They will be further fleshed out in the second essay which follows:

The second essay deals with the understanding of the four underlying principles of these books namely the active, the formative, the substantive, and the intentional, simply because the matter becomes known in its entirety (as the afore mentioned scholar notes) as its proximate and then its derivative causes and purposes are known. Since the ultimate reason precedes the others in thought, I will first clarify what the objective is in these four books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, whether it is common to all or specific to them individually. After that I will turn to the agent, that is, the person who was the author and composer of these books, whether there was for the totality one author and composer, and they were the same, or if there were many authors and composers according to the number of the books and who they were. And after that, I will explain their form, that is, whether the level of the books was the equivalent of the books of the Prophets or was at the level of the books written in the Holy Spirit and why they are distinguished from the others, and by what criteria were included among the Prophets and not the Writings. And after that I will explain their content, that is, the general context of the four books and their topics. And I will preface these remarks according to the books since these remarks are useful for their understanding.

And as for the matter of the intention or ultimate purpose, the first objective encompassing all of these four books is to teach us the benefits and useful lessons for the appreciation of their true conception and the understanding of the finest values and traits as their stories will demonstrate. And another objective embraces them all, that is, the knowledge of the histories of the past generations, for we have no other way of knowing the number of years involved [in that period] except for the chronology of the Judges and Kings, because they continued one after the other without pause as I will clarify in the book of Judges with God's help. And if country after country, in their respective Writings, and people after people, in their respective languages, have sought to organize and know their distant past and their milestones across the generations in order to know their times and years, so too in the case of the people of Israel, rooted as they are in the

faith in the intelligent generation of the world, it is fitting for us to know and understand the emergence of the generations from the beginning of creation until the Babylonian exile until Shiloh come and with it the messianic time. And therefore ⁸¹it was necessary for them to count the years of the judges and the kings and the stories of their activities so that we can thereby attain a better understanding of the history of the world. And the special objective in the book of Joshua is to bear witness that all the divine purposes that the Holy one, blessed be He, gave through our holy forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and through Moses our Lord, of blessed memory, regarding the chosen land and its heritage (as it is written in God's Torah) were all fulfilled and implemented without omission.

And therefore the book of Joshua was written to report the entrance of Israel into the land and its conquest and inheritance and its division. Now Joshua had already testified about his purpose in his address to Israel at the end of his days. He said "Acknowledge with all your heart and soul that not one of the good things that the Lord your God promised you has failed to happen; they have all come true for you, not a single one has failed."⁸² And the objective of the other three books was to narrate that after the death of Joshua in the days of the Judges and Kings the children of Israel were often wicked and sinful against God. The people started following the strange gods of the land and because of this they were powerless before their enemies. Israel abandoned the good, and the enemy pursued them. And once they returned to God and cried out to God in their distress, they were rescued from their distress and their enemies fell by the sword before them. And that all shows that there is a judging God in the land, and all the words of the Master of the prophets, of blessed memory, and his promises were fulfilled in the case of both reward and punishment according to the disposition of the receivers. Now Joshua had also testified to this in his words. There he said, "But just as every good thing

⁸¹ Genesis 49:10

⁸² JPS translation of Joshua 23:14

that the Lord your God promised you has been fulfilled for you, so the Lord can bring upon you every evil thing until He has wiped you off this good land that the Lord your God has given you."⁸³

This is the targeted objective in these three books, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, that is the book of Judges contains an account of what happened to Israel both the good and the bad according to the deeds in the time of the Judges. And in the book of Kings, we find the same process, that is the account of reward and punishment that befell them during the time of the Kings until the exile of Israel from its land. And in what way did the Judges and Kings differ? Here comes the clarification and an ample analysis will come in my introduction to the book of Judges. But we should appropriately ask the following question, namely, what was the point of the Book of Samuel? Because what was written about Samuel and Eli could properly have been included with the other Judges, while the stories of Saul and David, to whom one book was devoted, could have been included in the book of Kings, and that would leave us with the book of Judges and the book of Kings, only. But in my opinion the answer is that the book of Samuel was devoted to his eminence and the eminence of King David, and that therefore in the middle, between the books of Judges and Kings, we find the book of Samuel, since it is set aside for the stories of one perfect Judge amongst the Judges, namely Samuel the prophet, and one perfect King amongst the Kings, David. And in order to narrate the circumstances of the perfect Judge, Samuel, it was necessary to narrate along with that the matter of Eli, who preceded him, because God, blessed be He, elevated Samuel as a Judge during Eli's lifetime and Eli dies after Samuel had become the Judge during his lifetime. And similarly it brings before us in the stories regarding King David, the history of King Saul because King Saul ruled before David and David continued his life as king while Saul dies after David had been anointed. So therefore Samuel the Judge in this sense was likened to David the King in the order of Eli and Saul who respectively

⁸³ JPS translation of Joshua 23:15

preceded them in judging and reigning. And because of that the book of Samuel was the middle point, serving as the objective of the preceding divisions and its conclusion and the beginning of the later section and its preface. Because there it narrates the purpose of the book of Judges, the book of Samuel in this sense serves its conclusion. And from this perspective it serves as an introduction and beginning to the book of Kings. And therefore the Book of Samuel is situated between the books of Judges and Kings. But why therefore this book is called the book of Samuel I will explain in the introduction to this book..

Now if you ask why the Book of Kings starts with the portion "now King David was old and advanced in years..." and this was not part of the Book of Samuel which speaks of the events regarding David, would it not have made more sense if this story in the book of Samuel that speaks of David would have ended with the story of his death, allowing the Book of Kings to begin with Solomon and the accounts regarding him? I shall answer you that because this portion, "King David is now old and advanced in years..." records that he elevated Solomon the Book of Kings starts there and with it all the matters of Solomon and after his anointment connected to the Book of Kings and what is left in the book of Samuel are all matters of David when he was king because what happened to him after the enthronement of Solomon is already considered the time of Solomon.

So for me, this is the point of all these four books, which begin with the origin and development of Israel's heritage and glory when they entered the land as told in the book of Joshua, and until the time of their loss and destruction and exile from the land as mentioned at the end of the Book of Kings as I have said. And this is why I wanted to offer an explanation with regard to the point of these books in general and specifically. And one can observe that when Saul came to him ask about the matter of the asses he said, "Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he would say 'Come, let us go to the seer,' for the prophet of today was formerly called a seer" (Samuel 9:9). This

verse definitively shows that Samuel did not write it because Saul was still alive. So how can one say "Formerly in Israel for the prophet of today the word seer was used?" On the contrary, this shows conclusively that this was written a considerable amount of time after the death of Samuel when customs had changed. You will also find that he said, "A long time elapsed from the day that the Ark was housed in Kiriath-jearim, twenty years in all (Samuel 7:2)." And if Samuel wrote it when this took place in his time, how can it be said that the ark was there for twenty years [and left that place]? Indeed, in the time of Samuel, according to our sages, and the *Seder Olam*, chapter twelve, the ark was there for only thirteen years. And seven years after his death it was brought from there by King David.

And regarding David Scripture says, "At that time Achish granted him Ziklog: that is how Ziklag came to belong to the kings of Judah, as is still the case" (Samuel 27:6). But in the days of Samuel there were no kings over Judah alone. And in the case of Uzzah it is said, "And that place was named Perez-Uzzah, as it is still called" (II Samuel 6:8). We cannot say that Nathan the prophet or Gad the seer wrote it because this occurred in their days. And therefore how can the term "until this day" be used? Therefore everything that I have said shows that Samuel did not write his book. And because of all of this I concluded that Joshua did not write his book but that Samuel the prophet wrote it and he also wrote the book of Judges. Therefore you will not find it said that Joshua wrote it, just as the Torah testifies about Moses our teacher, may he rest in peace, when it says, "Moses wrote down this Torah" (Deuteronomy 30:9). It further says "When Moses finished writing the words of the Torah to the very end" (Deuteronomy 31:21). And indeed it is written at the end of the book of Joshua that he wrote all these things that he had spoken to the people.⁸⁴ And if in fact he wrote this book how come the text did not record it? But since the book of Joshua was written by Samuel it says things like I mentioned above such as "until this day." Thus it records the conquests of Leshem

⁸⁴ Joshua 24:26

by the tribe of Dan since this record had occurred during the composition of the book. But as to what is said about the sculpture of Micah (Judges 18:30), "until the exile from the land", this does not refer to the general exile of all Israel but rather to the exile of the Ark that was taken by the Phillistines during the war that occurred during the time of Samuel, which I will explain below. And do not think that I have strayed from the opinion of the sages in this, because also in the Gemara they did not all agree in these things. [In fact] they had a division of opinion regarding whether Moses wrote the book of Job and whether Joshua wrote the last eight verses of the Torah⁸⁵. And since the sages themselves had doubt about part of this statement, so too I can choose in part to take a more direct and appropriate way and correct it corresponding to the nature of these verses and their truth.

So who did write the book of Samuel? Here, besides what the sages wrote (as I have said) in the Book of Chronicles it was said upon David's death, "The acts of King David, early and later, are recorded in the history of Samuel the seer, the history of Nathan the prophet, and history of Gad the seer, and so on" (Chronicles 29:29). And that shows that Samuel wrote his book and that Nathan and Gad completed it according to their words. Even in the case of some of our sages, how is it that they did not adduce this quote to support their opinion? And what I think is correct in this matter is that Samuel wrote the things that happened in his day and Nathan the prophet also wrote independently, and Gad the seer wrote as well, every one of them on the events of their time and that Jeremiah the prophet assembled these writings and unified them and arranged the entire book according to their work. Because if it did not happen this way, then who collected these documents, since they are derived from different sources dealing with the same material? For the text does not say that these prophets wrote these words one after the other but that each wrote a book on his own. And it appears that when Jeremiah wanted to write the book of Kings, he understood the book of Samuel that

⁸⁵ Baba Batra 141

preceded. So he collected the statements of the prophets that are mentioned in the book and without doubt added words to clarify the writings as he understood them. And he was the one who said, "until this day," referring to what had been written in Israel beforehand, etc. Because the individual called the prophet now had been called the seer in the past. And the rest of the verses that I have mentioned to point to a later time and the work of an editor and collector of blessed memory. And in order to agree with the sages if you want to say that Joshua wrote his book you will have to say that Jeremiah or Samuel also collected these writings and compiled them into a book, and that [Samuel] he was the one who enriched them by divine inspiration just as I will mention [in my commentary to] the book of Samuel. And this is what I wanted to clarify in the matter of the agent and writer of these books.

But regarding the form of these four books, our sages have written that they belong to the Prophets and not to the collection of the books written in the Holy Spirit and that in form they were therefore completely prophetic. And I in the book called *Machazei Shadai* [The Vision of the Almighty], which I wrote, I separated the inquiry regarding the prophecy and Holy Spirit and the question of how the level of prophecy differed from the level of the Holy Spirit. [I raised the question as to] Whether the difference resulted from the perspective of the source and the bestower or from the perspective of the receiver or from the perspective of the gift itself. Also whether the difference was in quantity or quality or was involved in the subjugation of their senses or their employ? For this is refractorily recondite, who would find it? And indeed I found nothing on it except in the writing of Ephodi page 113, in that chapter 45b which I have mentioned, and even there his words were written with extraordinary concision and insufficiency. And I found in Nahmanides' commentary to the Torah in the Perush Behalotekh 114a words that appear to be contradicting the thought of Rabbi Ephodi. It is therefore appropriate in this regard that we know their opinions have a clear understanding of the opinions of the sages in this connect or with regard to the truth of

the Holy Spirit. And I investigated this in general and specifically with regard to the level of every single book as is required by the nature of such investigation and this is not the place for the details of this Investigation, but what is appropriate that we know here is the perspective from which these books are prophecies.

I say that the form of these books was prophetic from three perspectives – One is from the point of view of the speaker who says that he is a prophet, because in the case of Samuel and Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, their books were on the level of prophecy because they had been organized and written by prophets. And the second perspective comes from the fact that the divine command came to the prophet for him to write every one of the [aforesaid] books and after these books had been written by the word of God and his command, their level was prophetic. The third perspective comes from the fact that God, blessed be He, through the grace of His prophecy, informed the prophets of many things that had not been known in Israel so that they could write them down in their books. And this dealt with the thoughts of nations and their kings and their events and the sins of the children of Israel and their repentance and that God would repent of the evil which he had threatened to do unto them, and words similar to these which were not possible for the prophet to muster and to know except directly from God.

But indeed [judging from] the way that books were written and how the prophets knew the matters that took place during the early days that they wrote about in these books, there can be no doubt that the prophets found things that were written in those days in the books of chronicles that were mentioned in the Book of Kings. And these things were being written from that time either by the Judges or the Kings or the rest of the worthies and writers of those generations. And since these people were scattered and separated one from the other and there were matters in their writings that were written out of imagination and not according to the truth, and among them extraneous matters, because such is the way of writers and narrators to praise and to fault more than is appropriate according to the amount of their affection or disaffection, and therefore

within them truth mixes with lies and the tangential mixes with the essential. Therefore, the spirit of God rested on these prophets and ordered them to compose on a book all these things in their fullness and truth. And they added to them all those writings and through His prophecy God informed them about the integrity of those words and their truth and their justification and the separation of truth from falsehood and the essential from the tangential.

Therefore the situation of the compiler[s] and the level of prophecy that came to them in this connection and the prophetic revelation to verify and justify these matters. These are the three perspectives through which we know that the form of these writings was prophetic. And if what I have written about it can answer the three doubts perhaps they can satisfy you through this investigation and not one of our sages, young or old, will be upset by them.

Précis to B. Netanyahu's book titled Don Isaac Abravanel

Don Isaac Abravanel is one of the most distinguished leaders that the Jewish people have had until this day. He was a man respected by kings, noblemen, and his Jewish community. Constantly torn between his involvement in politics and his own spiritual search, Abravanel learned to write through his own experiences – and his experiences were numerous and eventful. He learned first hand what it meant to be *a foreigner in a foreign land* for he and his fellow Jews were kicked out of country after country being forced to begin anew each time. And for Abravanel, who came from money and was able to acquire much throughout his life, this pattern grew more and more difficult each time.

Abravanel involved himself in three major fields: general diplomatic-financial, the Jewish communal-political, and the scholarly-spiritual. He excelled in each becoming well respected by kings and courtiers, being the spokesman for his people, and writing some of the most influential work in Jewish sacred literature to this day. However, most impressive of all is the fact that Abravanel had many opportunities (offered to him by kings and courtiers) to escape the oppression that his people were experiencing but on all occasions he declined.

This section will outline Abravanel's life (though there are limited sources on the subject and much of it is parsed out from his writings), his works, his outlook, and his philosophy.

Don Isaac Abravanel's Life

In order to better understand Abravanel and the way in which he chose to live his life, it is important to know some details about his family. The Abravanel family were prominent in the Jewish community of Portugal as well as outside. They were financially sound and involved in politics, working for kings and other members of the royal family. Claiming their descent from the Davidic dynasty, the Abravanel family was well respected in the Jewish community as well as in the political realm. However they never compromised their ideals for either side. They stood by their morals and were well respected for that.

The Abravanel family first lived in Seville, where they were able to participate in the activities of this internationally recognized city. However, it was in Seville where a massive campaign against the Jews first began in 1378 and where the Inquisition first began in 1481. As a result, the Abravanel family moved to Portugal - a place seemingly better for the Jews. Unfortunately for them, when the Abravanel family arrived, the country was hostile towards the Jews. However, the opportunities for financial wealth and enterprise did exist. It is believed that the Abravanel family were already involved in Portugal's politics and finances at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

When Don Isaac Abravanel was born in Lisbon in 1437, harsh policies towards the Jews increased and involved much of the Jewish community. In 1433, João I, who had been reasonably good to the Jews, died. His eldest son and heir to the throne, Duarte, did not follow his father's ways. He sought the support of the Cortes for his endeavors and in exchange he took their disdain towards the Jews into consideration. His policies

were very anti-Jewish and spurred much intolerance of the Jews throughout the land. Fortunately for the Jews, he died in 1438 and none of his policies were implemented.

Don Isaac was one year old at the time of Duarte's death. From a young age, he already began to experience the oppression that was placed upon the Jews of that area. And since his father, Don Judah, had direct relations with Portugal's royal house Isaac was exposed to politics, wealth, and honor, at a very young age.

Don Pedro, Duarte's brother had the same policies towards the Jews as his brother although many of his policies were not enforced. The Jews were, however, forced to live in *Judarias* with a strictly enforced curfew. It was in 1449, when Don Isaac was twelve, that the Jews experienced the first major outbreak of hostility toward their people. In Lisbon, Don Isaac's home town, rioting mobs attempted to attack the *Judarias* in the city. But the Jews knew how to defend themselves. This aggravated the mobs and forced them to turn on the king (Afonso) – who they now believed was determined to defend the Jews. Lisbon was filled with conflict and tension, the beginning of a troubling pattern in Abravanel's life.

Don Isaac's Early Studies and Writings

As the son of a prominent leader in the Jewish community of Portugal, Isaac's education was meant to prepare him to eventually take over for his father. Having visited the palaces of kings and princes, he was accustomed to an education directed towards those on the high end of the social spectrum. Isaac studied Latin, the Roman classics, the works of Roman politicians and thinkers and moralists. With his knowledge of Latin he was able to study the writings of the Christian medieval writers. As well,

Abravanel was schooled in Portuguese and Castilian but excelled the most in Hebrew. It is believed that he studied mostly in Hebrew and that his curriculum consisted of medieval Jewish philosophy and their Greek and Arab counterparts, medicine, astrology, and many of the natural sciences. All of these studies proved to influence Abravanel's works throughout his life.

Abravanel was a theoretician and writer by nature. His early writings (having not yet experienced the strife that was yet to come) concentrated on the natural elements and philosophy. His first work was called *The Forms of the Elements* and concentrated on the essential qualities of the elements. Nothing about it was religious. In fact there was no mention of God. This work was a great example of philosophy based on logic. However, the more that Abravanel studied this kind of philosophy, the more he realized that it was a useless exercise in dialectics. He wanted answers and truth and so he began to turn to religion and mysticism. We will see that the longer he lived, the deeper Abravanel delved into serious questions of life and death, redemption and freedom.

This change can be seen in his second work titled *Crown of the Elders* where he names the cabalists the "bearers of truth." Here he focused on the concept of God and the meaning of prophecy and at the same time attacked philosophers. He was mostly interested in the prophets and made it his mission to reveal the depth of their wisdom. But soon enough this mission was interrupted. Don Isaac slowly took over for his father who was then growing older. Abravanel found himself completely immersed in the life of finance and politics with very little time for his writing. It is interesting to note that Abravanel started out as a writer. Throughout his life, he was torn between serving kings

and serving his own spiritual needs. And the greater the strife placed on his people, the greater his need was to write.

The First Stage of His Life as a Statesman and Financier

Don Isaac carefully and meticulously worked to gain favor with Afonso V, whom he respected very much. He befriended friends and courtiers of Afonso in order to enter into the circle of Afonso's favorites, which he did. It is believed that he rose to this position between the year 1472 and 1475 and continued to progress in his court. Afonso gave greater freedom to the Jews and worked to develop the commercial resources of the country. He had a friendly policy toward nobility and had a special interest in developing trade. Afonso needed money for all of his expeditions, as he was a strong supporter of exploration. As a result, he had a very tolerant policy towards the Jews. Afonso was a rare king – one who was truthful and tolerant. He was a friend of the Jews and employed a number of Jews in his court. Abravanel developed a most special relationship with Afonso. They had much in common – their studies, their interests, and their search for the truth. And what secured Abravanel's place in Afonso's court was Abravanel's relations with the princes in Braganza.

The Braganzas were rich and powerful. Abravanel benefited from their wealth as well and was closest with Ferdinand II. In fact, Ferdinand consulted Abravanel on every important activity. And in 1478, Ferdinand assumed the dukedom which meant a higher position of power for Abravanel, which in turn meant a higher position of power for Abravanel with Afonso V. The years between 1478 and 1481 proved to be the happiest years of Abravanel's life. He gained much wealth as well as political power. He now

had three sons, Judah, Joseph, and Samuel. The country was at peace and Abravanel even found time to write. He began his work on prophecy opposing Maimonides titled *Vision of God*, he wrote commentary on the *Guide*, and his home became a center for intellectual discussions (as mentioned in the translation of his introduction to the Prophets). He was a prominent leader of the Jewish community of Portugal and experienced much joy. However, on August 18, 1481, Afonso V died from the plague. This marked an end of an era for the Jews and their good relations with the Crown. Abravanel began to worry for his people, and rightly so.

Abravanel's First Departure (Forced Exile)

João II, Afonso's successor, could not have been any more different than Afonso. His primary concern was the Crown and what benefited the Crown. In fact, he drew his inspiration from neighboring royalty such as Henry VII and Louis XI as well as Ferdinand and Isabella of Castille and Aragon. Having been left with a country stripped of its wealth, João investigated where some of the wealth might have gone. He found that the Braganzas, whom he already sought revenge on (for dealing poorly with his grandfather and mother), possessed one third of the land of Portugal as well as many castles and towns. João's first mission was to destroy the Braganzas. This, of course, did not bode well for Abravanel, who was closely associated with the Braganzas. As well, tight restrictions were placed on the Jews.

Perhaps because the duke continued to have influence, Abravanel was not immediately relieved of his duties in the court. He continued to work for João but times were not good for the Jews. They were attacked, ridiculed, and exiled, and Abravanel's

connection with the Court began to weaken. But it was the discovery of the duke's secret correspondence with Ferdinand that cut Abravanel off completely. Once João officially declared the duke a traitor, he went after all the princes of Braganza. Included in the mix was Abravanel. João was after their land and would go to any means to get it, even if it meant conjuring up lies. As mentioned in his introduction to the Prophets, Abravanel was summoned to appear before the king. Unsuspectingly he made his way to the court but on his travels he stopped at Arrayalos. It was there that Abravanel heard news of the duke's arrest and was warned not to proceed any further on his journey, for he would be next. In fact, he was advised to flee the country. Knowing that he did not stand a chance, he decided to flee. He traveled for two days and on May 31, 1483, Abravanel entered Castile, leaving his entire family behind.¹

Abravanel Rebuilds His Home and is Once Again Expelled (this time with all his people)

Abravanel ended up in a town called Segura de la Orden which had a large Jewish community. Because of the history between Portugal and Castille, the king knew it would not be in his best interest to go after Abravanel. In fact, he allowed Abravanel's family to escape Portugal but without any possessions – they were all confiscated. However, the king still held his suspicions that Abravanel was involved in the conspiracy against him. To make matters worse, Abravanel now had no one in the court to protect him. The new guard entered, none of whom had ties with Abravanel. To make matters even worse, Abravanel's nephew got thrown into the mix and in 1485, two years after Abravanel's escape, death sentences were issued against both Abravanel and his nephew.

¹ See Text and translation

It was at this point that Abravanel returned to his spiritual side and his writing. He blamed himself for getting too caught up in the politics and for allowing that side of him to disappear. Urged by his followers, Abravanel began to write again and within four months, he had written four large volumes dealing with the prophets. Because the books of the prophets dealt with man's faults, responsibilities, leadership, etc and with Abravanel having just been immersed in the political life of Portugal, he could not think of a better topic to write about. He aimed to find truth and attacked those whom he believed to be hypocrites – specifically the rationalists such as Maimonides and Ibn Caspi. However, while Abravanel found peace and comfort in his writing and expression, his drive for politics did not disappear – nor would the Crown of Spain allow it to.

In mid March 1484, Abravanel's presence before King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella was requested. In need of money, and having heard of Abravanel's skills in finance, Ferdinand and Isabella enlisted him in their service. For Abravanel, who was a refugee and always devoted to the Crown, he could not see a better option. However, one wonders why and how he would work for a Crown who only fourteen years later would expel all the Jews from their country. Was he aware of their policy towards the Jews?

Netanyahu explains that Ferdinand was the shrewdest of all the Spanish Kings - that he had an unusual regard for public opinion and knew exactly how to exploit it. He was also known as the most ruthless prince of his time.² He did much in secrecy and only revealed what was necessary to the public. And as for his policy towards the Jews,

² Machiavelli held him up as the shrewdest of all princes and as the ideal of his *Prince*.

at this time (1484) he did not stamp himself as anti-Jewish. However it is believed that he conjured up the plan to expel the Jews as early as 1483, when he expelled them from Andalusia. Yet, the Jews still failed to see the forecast of their future expulsion from Spain. They believed that the Church and the king would never collaborate, keeping them safe. Furthermore, Jews held important positions in the community. Surely the royalty's aim was to create a false sense of security for the Jews while at the same time using them for their talents. Abravanel fell into the trap as well, joining his fellow Spanish Jews in the belief that they were protected. He also believed that as his influence strengthened so would the position of the Jews in Spain. And so he accepted the position offered to him by Ferdinand and Isabella.

Once again, Abravanel worked his way up through the ranks. The king and queen would only allow Jews to be involved in the financial aspects of the country and Abravanel quickly began building up his fortune again. As in Portugal, Abravanel found himself working for both the king and the duke. He befriended Íñigo López de Mendoza, the second Duke of the Infantado, who entrusted Abravanel with his finances to the full extent. Abravanel quickly rose as one of the most prominent Jewish leaders in Spain. But once again, he had very little time for his spiritual side. He worked on his writing during borrowed time (the times between jobs) and managed to compose his introduction to the third part of the *Guide*³ while in Spain. Though Abravanel had good years in Spain filled with wealth and political gain, it was becoming more and more evident that the time of the Jews in Spain was limited.

An edict of expulsion of the Jews was signed in secrecy without giving

³ Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed

the Jewish leaders any notice. Abravanel and Abraham Senior (the official head of the Jewish community in Castile), however, still had hope. They would not go down without a fight. They came before King Ferdinand twice, pleading with him to overturn the edict. They spoke eloquently and even offered a large sum of money. On both occasions, Ferdinand promised to think about it and delayed the expulsion. This gave Abravanel and the Jews false hope. When Abravanel and Senior approached the king for the third time, he placed the blame of the decision on Queen Isabella. Not giving up hope, they went before the queen who quickly revealed that they had been fooled by the ruthless king. It was he who spearheaded the expulsion, it was he who sought riches, and it was he who would stop at nothing for financial gain. Abravanel and Senior knew that their fate was now sealed.

The edict to expel the Jews was finally made public on April 29-May 1, 1492. Many panicked as Abravanel, Senior, and Melamed (another prominent Jewish leader) tried to figure out their next move. They had three months to leave and in that time had to figure out where to go. Abravanel knew that many would travel to Portugal but he also knew that he and his family could not follow that path. Once again, he was about to lose all that he had acquired. Once again, he was to be uprooted from his home. Having been a favored courtier of the Crown, Abravanel was permitted certain privileges. In fact the Crown favored him so much that they called to have Abravanel, Senior, and Melamed convert so that they could continue to work for them. Melamed and Senior yielded, having their entire families baptized and therefore being allowed to stay. Abravanel refused. On the contrary he and his family boarded the Valenica and headed to Italy.

Abravanel Rebuilds Once Again

The journey from Spain to Italy was not an easy one for the Jews. The shipmasters were ruthless and many Jews literally starved. City after city rejected entry to the plague-ridden Jews. The burghers of the North only allowed prominent and wealthy Jews to enter – those that would contribute to their wealth. And in the middle of the country, the Church had no interest in a large population of Jews entering their land. Only those who could pay large sums of money were allowed to enter. It was Ferrante, the king of Naples, who almost with open arms allowed the Jews to enter his country. He had no problem with the Jews entering his land. All that mattered to him was that those who lived under his rule were loyal to the Crown.

Abravanel and his family settled in Naples as Abravanel quickly rose to power once again. He became Ferrante's most treasured and trusted courtier. He again built up his wealth and became the leader of the Jews in Naples. However, Abravanel knew that he had to always be on guard. Not only did Ferrante and his son have reputations of being ruthless leaders but the residents of Naples began to clamor against the plague-ridden Jews. Ferrante, however, stood strong and even offered medical help to all those with the plague. Abravanel was building up quite a reputation for himself in the meantime.

Between the literary activity that took place in Naples and his new found time to write, Abravanel found comfort and joy in Naples. Almost therapeutically, he began to write about his experiences and the experiences of the Jews through the lens of their sacred texts. He completed his commentary on the two books of Kings, incorporating his own experience with royalty and exile. As well he wrote *Eternal Justice*, a book that

dealt with God's justice in the world. And in the spirit of disbelief, which many of the displaced Jews experienced, he completed a book titled *Principles of Faith*, incorporating Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith.

Though the Jews were allowed to settle in Naples, it was by no means a safe haven for them, for the kings of Naples had problems of their own. The French had been eyeing the city for years and were only waiting for permission from Ferdinand (with whom they had a cordial relationship) to invade. Once Ferrante died, the French began to invade – only three years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Abravanel, having re-built his home and finances twice now, hoped that he would not have to do it again. Alfonso, the new king not only faced invasion but rebellion by his own people as well. He decided to leave the country secretly, telling only his mother-in-law and Abravanel. Having been treated kindly by Alfonso and Ferrante, Abravanel felt indebted to them and on January 21, 1495, Abravanel accompanied Alfonso to Sicily.

Back in Naples, the Jews faced harsh pogroms, their entire community almost destroyed. Once again, Abravanel's home and riches were destroyed. Many Jews fled but having heard of a plan to oust the French from Italy, Abravanel urged his family to remain in Naples a bit longer. Alfonso in the meantime was considered a king in exile as his son, Ferrante II was fighting a war back in Naples and forced The French out of his land. Victory was not theirs yet and the war continued. Ferrante had no intention of handing the throne back to his father once the war was over and Alfonso, already in despair entered a monastery in Palermo. Abravanel, obviously not being able to follow Alfonso's path, was now left to his own devices. He decided to leave Italy and head for Turkey.

Abravanel: An Unsettled Settler

Don Isaac Abravanel spent most of his life moving from city to city in search of safety and calm. Though in his last fifteen years, he continued to move around, he was able to find some of the stability and quiet that he spent his entire life searching for.

On his way to Turkey, Abravanel stopped in Corfu, a waiting room for many Jews traveling to Turkey. Many however settled there and received much more freedom than under any other rule. It was in Corfu that Abravanel met many of his fellow leaders of the Jewish communities. He met scholars, physicians, philosophers, and those who worked under kings. He was overjoyed to be in the company of such notables but at the same time disheartened to see that life wore down on them. These once intellectual giants were now broken pots of clay, according to Abravanel. He noticed that they possessed all the qualities of displaced people – straying away from spiritual attainment, only looking for enjoyment and wanting to forget the past. Abravanel was heartbroken, and perhaps this is what drove him to continue his writing in Corfu. He even found an old manuscript of his that was lost in Portugal and he began working on his commentary to Isaiah. The situation in Naples was changing which resulted in Abravanel's family staying put. So now, rather than traveling to Turkey as planned, Abravanel headed to Monopoli where he could be closer to his family.

Abravanel arrived in Monopoli around November/December of 1495. It belonged to Naples but was ruled neither by the Neapolitans or the French. Rather it was under Venetian rule. For this reason, Monopoli was a relatively safe place for Abravanel to be. For the first time Abravanel was free of politics, which usually took him away from his writing. All he was left with in Monopoli were his thoughts. As a result,

Abravanel went through several stages of thought. At first he was in a state of despair, wondering why all this suffering was necessary for him and his people. He then put it into a historical context writing *The Days of the World* in which he expressed his reverence for the endurance of the Jews. Shortly thereafter, he questioned how long the Jews could take this suffering and focused on the theme of redemption, writing *The Passover Sacrifice*. Abravanel raised many questions in Monopoli. How much longer can we endure this suffering? Is there reason for it? Is it worthwhile? When will it end? His mind began to be filled with visions of suffering and horror, placing his own life and struggles on the back burner. It is in Monopoli that Abravanel might have had a mild mental break down or mid life crisis.

On July 21 of the same year, the war in Italy ended with a victory for Ferrante II and his allies. Ferrante assumed power once again; however, Abravanel was too engrossed in his works to come back just yet. He was now working on a messianic trilogy which many termed as the most inspiring and significant of his works. The trilogy consisted of *The Wells of Salvation* (where he prophesied redemption in the year 1503),

The Salvations of His Anointed, and *The Announcer of Salvation*.

Abravanel spent seven and a half years in Monopoli. Because it was a peaceful island, Abravanel was able to witness the political warfare closely but in no danger to himself. Monopoli served as a haven for his creativity. He finished his commentaries on Isaiah and the Minor Prophets. As well, he wrote a great philosophic work titled *Deeds of God* in which he expressed his admiration for Plato. Meanwhile Spain and Italy now went into war over Naples, and although Abravanel received a royal invitation to return

to Naples, he declined. In fact, the next move on his journey was Venice where Abravanel's son practiced medicine and invited his father to join him. For the first time in his life, Abravanel left a place on his own terms and without disappointment.

Venice was the last stop on Abravanel's long and difficult journey. Fortunately for him, it was a safe refuge and he was able to become involved in politics and finance once again. In the midst of a Venetian/Portuguese economic conflict, Abravanel submitted to the *Consiglio dei Dieci* (the Venetian Council of ten) a plan of regulation that would benefit both sides. Though the plan was not accepted by Portugal, the Council looked favorably upon Abravanel and enabled him to be an admired figure until his death.

The Venetian/Portuguese negotiations was Abravanel's last political act. He wanted to devote the rest of his life to his writing. It was in Venice that Abravanel entered his third literary period. He completed his commentaries on the entire Bible except for the Hagiographa. Three of his works, *The Inheritance*, *Passover Sacrifice*, and *The Principle* were all published in Constantinople. And believed to be his final work at age seventy, Abravanel wrote *Letters to Saul*, in which he answered the questions posed by the philosopher/author Saul ha-Kohen Ashkenazi.

Abravanel died at age seventy one in November, 1508. He was honored by both the leaders of the Republic and the leaders of his people. His death and the events that went along with it demonstrated Abravanel's influence as a political and spiritual leader, known on both the national and international level.

Abravanel as a Commentator and Philosopher

World Outlook

Revelation

Etienne Gilson, historian of medieval philosophy, divided medieval thinkers into three categories that he termed "spiritual families." The first consisted of those who believed that the only function of reason was to help us understand what Revelation teaches us. The second consisted of those who subscribed to the primacy of reason over faith. And the third consisted of those whose aim it was to bring harmony between Reason and Revelation. Furthermore, each group had its Jewish counterpart.

Abravanel falls into the first category. He aimed to re-establish Revelation while repudiating the supremacy of Reason. Albo, a prominent thinker of the time, reduced Maimonides' Articles of Faith from thirteen to three, hence following in the spirit of the Renaissance which aimed to establish the primacy of Reason. Abravanel, on the other hand, looked to Saadia Gaon as his teacher. Both Saadia and Abravanel believed in the principle of the primacy of Faith. They, and others such as Maimonides, believed so strongly in the primacy of faith that they believed that those who do not have faith and deny the existence of God should be punished. Abravanel expressed that a crime involving faith is worse than a crime involving action and should be punished accordingly. When challenged by those who claim that the commandments have nothing to do with faith, Abravanel states that the commandments are not only driven by faith but are ordered by revelation.

Abravanel's position on revelation can be summed up in the following sentence (which he wrote): "There is no other wisdom which is more comprehensive and more

ancient than that embodied in our law." He believed that what man learned through his senses and experience was partial truth or knowledge but that only through revelation can man receive the whole truth. He followed in the footsteps of HaLevi who stated that the roots and principles of all sciences were handed down from the Hebrews to the rest of the peoples. As far as the Scripture was concerned, many philosophers at the time believed that the Torah was an archeological site meant to be interpreted and investigated. Many believed that it could not be taken literally and that its words were symbols and allusions. Abravanel found himself embracing two theories. As a philosopher he believed in allegorical interpretation but as a believer he took the literal meaning very seriously. He believed that one should at first read the words of the Torah literally but that through Revelation (and what some may call interpretation) higher truths and deeper meanings were revealed. We can find Abravanel's philosophy on revelation and the Bible in his commentaries on the Bible where he sees the Bible as one cohesive unit based on revelation.

Creation

There are three basic theories when it comes to Creation – creation out of God, creation out of matter, and creation out of nothing. Abravanel's theory falls into the third category, namely that God and nature are not separate but that God's will controls nature. Therefore, natural law does not exist and therefore miracles are not caused by nature but by God. In arguing his point against other philosophers, Abravanel points out that the nature of water is to flow downward but when willed by God, it stood up like a wall. And since nature is willed by God, there is no such thing as an impossible miracle.

Because Abravanel believes that the Bible is the word of God and that it represents truth, he views the miracles in the Bible as God's will and not natural processes. Furthermore, Abravanel believes that in order to truly believe in revelation, one must believe in creation out of nothing – "only when we accept the belief in creation out of nothing can we recognize the existence of a creating God. For Abravanel, his theory on creation (that of creation out of nothing) is the cornerstone of all divine law and of his entire world concept. By coming to the conclusion, in his theory on creation, that the entire existence of matter is God's will, he is able support his other theories with more ease.

The Universe

For Abravanel, the universe is marked by duality, namely the world of the spirit and the world of matter. The spiritual world contained separate intelligences that some might term as the angels of the Bible. But while some aimed to place a number on the amount of intelligences or spheres, Abravanel knew that they could not possibly be counted but that the number ten was appropriate since it could be tens of thousands or tens of millions. Abravanel looked to the Bible for support. There he finds that in the Book of Job it is asked, "Can His hosts be counted?" Or in Daniel we find, "Thousand thousands ministered unto Him and myriad myriads stood before Him." Specifically, Abravanel believed that there are three classes of spiritual beings that influence the affairs of mankind. The first class deals with separate intelligences that dominate all of the heavenly bodies. The second consists of the Angels of Service or Mercy who provide salvation for all those who fear God. The third are called the Angels of Destruction or Death and punish God's creatures for their sins. Some may call them evil spirits or evils.

Maimonides believed that no intelligent person could possibly believe in evil spirits. However, those such as Crescas and Albo believed in this "absurdity" (as Maimonides termed it). For Abravanel, the Angels of Death are just as necessary as the Angels of Mercy and both are instruments of God.

Man, Life After Death, and Resurrection

As mentioned earlier, Abravanel's view of the universe is that there are two worlds: the world of the spirit and the world of matter. In his opinion man stands between those two worlds, connecting them and living in both. Man is the only being that is both matter and spirit. Abravanel believed that the angels were not free spirits but rather messengers of God. Man, on the other hand, has freedom of choice which the angels do not. In this way, Abravanel believed that man's nature is higher than that of the angels because man's soul is a combination of an animal soul and an angelic soul – again, man lives between the spiritual world and the world of matter. However, Abravanel believed that man should not concentrate too much on the matter (on the material things) because man has to prepare for the afterworld, the world without matter. In order to do so, man's purpose should be to cleave to God by concentrating fully on God's essence, being obedient to God's command and preparing for life after life. Abravanel reminds us that this is what man should do but man was given free will and therefore it is his choice whether or not to cleave to God or material things.

Abravanel takes us further into the subject of man and compares the souls of the just and the wicked. Those who are just will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven and those who are wicked will experience eternal suffering which can only be reversed by

repentance. It is clear that Abravanel believed in the transmigration of souls which he claimed was in the footsteps of Plato and Pythagoras. However, most of his inspiration came from the cabalists who dealt greatly with the transmigration of souls.

Though Abravanel believed that a soul could repent, he also believed that on judgement day, those souls that didn't would resurrect to receive their punishment. In his eyes, resurrection balanced the scale of justice in the world. The ultimate verdict for man's soul may be eternal bliss or eternal damnation.

Astrology, Prophecy, and Dreams

In relation to his theory on the universe (that of a hierarchic system operating according to a discernible pattern), astrology was simply a way of distinguishing the threads of this pattern. Abravanel, therefore, believed that man's fortune could be determined by astrology and the position of the heavenly bodies. The constellations do not affect freedom of choice but by their alignment, for instance during one's birth, astrologers could foretell whether that man would be just or wicked, rich or poor, live a long life or die too soon. Furthermore, Abravanel believed that if man has faith in God, he can be saved from the harm decreed by the constellations. Though Abravanel believed in astrology and Providence, he also believed that the way in which God communicated with Israel was through Prophecy.

While the predictions of astrologers were often inadequate, Abravanel reminds us that the predictions of the prophets were always precise and true. Prophecy is more than foretelling the future; it is about revelation – revealing to man his own nature and destiny. And while Abravanel agrees that God communicated with the prophets through dreams,

visions, and the Active Intellect, he also believed that God spoke to the prophet's mind and ears which to him was the highest form of prophecy.

View of History

In Abravanel's view, God directs the world with a certain plan in tact – a plan that embraces all of history. As a result, it is impossible for us to comprehend one period of time in history without knowing the planned course from beginning to end – Abravanel claiming that there is an end (limited amount of time that the world will exist) which contradicts Maimonides theory that the world will never cease to exist. Because the universe is finite in space, history must be finite in time. To know history, according to Abravanel, is to know the past and the future, to know the entire process of the plan. He expressed this in his works, looking at his life from the perspective of the history of the Jewish people. Abravanel assumed that the entire course of history was not only planned by God but foreseen by God as well. In other words, and deviation from the righteous path by man was foreseen. The problem with this assumption is that it contradicts with his theory of free will. How can one possess free will when the entire course of history has already been planned?

Returning to Abravanel's theory concerning the end of the world, it is important to note that he did not stand alone on the subject. Others such as Augustine, Irenaeus, and Saadia also envisioned the world coming to an end. While Abravanel took their thoughts into account, he mostly looked to the prophets to support his theory. He found the idea of the destruction of the world in Psalm 102 that reads:

Thou whose years endure throughout all generations,

Of old Thou didst lay the foundations of the earth;

And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.

They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure;

Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment;

As avesture shalt Thou change them and they shall pass away.

For Abravanel, this psalm served the purpose of supporting his theory but he wanted more. Not only did he believe that the world would come to an end, but that it would do so at a specified time. This time according to Irenaeus and Abravanel, who agrees, is the seventh millennium, since God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Furthermore, Abravanel followed the cabalists in the belief that only the material world would be destroyed. The sublunary world would be destroyed in the forty nine thousandth year (seven sabbatical millennia). And finally, Abravanel believed that this cycle would continue endlessly – each time that the sublunary and celestial worlds are destroyed, God would create again.

Abravanel viewed history as circular, beginning and ending with God while others including Maimonides saw history as a straight line. Although the circular theory may seem more optimistic, it is not. Abravanel's pessimistic view of history placed man on a downward spiraling staircase – never able to climb back up. He felt that man was on a continual decline. His historical view was not on par with other theories of the Renaissance which were based on man rather than God. Abravanel's historical creed was based on God – not man.

Messianism

The Middle Ages was a period filled with wars. Abravanel wrote that most of these wars between then nations were due to religious differences and the most chronic cause of these wars (especially between the Jews and the Christians) was the issue of Messianism. For the Christians, Messianism centered on Jesus and was a theoretical doctrine. For Jews, Messianism served as a source of moral stamina, giving them hope that one day they could rise above the nations that oppressed them. But the Christians used the subject of Messianism to convince Jews and everyone else that there are inconsistencies in Jewish theories. Their main objective was to persuade many Jews to convert to Christianity and they succeeded to do so. Coupled with the political and physical aggression towards the Jews, many in the Jewish communities began to doubt that the Messiah would ever come.

Abravanel lived amongst these people and witnessed their spirits breaking. He watched as they began to call out to Jesus as they termed our Messiah dead, losing all hope. It was then that Abravanel saw it as his duty to restore Jewish faith in salvation and to provide meaning and purpose to the historic course of the Jewish people. He began by sending out a message to the skeptical Jews and the Marranos – the prophetic warning of Ezekiel:

And that which comes into your minds shall not be at all...

That you say...we will be as the heathen...

As I live, said God...

With a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm,

And with the fury poured out

Will I be King over you⁴

In using these verses, Abravanel spoke to all those who planned to stray from God. He warned them that intermarriage, conversion, or racial fusion would not save them. God would separate them from the nations and keep them distinct. In a time where Christians attempted to convince Jews of their dreadful fate if they were to remain Jewish, Abravanel stood up for Jewish belief and warned the same audience that there was no escape. He warned that those who betray our religion will be singled out for punishment and persecution. He also pointed out that in the past, those who aimed to persecute the Jews singled out the converts first. Abravanel's argument was forceful and in many ways effective. Now that he had their attention, Abravanel knew that he would have to present a strong case for Jewish messianism.

Abravanel's Case for Messianism

Abravanel had to prove that the prophecies of redemption were never fulfilled but he faced two obstacles. First, he faced the Christians who believed that the prophecies concerning the Messiah referred to Jesus and that the prophecies of consolation referred to the Second Commonwealth period. Secondly, he faced a Jewish position that was weak and ambiguous – believing that some of the Messianic prophecies were realized while others were not. As a result, Abravanel aimed to prove that not only were none of the prophecies of redemption fulfilled but that none of them were even related to the Second Commonwealth period. In order to prove this, he knew that he would have to refer to the prophets – he would have to determine the conditions and symptoms of redemption according to the prophets and then compare it to the conditions

⁴ Ezekiel 20:32-33

and symptoms of the Second Commonwealth period. If they did not match, Abravanel would be able to prove that the messianic prophecies referred to a later date. He therefore wrote his second book on messianism titled *The Announcer of Salvation* where he discussed these issues.

As with others who aimed to disprove the Christian notion of the Messiah having already arrived, Abravanel needed to list symptoms and conditions of the Messianic Age in order to make his case. He compiled the largest list ever consisting of twenty two symptoms. After researching the Bible, Abravanel discovered what events must happen in order for redemption to come. These events included a long exile, the return of the Ten Tribes from exile, God's vengeance on nations who persecuted Israel, the acceptance of true faith by those nations that survived God's, the resurrection of the dead, the Providence would return to Israel, and that the King of the House of David would once again rule over Israel, in the spirit of God. Abravanel then showed that all of these things have not happened. However he based most of his research on the period of the Second Commonwealth and aimed to eliminate this period as the subject of the redemption prophecies. In doing so he showed that the period of the Second Commonwealth did not represent redemption but rather the beginning of a long exile. It was a period which God gave to Israel as a chance to repent. But since repentance did not occur, Israel faced a long and arduous exile.

As mentioned earlier, Abravanel faced two opponents in his pursuit to reveal the truth about messianism – skeptical Jews and the Christians. As a result not only did he have to prove that the Second Commonwealth was not the period of redemption, but he also had to show that the period following the Second Commonwealth (the age of

Christianity) was also not a period of redemption. He did so by refuting the biblical passages that the Christians used as a basis for their belief. The most prominent consisted of what Christianity termed the "Fifth Kingdom." Christians used the book of Daniel (just as an example) to indicate the five kingdoms. Christians claimed that the fifth kingdom belonged to them and referred to the establishment of Christendom and the rule of Jesus. Abravanel attacks Christianity using the text to show that Christianity did not destroy all the other nations or establish sole control over mankind. If anything, the majority of the world believed in Mohammed and not Jesus.

Abravanel noted that three events would occur and mark the messianic era: the Resurrection of the dead (as many have said before him), the Redemption of Israel, and Revenge upon our enemies. It is not difficult to understand why Abravanel would include revenge in his equation. He was living in a time of Jewish persecution – a time where many Jews were pessimists. The revenge aspect spoke to those Jews who doubted their faith in God, who needed revenge in order to believe again. Revenge or at least thinking about revenge gave the Jews an answer to all that they have endured – that the enemies will pay for what they did. Revenge served as a road back to justice and truth, a road back to God. As stated by Abravanel, in order for the Fifth Kingdom to arrive, the Fourth Kingdom must be destroyed. He predicted that the downfall of the Fourth Kingdom would be a result of a war (a clash) between Christianity and Islam and that it would begin by the Christians attacking Egypt (the center of Moslem power). In other words, Israel would be redeemed when the other two world religions destroy each other.

Since Abravanel aimed to prove that the Messiah had indeed not arrived yet, he realized that it would be important to provide a date for the Messiah's future arrival. For

this, he followed his mystical predecessors' lead in saying that the prophets had foreseen the future of the world. Though the actual date was not revealed by the prophets, Abravanel (and others before him) knew that it was hidden deep in their words. It was up to him to find the date hidden deep within the text. The text that he turned to in particular was that of Daniel. Within Daniel laid several numerical clues as to the date of redemption. In his book, *Wells of Salvation* (1496) Abravanel interpreted the prophecies in the book of Daniel. According to his investigation of the text, the Messiah was to appear in the year 1503. Though, as we know, this date came and went without the Messiah, Abravanel's prediction played an integral role in the Jewish community of the Middle Ages. Jews now had a date and an answer with which to dispute the Christians and converts. While it provided hope for the Jews, it also placed an even bigger wedge between the Christians and the Jews.

Political Concepts

Abravanel (as mentioned many times in this paper) was highly involved in politics and finance. It is no surprise then that he wrote of his political theories. Much like the position of the Church Fathers, who believed that man did not originally require government and that it was man's corruption that led to government, Abravanel believed that the state (government) was a departure from man's nature. However, he could not deny the fact that Moses handed the people Israel a state constitution. He resolved this problem in his realization that by then (the time of Moses) man had already become a political creature. In this way, he could agree with Aristotle's theory that, although man's original nature (going back to Adam and Eve) was not a political one, man's

acquired (secondary) nature was indeed a political one. After having established this fact, Abravanel faced the issue of whether or not all men are created equal. Two popular theories during his time were that again of the Church Fathers and Aristotle. The latter believed that by nature, men are created unequal – there are meant to be masters and servants. The Church Fathers, on the other hand, believed that all are equal before God and that slavery was a product of sin just as government was. Once again, Abravanel accepted both theories and incorporated them into his own. He believed that all men were equal before God but that men are divided into inferior and superior groups. However, slavery in his eyes was a crime comparable to murder and should be punished accordingly. He used the priests as an example of a superior group – they did not have the right to enslave others and were vulnerable to the same threats as the rest of Israel but they were seen as a superior group.

Law and the Ideal Constitution

The leading theory during the Middle Ages concerning law followed the theory of Roman Law which divided law into three categories: natural law, law of nations, and civil law. Natural law consisted of law that came naturally to man – law that was instilled into man's heart. The law of nations was law that concerned all nations but not necessarily in man's nature. And civil law, as apparent in its name, referred to the laws unique to each nation. The Church Fathers re-divided these categories into two: divine law and human law. This theory was also agreed upon by Maimonides who said that human law involved laws required by man's material and political needs while divine law

was the law written by God on the tablets. In this case, Abravanel adopted Maimonides view on law.

Based on his theory that law consisted of human and divine government and on passages from the Torah (in particular Deuteronomy), Abravanel offered a method for these types of governments. The human government consisted of three institutions: the lower Court, the Higher Court, and the King. The divine government also consisted of three parts: the Levites, the Priests, and the Prophets. Each rung had laws pertaining to that group and their functions. As vital as his theory may have been, it was not a theory that could fit in with the time that Abravanel lived in for at that time politics ruled over Church – human government ruled over divine government. Returning to his theory on the human government, Abravanel went into detail regarding the number of officers and how they were appointed. The lower court, according to Deuteronomy, should consist of both Judges and officers – three members to handle property, robberies, and bodily injuries and twenty three members to handle the death penalty. In Abravanel's opinion (using the text in Deuteronomy to support his case) the judges should be appointed by the people and not the king. As far as the Higher Court was concerned, Abravanel saw the seventy one members as being identical to that of the Seventy Elders who served with Moses to bear the burden of their people. This group according to Abravanel should consist of the wisest and most learned men in every art and science. He also did not agree that the King had total power. Controversially, Abravanel believed that there was nothing that the King could do that the seventy could not. In addition, Abravanel favored a mixed government consisting of democrats and aristocrats – praetors, senators, and consuls. Because of his involvement in politics throughout his entire life, it is no surprise

that Abravanel's theories evolved over time. He was influenced by many theories and aimed to ultimately infuse them all into his own unique theory, on politics. His theory was indeed a mixed government but is built on the principle of allowing each region to be free and independent. Netanyahu summarizes Abravanel's final conception of the ideal constitution as follows:

- 1) Lower Courts of three and twenty-three members handling individual legal cases in every city and town. These courts are elected by the people.
- 2) Four Councils, numbering from a thousand to ten members, dealing with judicial, political and military matters which concern every tribe or regional unit. These, too, are elected by the people.
- 3) The Synhedrion, or the Highest Court, whose members have the highest authority in all judicial, political, and military matters affecting the entire nation. They represent the aristocracy and are not elected by the people.

Analysis

I have translated the beginning of the introduction to the entire corpus of Isaac Abravanel's *Neviim Rishonim*. The purpose of the commentary is to make available an understanding of the *Neviim Rishonim*, and, judging from Abravanel's other commentaries, the entire Bible – an understanding which was consistent with the world in which he lived. As a matter of fact there is quite a bit of biographical information in Abravanel's commentary of *Neviim Rishonim* because one of the most important pieces of biographical information comes at the end of his commentary to the Second book of Kings which shows how potent and relevant he wanted this to be. His commentary and certainly the introduction to the commentary reveals how steeped in every way Abravanel was in the Renaissance around him.

To begin with, Hebraically he uses a very flowery style to begin his introduction. It brings to mind the subsequent *Melitza* style that was used in the early Jewish enlightenment in Western Europe but it is also related to the flowery style in non-Jewish writings that one finds both in Latin and with regard to the vernacular literatures which also flourished in this way. As a matter a fact, one sees this flowery style in the writings of *Usque* and although I cannot read Portuguese, it is very clear from Martin A. Cohen's translation into English that the original was written in a form that was connectible to what was going on in the Renaissance. So in this way in the introduction, Abravanel is a Renaissance man as he of course was in everything that he did in life.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about the introduction lies in the fact that it is in effect an apologium for the validity of the *Tanakh* and the *Neviim Rishonim*, because implicit in what he says is a response to apparently strong criticism of some of

the issues regarding the authenticity and validity of the Neviim Rishonim. It is not surprising that such criticism should have arisen because on the one hand such criticism was always present within Jewish circles going all the way back to the Geonic period where the renowned Hiwi al Balki questioned the authenticity of the Torah and so on down the ages. However the questioning of the validity of the inherited Biblical tradition during the Renaissance was not limited to Jews. Everything was being questioned during the Renaissance as humanist thinkers, particularly though not exclusively in Italy, began to raise questions about their respective inherited traditions. On the one hand, they went back to a study of the classics, Greek and Latin. On the other hand, perhaps because of this study, they developed a deep, rationalistic, and early scientific view of such things that they questioned everything. One of the most renowned of such questionings is the question correctly raised by the humanist Lorenzo Valla regarding the authenticity of the text called The Donation of Constantine, which was supposed to be the basis for which the Roman church was established as the official church within Catholicism. Lorenzo Valla showed that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery – indeed a forgery made centuries later to justify the position of the church. There were many other examples of such forgeries and the exposure of such forgeries and the exposure of other inconsistencies. As a matter of fact one can even say that such exposure was implicit in the efforts of the great Christian thinker of the sixteenth century, Desidareus Erasmus of Rotterdam who wished to cleanse the church from within from what he regarded to be its unfortunate and even quasi superstitious accretions during the ages. He wanted to go back to a more primitive and beneficent appreciation of the church. Erasmus was almost nominated for a Cardinals hat by one of the Popes but a few decades later he was

regarded almost as a heretic. His followers were indeed regarded as heretics and many of them became the precursors of various Protestant movements. Luther himself who was a conservative nevertheless also had in common with all of these people a desire to get to the root of things.

So that when you get to Isaac Abravanel, you see that Isaac Abravanel is facing a Renaissance spirit of deep enquiry. He is obviously facing Jews of humanistic bent who are raising questions, and he is aware of similar questions being raised about our sacred Scriptures which he shared with Christians who were raising the same questions about the same scripture. And although Abravanel is writing in Hebrew he is part of a general community in which he is constantly hobnobbing with people of different faiths and obviously at the royal court. He therefore he writes what in effect is a defense of Jewish tradition. As a result, one can understand that the questions that he raises are part of this context and they are not merely academic questions. Abravanel was not known to be just an armchair thinker – he was involved in numerous things. So we raise the question as to what precisely are the objections that he is dealing with. These are some of the questions that are found in the section that I have translated:

Questions Concerning Abravanel's Life and the Life of the Jews (Taken Directly from his work)

Why has God treated me like this?

Why has He dealt with me so uncharacteristically?

Did I not cry out with heaviness of spirit that God should so harden His spirit by thrusting me into the hands of a hard-hearted master?

Did I ever step out my door with an evil intent that God should snap from my tent the sources of my generational security pulling them from me like a shepherd's tent?

Did I ever inappropriately derive lies or deceit from the books I studied, the books of faith and law which I prize more than gold and the finest gems, that God should take these books and leave me without learning?

Whom have I oppressed and whom have I ever robbed or ever coveted that I should be threatened with my life?

Questions Abravanel Asked of Himself

Did you think you were special in forgetting God who created you and have you not forgotten the teaching of your God?

How is it that you are perishing but You survive?

Is it not that all these evils befell me because I did not have God with me?

Questions Concerning the Text

Abravanel found it important to understand why the books of Torah, Prophets, and Writings were named accordingly and how their divisions were decided upon. Were these books named according their content, their writers, or the manner of their delivery? Abravanel raises questions pertaining to all three possibilities.

Furthermore, he questioned the ranking of each of the books and whether or not one was more important than the other. Also included in my translation is the question of the organization of the books of the Bible. Why were they ordered in this way? Were they always in this order or did it change over time? Abravanel added his own organization of the books, namely those writings before Israel entered the Holy Land,

those books written while they were in the Land of Israel, and those written after the Exile. Abravanel continues to investigate and question the purpose of each of these books. He notes that the purpose of the books is to teach us the benefits and lessons for the appreciation of their true conception and the understanding of the finest values and traits found in their stories. In short, their ultimate purpose is to teach us how to live. Furthermore, Abravanel points out that it is important for us to know the histories of past generations. These books allow us to have a better understanding of the history of the world. For Abravanel, the books of the Bible begin with the origin and development of Israel's heritage and glory when they entered the Land as told in the book of Joshua, and until the time of their loss and destruction and exile from the land as mentioned at the end of the Book of Kings.

Abravanel lived in one of the most crucial periods in Jewish history, a period many remember for the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Abravanel (knowingly or unknowingly) was influenced by our Scripture in many ways. Firstly, by studying the politics and drama of the Bible (especially that of the Prophets and Kings) in addition to all the other subjects that he studies, Abravanel developed a keen sense for politics. He was a mastermind when it came to working with kings and rulers. He had an understanding for trade. He was a problem solver and knew how to find a solution that benefited both sides (even if his solutions were not always used). Secondly, by studying the history of his people, Abravanel could have a better understanding of where the Jewish people of his time stood in history. He was able to see his position from the outside looking in and though life was not easy for him, he seemed to always know the next step that he and his people would take (good or bad). The Jewish people of his time

looked to his commentaries not only for a different perspective of the text but, in many ways, to help them survive their most difficult state.

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