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ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S COMMENTARY TO SONG OF SONGS
A LITERARY ANALYSIS

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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When I first entered the Hebrew Union College six years ago, I could not have predicted the direction that my life was about to take. I only knew that I wanted to be a Rabbi, and that meant learning all that I possibly could about Judaism, Jewish texts, and Jewish traditions. The past six years have shaped me in ways I had never thought imaginable. I have made friends who will forever be a part of my life. I have learned so much from my teachers. I have been exposed to the wealth of the Jewish tradition. But, most importantly, I have learned to translate all that I have learned into a way of life.

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CHAPTER I.

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S WORLD AND WORLDVIEW

The life of Abraham Ibn Ezra reflects the dissolution of Jewish symbiosis with Islamic civilization in the Iberian Peninsula, and the growing dissemination of its broad cultural world view into Europe, north of the Pyrenees. Born in Toledo in 1092, he travelled through France, England and Italy. His wanderings were not produced by political persecution, but by an internal restlessness which rendered him unable to remain in a single place for any length of time. This geographical diversity also reflects a diversity of intellectual trends. In every place where Ibn Ezra lived and wrote his commentaries, he encountered different approaches to understanding Scripture. His temperament would lead him to strong disagreement with some of them, and to an adaptation of other approaches for his own use. This synthetic process is most clearly reflected in Abraham Ibn Ezra's introduction to the commentary on the Five Books of Moses. [1]

The introduction to the Torah commentary begins with a prayer for Divine assistance in completing his task of interpreting the Torah. He establishes that his goal is to ascertain the truth. He suggests a metaphor for the truth as a point within the center of the circle. Each method is visualized as central or peripheral to the point and the circle. The First Method is that of the uncircumcised scholars, that is, the Christians, for they understand the Torah as riddles and parables. The laws and commandments presented in the Bible are understood by them as having only symbolic meaning. Ibn Ezra criticizes their method, for he claims that they add or diminish the meaning according to their own thinking. The

only way to understand these commandments is as they are written in the Torah, if this is in agreement with reason. If reason does not support the literal meaning, a deeper meaning must be sought. There are some commandments which could not have been intended to be understood on a literal level. These can only be reinterpreted by recourse to rules of language. In addition, some narrative sections seem also to be intended on a symbolic level, such as the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. Ibn Ezra accepts that the Biblical text can be understood on both the literal level and the symbolic level. This only proves the glory inherent in God's words. However, it is not appropriate for the Christian scholars to reinterpret the text, for they do not recognize the importance of beginning on the literal level of the text. They assume that the literal level should be reinterpreted. Thus, Ibn Ezra concludes that their method is beyond the boundary of the "circle" of truth.

It is thought that this recension of the Introduction was written in France, in 1156. [2] At that time, disputations between Christian and Jewish scholars were quite frequent, and this repudiation of their method of Bible interpretation may reflect that historical fact. [3] After leaving Spain in 1140, he spent a great deal of time developing a system of grammatical terminology, and translating the works of well-known Jewish grammarians who had written in Arabic. [4] His desires were to develop systematic, consistent usage in grammatical works, in order to facilitate the purification of the Hebrew style in Christian countries, and to create a

foundation for Biblical exegesis. If exegesis were based on the studies of grammarians, it would be more likely that the exegete would arrive at conclusions that were justifiable. This emphasis on grammar facilitated the development of the "true" Biblical exegesis. It is in this context that his critique against the Christian scholars can be better understood. We do know that Ibn Ezra lived in several cities in Southern France, Beziers, Narbonne, Rodez and in Rouen in Normandy, between the years 1155 and 1166. While there, he had contact with the Tosafists, particularly R. Jacob Ben Meir, Rabbenu Tam, Rashi's grandson. [5] Ibn Ezra had many opportunities to develop his exegetical method while living among the Christians.

Ibn Ezra next criticizes the method of the Karaites, for their disregard of the Oral Law. He mentions two Karaite scholars, Anan and Benjamin, for their misinterpretation of the Bible. Ibn Ezra rejects their insights, because they rejected the Oral Law. Because their interpretation is based only on the Written Law, they come to faulty conclusions. He continues by showing the indispensibility of the Oral Law for the comprehension of the commandments. The Torah alone does not provide enough information for the full understanding of one's religious responsibility. For example, the Torah does not give the details of the labors prohibited on the Sabbath; nor does it include enough information about the observance of holidays, or the maintenance of the calendar, all of which rely on the supplementation given in the Oral Law. Ibn Ezra claims that even Moses had knowledge of

the Oral Law, having received it from God. In addition, the Karaites' ignorance of grammar often leads them to remove a word from its proper context or to misconstrue a verbal form. Thus, the Karaites are considered incapable of presenting a total, valid exegesis of the text, because they deny the presence and importance of the Oral Law. Ibn Ezra claims that they are at times around, at times within, and at times beyond the circle of truth.

Ibn Ezra was not the only one who participated in this attack on the Karaites. [6] The opponents of Karaism focused on the Karaitic denial of the Oral Law as binding, for the Karaites believed it to be of human, not Divine, origin. This denigration of all rabbinic works, including midrashic collections, caused a vicious cycle of polemic literature between both camps. Ibn Ezra's knowledge of their works and beliefs may have its origin in two different sources. First, although the Karaite movement developed in the Far East, in Egypt, Iran and Iraq, there are several reports of a high concentration of Karaites in Toledo, Spain. Karaism was brought to Spain by a Jewish convert to Karaism, after a trip to Palestine. After his return to Spain, the works, doctrines, beliefs, and exegeses developed by the Karaite community received wide circulation among the Spanish-Jewish community. [7] Ibn Ezra's familiarity with their words, their practices, and their doctrines, indicate the wide-spread nature of their sect, and this familiarity is found in the works of his contemporaries. [8] Karaism must have achieved, by Ibn Ezra's time, enough size and significance to create concern in the

thinkers of the day. The challenge presented by the Karaites must have been very great. This challenge was also felt by Saadiah. Early in his life, he wrote a polemical work against Anan, and many of his other words show a familiarity with the works of Banjamin Nahawendi, and other Karaites. Saadiah's opinion was certainly known to Ibn Ezra, and was an additional source for him. [9]

Despite the challenge they presented, their literary achievements had to be recognized by the Jewish community. Ibn Ezra mentions two Karaites, Anan and Benjamin, both of whom are considered to be the founders of the Karaite sect. Benjamin Nahawendi, who lived in Persia in the ninth century, wrote Biblical exegesis, for the study of the Bible was considered to be one of the basic principles of Karaism. His commentaries were characterized by their brevity and directness. [10] However, he also utilized this focus on the word as a vehicle for the communication of his philosophical doctrines. [11] Ibn Ezra's disapproval of his method and his opinions may be the reason for Benjamin's inclusion in the Introduction. However, Ibn Ezra may also have been indebted to him for ushering in, and initiating, Biblical exegesis as a form of literature.

Ibn Ezra was probably also aware of the other grammatical-exegetical works by Karaite scholars. However, they "treated problems of Hebrew grammar as mere aids for their Biblical exegesis." [12] Their contribution to the study of grammar can be seen in the works of exegetes like Yephet ben 'Ali, Joseph ben Nuh, and Abu'l Faruj, all of whom advanced the study of

grammar and lexicography in their day. [13] However, by the time of Ibn Ezra's adulthood, their work was second to the accomplishments of the grammarians from the opposing camp of the Rabbanites.

The third method criticized by Ibn Ezra is that of the Geonim. The failing of the Geonim is that they include "alien" scholarship (secular learning) to display their erudition and knowledge, and to interpret the Bible. He gives several examples of this inappropriate utilization of areas of knowledge. They mention different theories of creation; they expound the laws of astronomy in their interpretations of "Let there be light"; they give a full theory of dream interpretation in the exegesis on Jacob's ladder. They use information gleaned from sources other than Torah in their interpretations of the Torah. Although there are mysteries in the Biblical text, Ibn Ezra contends that one should look to the Torah itself to explain these ideas. The Geonim move around the point of truth, and even move around the outermost circle of what is permissible. In their use of the Torah to explain these fields of knowledge, they totally obfuscate the true sense and significance of the Torah text. The Torah should not be seen as a textbook for science or philosophy.

Ibn Ezra's critique can be understood as an attack against Saadiah's method in his commentaries and philosophical works. [14] Saadiah wrote frequent excurses on various texts, which included non-Biblical material. Ibn Ezra felt that the Bible should be interpreted on its own terms.

However, his own interpretations are also filled with excurses on different subjects. One can find treatises on creation, the names of God, the Jewish calendar, the Ten Commandments,on Asmachta, the superiority of Angels to man, the Oral Law, fate, the form and nature of the universe, the knowledge of God and on prayer in his commentaries to Biblical books. [15] There must have been a boundary within which it was permissible to write digressions within a commentary. It may be that he may not have wanted to see the Torah as a textbook of science or philosophy, but he must have felt that these subjects could illuminate problems in the Biblical text. Thus, it makes a difference if one's exegesis of the text is the end, and these areas of investigation are the means of achieving that end, or if one's goal is the understanding of science, and one uses the Bible as the means of achieving that goal. Perhaps Ibn Ezra was expressing this distinction.

However, it is clear, simply by looking at the list of subjects that he addressed in his commentary, that his interest in extra-Biblical subjects was broad. In his digression on the form and nature of the universe, he explains the relationship between God and the creations, and describes the divisions of the world into three worlds: the superior, the middle and the inferior. [16] On the knowledge of God, he explains what one must do in order to approach God and to understand God's essence. Thus, despite his censure of digressions, he himself includes information on metaphysical, astronomical, astrological, theological and grammatical issues.

Ibn Ezra did not limit the presentation of these ideas to

his commentaries. He wrote an entire work, Keli Hanechoshet, about the astrolabe as an instrument for astronomical investigation. His book, Yesod Mora, "The Foundation of the Fear of the Lord," was a religious-philosophical work on the study of the Law and the nature of God's commandments. Iggeret Hashabbat, "The Letter of Shabbat," dealt with the time of the commencement of the Shabbat. His work, The Book of Number, was a work on mathematics and arithmetic processes. His most concentrated efforts ouside the field of Biblical exegesis were in grammar. He wrote many books on the subject in order to develop a correct understanding of Hebrew grammatical terminology and to increase familiarity with Hebrew literary style. All of these writings ebabled him to develop his scientific method of Biblical exegesis. One can see that Ibn Ezra was familiar with all realms of scientific investigation, and that he appropriated them for his own use. However he may have been careful about maintaining the distinction between the sacred texts and the disciplines which led to its more profound understanding. He would not deny the importance of these fields as areas of study; he just put a boundary around them.

In Method Four, Ibn Ezra criticizes the method of the Aggadists, who are both on the dot, and around the dot, of truth. They correctly utilize the method of explaining the plain sense of the words in the Scriptural text, but they also rely a great deal on homiletical devices, which lead them far off the course. He discusses in detail how the Rabbis reconcile contradictions in the text and shows how aggadic material

can be used to interpret the Bible in an appropriate manner. He proposes that if there is a passage which is difficult to understand, based on common sense or reason, of if the passage contradicts the logic found in another text, or if the text contradicts tradition, then the interpreter must have recourse to other methods which will help him to understand the text. These supplementary methods include allegory, or the addition of a letter or word, that is some linguistic device which will enable the reader to comprehend the text. However, if these methods do not adequately solve the problem, then the passage is best left unexplained, for there is then a deeper problem or meaning inherent in the text, and current knowledge will not suffice to unlock it. [17] Ibn Ezra continues by pointing out the problems with the midrashic-homiletical method of interpretation. He is particularly critical of their interpretation of the Creation, in which they posited the creation of five, or seven, or ten things before the creation of the world, which Ibn Ezra believes may be supported by the plain meaning of the Biblical text. Ibn Ezra brings in many examples of their interpretations, which seem to be based primarily on the use of the plain meaning. Since this is the starting point for them, even if they do interpret the Torah according to its "seventy facets," their method is the closest of all of the methods mentioned in this introduction.

Ibn Ezra's commentaries reveal a broad knowledge of midrashic exegesis. He was familiar with the Talmuds, and all available midrashic texts, especially Midrash Canticles, as we will see later on. In referring to these texts, Ibn Ezra

was able to show his own grounding in traditional Jewish exegesis. The works to which he refers were the basic works known to every Jewish scholar; one had to recognize their authority and not totally discount it. Yet, Ibn Ezra may have also been responding to some of his contemporaries who misused, in his opinion, the midrashic legacy. Tobiah ben Eliezer, from Bulgaria, was able to combine rational exegesis, attention to grammar, and midrash within his commentaries to the Torah and the Megillot. However, his major work, Lekach Tov, was criticized by Ibn Ezra for its over-reliance on homiletical interpretations, and for its distance from the ordinary meaning of the Scriptures. [18] Samuel ben Hofni, even though he may have "preached discrimination" in the integration of homiletical interpretation within Biblical exegesis, could not ignore the power and richness inherent within the midrashic literature, [19] and was also sharply censured by Ibn Ezra. [20]

Ibn Ezra's attention to these (and other) exegetes indicate that there was a limit which they clearly had overstepped. He acknowledged their contribution to exegetical activity, but criticized it, just as he criticizes the work of the Rabbis in their midrashic exegesis. He firmly believed that aggadic material could be used, but only if its use was in agreement with the standards of his day. The ultimate criterion for deciding the suitability of a midrashic explanation is its agreement with reason or logic. In Ibn Ezra's system, this means grammatical or lexical support for a conclusion. This would include grammatical or lexical information, based on the Biblical text itself. Once this peshat level is established

as a basis, will the midrashic method be justified.

Ibn Ezra describes his own method of Biblical exegesis in Method Five. He bases his commentary on explanations of the words, their form, their grammar and their plain meaning. He distinguishes between his method of explicating legal passages and non-legal passages. In interpreting those sections which contain legal matter, he will first rely on the explanations given by the Sages, and will only develop his exegesis based on what they have said. When explaining non-legal material, however, he will first mention the grammatical form of every word, and will also present the comments of other exegetes, in order to reach the true meaning of the word. He concludes this section by indicating the presentation of grammatical principles, which follows, so that other scholars may know the foundation of Ibn Ezra's work on the Bible.

Ibn Ezra's method, as he explains it here, is heavily dependent on the explanations of the Rabbis. Ibn Ezra is intent to prove his reliance on their works. Two reasons have been suggested for this; either Ibn Ezra made these concessions to tradition to avoid conflict with the Karaites, or he desired to pacify those who objected to his unconventional exegesis. [21] Ibn Ezra, whatever his reasons, was indicating that his use of grammar as the foundation of his exegesis was only a part of the total method he utilized.

It may be the same reverence for the tradition that pushed him to seek the plain meaning of the Biblical text. One had to understand the Bible, what it meant, and grammar was the best tool available to him to reach that type of understanding

of the text. The work of the Rabbis, which attempted to achieve that same goal, had to be recognized. If we look at this admiration for the Rabbis, alongside the comments Ibn Ezra makes about the Rabbis in Method Four,a clearer image of which method takes precedence may appear. I have no doubt that Ibn Ezra understood the grammatical method to be more clear because it was closer to reason.

This emphasis on grammar was one which was only newly accepted into the forum of Biblical exegesis. Grammar reached the status of a scientific discipline in Spain in the tenth century. The increased study of grammar had two purposes: one, the aesthetic purpose, in which grammarians were concerned with the beauty of the Hebrew language, clarity of speech, the development of rules for its use, and elegance of expression, and two, the religious purpose, in which a particular exegetical interpretation could be supported by a particular grammatical discussion, and in which the treasures of the Arabic-Jewish community were transferred to the northern French community, which was seen as holding the future of Jewish life and learning.

Most grammarians of this age belong in the first category, concerned with the transmission of a pure Hebrew style, and the enrichment of the Hebrew language, which only the expansion of the Hebrew vocabulary and grammatical forms could facilitate. Biblical lexicography reached new heights in the century and a half between Saadiah and Ibn Janach. Both men attempted to create dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew, to present the meanings of the words in any of its different contexts, based predomin-

antly on the evidence gleaned from Hebrew. [22] Solomon Ibn Parchon also presented the findings of his research in philosophy and lexicography in a dictionary. These lexicographical advances were accompanied by advances in the field of grammar. Yehudah Hayyuj, in his grammatical treatises, presented theories of verbal forms, and established the theory of trilateral roots. He did not do this for reasons of establishing the meaning of Biblical texts, although he did include the Bible as his main source. His intent was to present the linguistic rules which could be derived from an empirical study of the Biblical text. Ibn Janach, his student and successor, elaborated these rules, and was able to reinterpret other Hebrew linguistic works in light of Hayyuj's contribution. [23]

These works were slowly accepted into the mainstream of Jewish scholarship. Because both Ibn Janach and Hayyuj wrote in Arabic, their translations into Hebrew facilitated their acceptance in the northern French Jewish communities. These translations were done by Moses Ibn Chiquitilla and Abraham Ibn Ezra. Neither one of them simply translated the works of others who had preceded them. Rather, both were critical of these contributions, and wrote their own grammatical works as well. Ibn Ezra's grammatical works received greater popular acceptance. In them, he attempted to communicate the achievements of the Spanish-Jewish community, and to transmit the importance of correct forms of speech and writing in Hebrew. However, in the introduction to his Foundations of Grammar, he wrote,

> ... he who tries to explain Scripture without penetrating the mysteries of Hebrew grammar gropes along the walls like a blind man and does not know on what he stumbles. [24]

With Ibn Ezra, we get an understanding of the full scope for utilizing grammar in Biblical exegesis. It was not sufficient to explain grammatical principles, or to write lexicographies. These works of grammar were not the ends. They served a higher purpose, establishing the true meaning of the Biblical text. Ultimately, they were tools to be used in decoding the Biblical text. In this sense, Ibn Ezra went beyond the grammarians who preceded him. He created a new science and methodology for Biblical exegesis. He utilized the achievements of all who came before him, but recast their work in a new mold, to conform with what he felt to be the pressing need of the time, that of Bible study and exegesis.

Ibn Ezra's world was multi-faceted, filled with the spirit of intellectual inquiry, and hunger for the truth. Ibn Ezra was familiar with many different fields of investigation, as seen in his piercing comments about them. He recognized that they were legitimate fields of study, but was clear about their application to Bible study and exegesis. He was not one to avoid different means of reaching the truth, but with regard to a sacred text, he insisted on grammar as the primary focus, and on the contributions of the Sages, in establishing the meaning of the Biblical text. These inclinations did not present him from becoming a scholar in different fields, such as astronomy, astrology, poetry, philosophy and theology. Yet, these fields were meaningful only insofar as they enabled

Ibn Ezra to arrive at the true meaning of the Biblical text.

What was the essence of Ibn Ezra's attitude towards exegesis of the Bible? What was his method? First, the Oral and Written Law was the ultimate criterion of any interpretation. Their truth cannot be doubted. The interpretation of the Sages is of utmost importance. However, all interpretation must be based on the plain sense meaning of the text. Grammar became the primary means of reaching this meaning of the text, as it is the method based on reason. If a passage cannot be interpreted according to reason, that is, if that grammatical analysis fails, another method will be applied, and the existence of a deeper meaning will be recognized. Thus, more than one meaning of a text is possible. However, midrashic interpretation can never replace the status of the plain meaning of the text.

The book of Song of Songs stood as a challenge for Ibn Ezra and his emphasis on establishing the plain sense of the text as a basis for deeper meanings. The methods he suggests test the strength of his methods and force him to be creative and flexible. He will explicate the lexical difficulties of the book and will recognize and explain the deeper meaning within it. His method will be totally congruent with his introduction to the Torah commentary. His program of Biblical exegesis is consistently maintained throughout the commentary to Song of Songs. The way in which he does this, as well as the historical background of his commentary to Song of Songs, will be addressed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II.

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S COMMENTARY TO SONG OF SONGS: ITS STRUCTURE, THEMES AND CONTENT

A number of different areas of investigation should be addressed in setting the stage for a complete discussion of Ibn Ezra's allegorical treatment of Song of Songs. First would be an investigation of allegory as a medieval literary technique. This will enable us to understand Ibn Ezra's works in the light of general exegetical activity. Does Ibn Ezra's work fit into a general understanding of allegory as a legitimate mode of literary activity? Second, a survey of how allegory has been used as a specific technique in the interpretation of Song of Songs would allow us to recognize that Ibn Ezra's utilization of this technique is consistent with the Jewish exegetical tradition surrounding Song of Songs. The history of Jewish allegorical exegesis to Song of Songs will be discussed, concluding with Ibn Ezra's own particular contribution to this history.

C. S. Lewis' theory of allegory expressed in The Allegory of Love, is that it represents "the subjectivism of an objective age."[1] Allegory develops in response to social change. In this context, the change was movement towards greater objectivity in literature, and, as a response, the allegory will have a polemical purpose, a desire to look inward, and to understand the inner world. Allegory attempted to incorporate the "world of myth and fancy" into the world of reality. This did not imply a total repudiation of the world-as-is, but only encouraged the addition of the very necessary world-as-it-might-be.[2]

The allegory consisted of dramatis personae, who represented virtues and vices. Although translatable into a literal

narrative, the allegory was only meaningful on its deeper level of meaning. The allegory spoke of ideas which were not permitted to be spoken of, such as life, love, and spiritual adventure.[3] Through using tangible entities, the allegory helped the reader to understand the intangible entities. As Lewis' study indicates, allegory was a literary method, frequently utilized in the Middle Ages in secular literature. It enabled the writer to create a fuller picture of reality, by allowing for a conjunction of the objective, empirical world and the subjective, inner world. The achievements of objective inquiry, such as philosophy and science, could then be brought to bear on the subjective perspective. In this view, allegory had a polemical purpose, in which new information was supplied in a way which did not totally destroy the status of the old information, yet it made a judgment about which path led you to the real truth of the literary piece. If one was alert and aware enough, one would understand the literature on the literal level, but would also be fully cognizant of the higher level of meaning inherent in the book. One could not ignore the literal meaning of the book, but the reader was expected to discover the symbolic character of the book as well.

The allegorical method within the Jewish interpretive tradition also focused on the apparent dichotomy between external and internal meaning. Isaac Heinemann, in his essay, "Scientific Allegorization During the Jewish Middle Ages," presents a different view of allegory's purpose. He recognizes that there is a view of allegory which sees it as serving

the "apolegetic purpose of appearing to bridge the gap between advanced understanding and the holy documents."[4] His understanding of allegorization is that it operated with scientific motivations, rather than polemical ones. Therefore, allegory is not presented in order to amplify the true meaning of a text, nor to deny the literal meaning of the text. Rather, it functions to present the "secret meaning," which could be developed only through recourse to scientific modes of inquiry, i.e. the blending of lexical investigation and allegorical interpretation. The secret meaning was there, but it was not derived with an intent to destroy the literal meaning of the text.[5]

The belief in the literal meaning of the text was an integral part of Jewish religious belief. Heinemann examines the use of allegory in Biblical exegesis. Lewis' study focuses on allegory as it developed in secular literature. These two genres of literature, i.e. the sacred and the secular, operated with different rules, and their production was governed by different standards. Therefore, Lewis' theory of the intent of allegorical literature applies only to the literature he examines, just as Heinemann's theory is applicable specifically to Biblical literature.

The scientific motivations, as Heinemann presents them, work to maintain the literal meaning of Scripture, through a reliance on objective modes of inquiry, such as lexical, grammatical, and philosophical investigations. Yet, these same modes of interpretation will support the deeper meaning when there is something in the text which is unsupportable by reason.

The allegorical, and the surface, meanings will be supported by the same modes of inquiry. There are also religious motivations for allegorization; the dual meaning ascribed to sacred texts was further proof of their Divine nature. In the process of reinterpretation, the text itself became more significant because it conveyed a plurality of meanings. This is particularly true regarding the book of Song of Songs. However, these religious interests also served to restrict the use of allegorization,

> in the interest of preserving the Jewish faith ... [and also] corresponded to the doubtlessly correct insight that the historical and legal sections of the Bible were meant literally. Allegorization was limited precisely to those sections whose content called for a more profound interpretation ... which ... were capable of more than one interpretation.[6]

Heinemann is drawing a distinction between the texts that were understood only on the literal level, and those which encouraged allegorical interpretation. Those which needed allegorical interpretation, were precisely those books whose literal meaning itself contradicted reason, or transcended the boundary of acceptability in some way. Song of Songs, which on a literal level is an erotic love poem or series of love poems, falls into this category. It had to be interpreted in accordance with its identity as a sacred book from the canonized text of the Bible.

Despite the great variation among the allegorical exegeses of Song of Songs, attention to these concerns can be seen. Indeed, all exegetes, whether they were the Rabbis of the Midrash, the author of the Targum, Saadiah, Rashi, or

Abraham Ibn Ezra, were forced to confront the religious reality of the Divine nature of the Biblical text. Each of these allegories establish the narrative framework of their interpretation of the Song of Songs as a love story between God and the people of Israel. This relationship is presented between God, as the Shechinah, and the Congregation of Israel as the corporate body of the people of Israel, as this relationship developed through history. Each of these allegories presents a different view of Jewish salvation history; that is, each one will understand the historical, redemptive events which are descriptive of God's intervention in Jewish history, as also being descriptive of God's evolving relationship with Israel.[7] Yet, each of these allegories has the particular stamp of its compiler, as we shall see later on.

In the three Midrashic collections which constitute Midrash Canticles, compiled by the Rabbis of the third and fourth centuries, there is a combination of varying allegorical modes of exegesis, each of which are accorded equal importance.[8] The historical-allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs addressed the history of the relationship between the Shechinah and the Congregation of Israel, from the time of the Exodus from Egypt onward.[9] The mystical interpretation of this book saw it as a description of the passion of the human soul in its yearning to be closer to God, to enter the Garden of esoteric teachings, and to learn the secret of the Work of the Chariot.[10] Ruminations concerning the End of Days can be seen in the eschatological interpretation of the book. Some interpretations of verses reflect

the recounting of particular historical events in the generation of R. Haninah, the Deputy High Priest, before the destruction of the Temple, and include events from the period immediately after the Temple's Destruction. [11] Presentation of the literal meaning of Song of Songs was not encouraged, as seen in Rabbi Akiba's comments to that effect, in Mishnah Yadayim 3:5. Our concern here is with the historical-allegorical method expounded in the Midrash. The history described within it begins with where the "kisses" were given, i.e., where the revelation took place. The mutual love between God and Israel is seen in God giving the Law to Israel and redeeming them from Egypt, and in Israel's acceptance of the Law, and in their readiness to become martyrs for God's sake. [12] The thrust of the historical allegory is the establishment of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel as the ultimate end of the Exodus from Egypt. The exegesis found in the Midrash focuses on Israel's observance of the commandments, the transmission of the Written and Oral Law, God's punishment of Israel when she does not observe the commandments, and the promise of ultimate redemption, if Israel is worthy of it. The exposition contained in this work, includes many different historical events and personages in its interpretation of Song of Songs. However, they are not presented in chronological order within the Midrash, and one cannot derive a periodization of Jewish history from the text.

The Targum is the next major contribution to allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs, written within the first

millenium. Scholars have assigned its date to the seventh century, although it clearly contains material which is much earlier. Therefore, it also reflects the types of midrashic interpretations found in the different Rabbinic Midrash, such as the Mekhilta, in the Talmuds and in other tannaitic works.[13] It has been divided into five movements.[14] The first is a commentary to 1:2-3:6; it includes the Exodus, the Revelation at Sinai, the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses' ability to intercede for the Jewish people and to atone for them, the merits of the patriarchs, and the construction of the Tabernacle, which will prefigure the glory of the Temple yet to be. The second movement, on 3:7-5:1, discusses Solomon's Temple, its dedication, the role of certain functionaries in the cult, and the protection the cult gives to Israel if she participates in it. The third movement, on 5:2-6:1, focuses on Israel's sin, despite God's desire for her righteousness, and Israel's penitence, which does not forestall the Exile. Israel expresses her lovesickness for God to the prophets. The description of the lover's body is transformed into a praise poem on Torah and the importance of study and of the sages. Israel is shown how to recover God's love through penitence. The fourth movement, 6:2-7:11, includes the rebuilding of the Temple with Cyrus and Ezra; Israel is praised for her devotion and observance of the cult and of scholarship. Israel is given a guarantee of God's eternal care for her. The obedience to Torah becomes the ultimate criterion for God's decision to guard the people. The fifth movement, 7:12-8:14, includes the exile throughout the Roman Empire, and Israel's desire for redemption,

which will come only when God is ready. The Messiah is invited to teach Israel the fear of God and to wait for God before she attempts to return to Jerusalem. The righteous are returned there, to the Land of Israel, newly purified. They receive the acclaim of the gentiles, because of their study of the Torah. Yet, there is recognition of the exiled status of Israel and of the defilement of the Land, and that the Land cannot adequately house God. God should retire to heaven until Israel can be restored to Jerusalem and the service of the cult.

The Targum's historical allegory emphasizes the Written and Oral Torahs as the form and content of the relationship between God and Israel. This emphasis is the basis upon which the history of Israel develops. The observance of the Law will enable Israel to reach the climax of its history, redemption and the Messianic Age. Until that time comes, Israel's history is destined to be one of intense longing for that time; but, this longing does not prevent Israel from sinning. However, Israel is given several methods for effecting atonement, which are derived from the Torah: participation in either the sacrificial cult or in Rabbinic learning. Both of these methods will enable Israel to be responsive to God's demands for her, and to be prepared for that future time of redemption. [15]

Saadiah Gaon (892-942) wrote a commentary to Song of Songs which also retains the allegorical interpretation of the book. He describes it as a lock for which the keys have been lost. Although we do have a copy of this commentary in

a printed edition, it may be that it is only mistakenly attributed to Saadiah, and may be written by another scholar with the same name. [16] In his allegorical interpretation, the book describes the love story between God and Israel, from the Exodus from Egypt through the Coming of the Messiah. His commentary parallels both the theme and the method of the Targum in the creation of the allegory, and in the emphasis on the Oral and Written Law. However, the content of their interpretations are different. For example, Saadiah's comments to 1:4 refer to Israel walking after God after the Ten Commandments are given, while the Targum interprets this verse as referring to Israel being drawn to God and desiring to receive the Commandments. On 3:5, Saadiah refers to Israel's desire to revenge Sihon and Og but needing to wait for the appropriate time, but the Targum explains the verse as a cautionary remark to Israel, that they should not enter the Land until the appropriate time. Saadiah's comments to 5:4 refer to God sending the prophets to reproach the people, and the Targum discusses the calf worship of the Jews while they are in Exile. The verse 7:3 is explicated as a praise of Israel as the center of the world, but the Targum explicates this verse as referring to the Sanhedrin and the beauty of the Law when the Sages would expound it. One can see that the historical framework is retained, but the particular historical events referred to in each may differ from verse to verse.

The chronological nature of this commentary allows a periodization to be developed. As Pope has described Saadiah's commentary,

> ... in 1:2-3:5 is described Israel's servitude in Egypt, the emancipation, the giving of the Law, the battles with Sihon and Og, and God's displeasure at Israel's reaction to the report of the spies. In 3:6-4:7 the erection of the Tabernacle, the wilderness wanderings and the status of Moses and Aaron are described. The entry into Canaan, the building of the Temple, the separation of Israel and Judah, the move of the Shechinah to abide with Judah, and the people's pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the three great festivals are the subjects treated in 4:8-5:1. Verses 5:2-6:3 take the history through the destruction of the Temple, the Babylonian Exile and Return, the Second Temple and renewed covenant with the penitent people. The spiritual welfare of the returnees was seen as treated in 6:4-9. Some were faithful and godly, but others married foreign women and forgot the holy tongue. The ongoing dispersion is the concern of 6:10-7:9 in which the people remain many days without king or priest, but still belong to God. The sufferings of the Messiah son of Joseph and the manifestation of the Messiah son of David and obedient Israel and God's joy with his bride, are the subjects of 7:12-8:4. From 8:5 to the end are described Israel's restoration, the building of the Third Temple, and a grateful people acting in accord with the divine will. [17]

Rashi, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1105) was familiar with the allegorical mode of interpretation as it flourished around Song of Songs, and also wrote a commentary which contains a dual interpretation. In his introduction, he explains his method of interpreting the book and its importance. He sets out to establish the peshat, the plain sense of the book, yet knows that a verse may have multiple layers of meaning apart from the peshat. He understands that the book was written by Solomon, and that with the aid of Divine Inspiration, Solomon was able to foretell the history of Israel. Thus, he knew that both exile and destruction would be a part

of Israel's history. The people would long to be with God, and would pray for the reinstitution of their status as God's people.

> In the shape of the changing relationship between the lovers, representing Israel and her God, he depicted the vicissitudes of the Jewish people, concluding with the certainty of final reconciliation with their Maker. 18

His commentary utilizes a dual interpretation. Both the literal and the figurative stories are given a place in his commentary. At times, he mentions only the figurative meaning for a word. Rashi's use of the allegorical mode of interpretation indicates how widely used and accepted it was.

In light of this survey of the the varying allegorical interpretations of Song of Songs, which had been offered prior to Ibn Ezra's time, it is now possible to turn to Ibn Ezra's allegorical interpretation. This will enable us to analyze how he both built upon and expanded the literary legacy of allegorical interpretation which had been bequeathed to him by these predecessors. Ibn Ezra, in his allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs, presents another version of Jewish salvation history, in which God's acts are understood as paradigmatic of the relationship between God and Israel. However, in this allegory, the Shechinah, God's presence, becomes the focus of this interpretation. Its periodization has already been presented in Chapter Two. A full expansion of the allegorical narrative follows.

Abraham Ibn Ezra's narrative of the allegory in Canticles can be divided into nine sections, each one descrip-

tive of a different historical period. Part I, 1:2-4, describes Abraham, and how he came to believe in God and to spread news of God everywhere. He instructed people in God's ways and converted people, bringing them under the wings of the Shechinah. He is brought to Canaan, to further instruct people about God. Ibn Ezra sees verses 1:5-6 as referring to the Egyptian enslavement. The Israelites are blackened with bad deeds, but they still maintain the covenant. They are punished by their exile in Egypt. Yet, they desire to repent, and to follow the way of the patriarchs, but they do not know how. In Part III, 1:7-3:8, which is descriptive of Moses, Aaron and the Wanderings in the Wilderness, the people have Moses to show them the way. God, through this prophet, speaks to Israel with praise, and foretells the going out from Egypt with material wealth. God promises to bring them to the mountain. The Shechinah dwells with Israel and brings them close to the Land. The people are frightened, but the Shechinah protects them and helps them to keep the commandments. God's omnipotence is seen with the Ephraimites. God is seen at the bush and again at Mount Sinai. God sees how pained the people are while in Exile, and promises to redeem them. Israel accepts responsibility for the covenant, but the calf worshippers destroy God's vineyard, the people of Israel. The Shechinah withdraws from Israel, but intends to enter the Land with Israel if she enters at the appointed time. Israel arrives at Solomon's couch, Canaan, with 600,000 people and they kill all of Canaan's inhabitants who might bring Exile upon Israel.

In 3:9-4:15, there is a description of the Temple, as Solomon built it. The Ark of the Covenant is brought into it. There are many different functionaries there, all in the service of God, in transmitting the two Torahs. The Shechinah dwells on Mount Moriah where the Temple is built, and will remain there as long as Israel maintains the Covenant. The people of Israel are praised for their steadfastness to their faith, as seen in their observance of the holidays, their repentance, and their righteousness.

The Exile is seen in 4:16-5:4. The Shechinah ascends to heaven; there is no need for sacrifices because the Shechinah is sustained by the angels. Israel is exiled to Babylon. She is asleep in Exile but longing to be with the Shechinah. God, who determines when the people should dwell in the Land, brings in Cyrus. The prophets prophecies about Darius' reign are all proved true.

The people attempt to rebuild the Temple in 5:5-5:10. But the Shechinah was not there, as the people had thought. The Kings of Greece took over. Israel found herself unable to keep the commandments, but she refused to engage in idol worship. God stayed with them, while they were in Exile.

In the next section, based on 5:11-6:3, visions of Ezekiel's chariot and of angels are described. Ezekiel, as the prophet of Exile, has a message for the people regarding God's functioning in the world and how God created the world. God, no matter whether hidden or present, immanent or transcendent, is always aware of good and evil. God is eternal and so are his works. God's faith never fails. God may dwell

with the righteous angels, but he will return to the people. The people still know that the God-Israel relationship is secure.

In Part VIII on 6:4-12, Israel declares her faith in God, they repent, the Shechinah comes to them, and the Second Temple is built. There was no prophecy at this time, as Daniel had foretold. There were Temple officers and functionaries. All the descendants of Noah were kingly. The Hasmoneans are praised for their restoration of Jewish sovereignty in Israel. Yet, because of the hatred throughout the Land at this time, the people became exiled again.

The final section of the commentary deals with the future return of Israel to Zion, based on Chapters 7 and 8 of Song of Songs. This part describes the joy inherent in the return to Zion, when Israel will return from every place she is found. The great Sanhedrin will reconvene, studying the Two Torahs. The King Messiah will rule, the prophets will return and the High Priest will function again in his office. Israel's prominence will be restored, in all her righteousness. Israel fully repents, so God redeems them; he recognizes their piety and joins them with their ancestors. But, the people discuss their performance of the commandment in private: How will God know that they have been fulfilling their responsibilities if they have not bee.. observed doing them? Once the Shechinah returns, they will be able to do them publicly. Solomon reminds them that this will happen only at the right time. Israel says to the Messiah, "It is because of me that I prayed to and for you, that you are here. I awakened you."

The unification of the tribes will take place in this future time of redemption. Exile will be over, there will be no more punishment for Israel's sins. At that time, she will be tested to see how far she strayed from the commandments. If she has remained faithful, she will be rescued. If not, she will not be. But she has remained faithful. Solomon's vineyard will be left for the Messiah, his descendent. Israel will dwell in the Garden, the angel will near the voice of Israel. Israel entreats God to come down from the angels, to come to the hills of Zion, where God commanded them eternal life.

Ibn Ezra's work in this section is clearly conjunctive with traditional Jewish allegorical exegesis. The thematic content is very similar to that expressed in the other allegories discussed above. Ibn Ezra addresses the Exodus from Egypt and the Revelation as central formative experiences for the Jewish people. He also understood Jewish history as unfolding from the ongoing relationship between God and Israel. Exile from Israel is also a theme found in other allegories and incorporated into Ibn Ezra's allegory. The table found in Appendix 1 will enable the reader to have a synoptic view of the entire Jewish allegorical tradition surrounding Song of Songs and to determine the place of Ibn Ezra's contribution in the historical continuum. However, Ibn Ezra was able to go beyond the legacy he received from those who went before him. These innovations will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S ALLEGORICAL EXEGESIS OF SONG OF SONGS AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

"This book is most honored, and is entirely delightful, and there is none like it among all the 1,005 songs of Solomon." Thus begins Abraham Ibn Ezra's introduction to his commentary on Song of Songs. One could use the same description for Ibn Ezra's commentary itself, for its style, methodology, and content are quite unique, and there could be no other like it among any of his writings on the Bible. It is a three part commentary, with a four part introduction, on a book which has provoked controversy since its acceptance into the canon. It has come down to us in two recensions, the longer French recension, found in Mikraot Gedolot, and the shorter Italian recension, edited by H.J. Matthews. Matthews based his edition on three manuscripts: the Oxford, and the Paris, which contain the commentary in its entirety, and the Berlin, containing only the First Exposition.[1] The printed edition is based on a manuscript in the British Museum. The British Museum also contains manuscripts of the Italian recension, but these are different from those examined by Matthews.[2] The commentary in the printed edition, as it is found in the Mikraot Gedolot, is divided into 18 sections, each of which is accompanied by the corresponding parts of the three expositions of the commentary. In the manuscript version, each exposition is presented in its entirety; the First Exposition to all the verses is followed by the Second Exposition, which is then followed by the Third Exposition.

There have been many attempts to determine a relative dating for these two recensions of the commentary. It is thought that the Italian is the earlier. Matthews' tentative

conclusion to this effect is based on the knowledge that Ibn Ezra's commentary to Ecclesiastes was completed in Rome in 1140, and on the supposition made by Gratz that Ibn Ezra's commentaries to the other four Megillot were completed at the same time. This conclusion is also supported by the dedication to the commentary on Ecclesiastes. This book was thought to have been dedicated to the same person to whom Job is dedicated. The commentary to Job was also written in Rome, possibly at the same time as the commentary to Ecclesiastes was written.[3] Other factors which enabled Matthews to arrive at this conclusion are: the use of an Italian word, found only in the edition edited by Matthews but omitted in the printed edition of the text; a reference to the Commentary to Daniel, a later commentary, which is found only in the printed edition and omitted in Matthews' edition; two quotations from the commentary on the Minor Prophets are found in the Mikraot Gedolot but not in Matthews, while the exact opposite situation applies to two quotations from the Pentateuch Commentary.[4]

Friedlander also attempted to develop criteria which would distinguish the earlier Italian recension of Ibn Ezra's works from the later French recensions, based on references to other commentaries, references to other scholars and Rabbis, sources utilized in the commentaries, and the presence of explanations in languages other than Hebrew.[5] However, the application of these criteria do not allow the researcher to reach a more definitive conclusion about their relative dates. The potential tampering with the text, additions and emenda-

tions by later readers, in addition to the fact that Ibn Ezra himself wrote several different versions of the same work in a variety of geographical locations, force one to decide not to rely on "internal evidence" in reaching a conclusion about the relative dates of Ibn Ezra's works. This thesis will focus exclusively on the recension considered to be the later French edition as it appears now in editions of Mikraot Gedolot.

In both recensions of the commentary to Song of Songs, Ibn Ezra prefaces his commentary with introductions. The presence of an introductory paragraph is not unusual in and of itself; indeed, Ibn Ezra wrote introductions to all of his commentaries. There are several different purposes served by these introductions:

> ... the author either justifies his method and views, or makes some remarks concerning the contents and character of the book; in some books the introduction begins with a few lines in which he praises his patron who had encouraged him to write the work, or he describes his own misery and sufferings.[6]

These concerns are all addressed in his introductions to his commentaries on the Torah, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Job, Zechariah, Psalms, and Song of Songs. In each introductory statement, there is a discussion of some issue which will help the reader comprehend the true meaning of the text at hand. Of Ibn Ezra's introduction to Song of Songs, Friedlander writes, "he explains the symbolic character of the book."[7] This one sentence synopsis of this introduction is quite apt. The method and structure of the introduction is complicated, for it seems to have several tasks to accomplish.

The introduction also seems to be constructed of several different introductions that were combined into one. Because several items are repeated, it would seem that there is more than one introduction. The introduction itself begins with a paragraph entitled "Introduction to the Interpretation of Ibn Ezra." In this paragraph, he discusses why the book is called Song of Songs; that it is by virtue of its exalted and superior status among the other writings of Solomon. He continues by acknowledging the secret hidden within the text, of the history of the Jewish people from the time of Abraham, through the Age of the Messiah. He discounts the book's uniqueness in this regard, for the poem Ha'azinu in Deut. 32 is also interpreted as an allegory of history from the generation of the Flood, through the Exile, after the War of Gog and Magog. He indicates that poetic allegorization is an unique vehicle for the communication of Jewish salvation history. Furthermore, in the metaphor of the lovers, the bride and groom is commonly used to describe the relationship between God and the Congregation of Israel, as seen in the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Psalms. The book is not an erotic love story, he contends, but an allegory, and as such, it is of great merit and importance. Before concluding this section of the introduction, Ibn Ezra mentions the sacred nature of Song of Songs, in repeating the statement from Mishnah Yadayim, that the book of Song of Songs defiles the hands. He concludes the first section of the introduction with three statements in rhymed prose, in which he says that he will interpret the book in three ways:

first, by revealing the meaning of each obscure word; second, by presenting it according to its plain meaning; and third, by following the paths of the midrash.

The introduction continues with three additional paragraphs, one for each of the three methods of interpretation. In the first paragraph, entitled "The First Exposition", he opens, "Abraham ben Meir the Spaniard, the Compiler, says,"and then proceeds to address the contents of the three parts of the commentary and the interpretations given to Song of Songs. He first refers to the Philosophers who explained this book by referring to the union of the highest soul and the body, and then to those who interpret the book according to its essential meaning. Yet, the true understanding of the book is consistent with the understanding of the Rabbis, that the book is about the Congregation of Israel. In the first paragraph, Ibn Ezra explicates various interpretations of the book, and concludes that the explanation of the Sages is the correct one. He will present their interpretation in the Third Exposition.

Ibn Ezra continues, in this paragraph, by focusing on the meaning of "Solomon" as it appears in the text, and concludes that, excluding its citation in 8:12, each reference to Solomon refers to the historical figure of King Solomon himself. He states that in the second interpretation, he will address himself to the erotic content of the book, by recourse to the literal meaning. Even in this interpretation, each "Solomon" will refer to the personage of King Solomon. Ibn Ezra will also attempt to explain the difficult words in the text, after

which he will explain the meaning of the parable described in the Second Exposition, and of that which is allegorized from it.

In the next section, entitled "The Second Exposition", Ibn Ezra shifts to the second level of interpretation. He states that it is not appropriate to discuss matters of erotic content in public. Thus, this becomes a parable, of a young woman, pre-pubescent, who is guarding a vineyard, sees a shepherd pass by, and intense longing immediately breaks out in the hearts of both of them.

Ibn Ezra begins the paragraph entitled, "The Third Exposition" with praise of Midrash Canticles by the Rabbis. He acknowledges that others also wrote expositions, and that they added and took away; he is simply following in their footsteps. He then repeats his identification of Solomon as the historical King Solomon, except for its occurence in 8:12, which, the reader now learns, refers to the Messiah. The Messiah is called Solomon because the Messiah will be Solomon's descendent, just as the Messiah will also be called David, in Ezek. 37:25, or as the Children of Israel are called "Jacob, my servant," in Jer. 30:10. Psalm 90, although attributed to David in authorship, says "A Prayer of Moses," perhaps because a descendent of Moses would play it musically. Thus, Ibn Ezra is able to justify one person being called by another name.

He continues by giving the various meanings for "the daughters of Jerusalem," since it is problematic for the reader. They could be the angels dwelling in the "Upper

Jerusalem," or the nations of the world; or as Ibn Ezra understands this phrase, according to the parable, that they are a verbalization of the thoughts of a woman speaking to herself, and the thoughts are called "the daughters of Jerusalem."

He then continues by claiming that since we know that God appeared to Solomon twice, it is not surprising that Solomon should, as a result, prophesy about an event in the future, for this prophecy came about as a result of Divine inspiration. He mentions both Heman and Assaph, who served as singers for King David, and who are referred to as "seers". Therefore, it is not just the creation of the Song of Songs, but its potential to prophesy about the future, which characterizes this Divine inspiration to Solomon. Solomon's creation of the Song which refers to a time in the future, seals Song of Song's identity as a divinely revealed text. This is the only way to understand the text of Song of Songs. Ibn Ezra concludes this paragraph with rhymed prose, in which he prays for Divine assistance in completing his task.

It is not clear why the introduction takes the form in which it exists today. According to one opinion, the text includes two and perhaps three introductions combined into one. The first one is the general introductory paragraph. The second one would be the one entitled "The First Exposition." The third introduction would consist of the two paragraphs titled, "The Second Exposition" and "The Third Exposition."[8] Yet another opinion claims that the French recension has two introductions, which originally belonged

to two different recensions of the commentary. The first introduction includes the first introductory paragraph, and the second would include the three paragraphs following it.[9]

However, it is entirely possible that these separate paragraphs are all parts of one single introduction. Its appearance in this form is supported by a British manuscript.[10] It should be noted that, in the manuscript, the commentary itself starts with the first introductory paragraph, followed by all three expositions, each of which is preceded by its own introductory paragraph. In its development into a printed form, the introductory paragraphs originally found at the beginning of each exposition may have been combined into one whole introduction, in the form seen today in the printed edition. In addition, there is an identifiable pattern which Ibn Ezra utilizes in his introductory statements. In his commentary to Lamentations, the introduction consists of a short rhymed section, followed by another rhyme beginning, "I, Abraham ben Meir ..." which praises different interpretations to the book, as well as recounts his life's events. His introduction to Ecclesiastes also starts with a rhymed introduction in which he describes himself; this is followed by a lengthy prose section which addresses the contents of the book. The introduction to Esther has a short rhyme, then a section which begins, "The discourse of Abraham the Spaniard, called Ibn Ezra," and is followed by prose. The commentary to Daniel is introduced by a section beginning, "The discourse of Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra the Spaniard" followed by a short rhyme. Job also begins with a rhymed

section, followed by "the discourse of Abraham," and a prose explanation of the book. Although one could not conclude definitively why Ibn Ezra composed a multi-paragraph introduction to so many of his commentaries, there is adequate evidence to show that Ibn Ezra maintained this pattern in many of the introductions to his exegetic works. In these introductory statements to the commentary to Song of Songs, Ibn Ezra sets certain parameters for what is and is not appropriate exegesis. He gives the reader a brief synopsis of the exegetical methods he appropriates in his commentary, and also indicates what he wishes to accomplish in the commentary itself. A survey of the three parts of the commentary will help determine the extent to which the commentary fulfills the aims Ibn Ezra sets for himself in these introductory passages.

Each of the three parts of the commentary addresses a different goal. The first exposition consists of grammatical and lexical information, and aims to provide the meaning of the words. The second includes a description of the parable, in which a young girl falls in love with a shepherd. The third exposition includes the historical-allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs. This division of the commentary into parts is not unique to the Canticles commentary. Ibn Ezra utilizes such a division in his commentaries on Lamentations and on Job. This division may have been Ibn Ezra's original intention in all of his commentaries, that is, "to explain, first, each word of the section, and then, the sense and context of the whole."[11] Yet the number of commentaries

which preserve this method in the extended presentation of the Song of Songs commentary is limited to fragments of the commentaries to the Pentateuch, Job, and Lamentations.[12]

The first exposition of the book as Ibn Ezra stated in the Introduction, establishes the meaning of words and phrases in the Song of Songs, a necessary task for understanding the book. Ibn Ezra utilizes the lexicon of the Bible to explain the grammatical structures and unique words within the text. In 1:2, in his comments on "Let him kiss me," he states that the verb "to kiss" when not followed by the letter lamed means "a kiss on the mouth," but when it is followed by a lamed, it will mean a kiss on another part of the body. Ibn Ezra gathers evidence for these two conclusions from the Bible; as proof for the meaning, "a kiss on the mouth," he mentions Gen. 33:4, and brings forth Gen. 27:26-27 and Gen. 29:11 as proof for the meaning, "a kiss of the hand, shoulder or cheek." Thus, two possible meanings for the verb "to kiss" are substantiated by recourse to the Biblical text. An additional example is his comment to "Grab," in 2:15, whose grammatical form he compares to "Love", in Ps. 31:24, or to "Offer," in Job 6:22, which are both imperative verbal forms. In this section of the commentary, Ibn Ezra utilizes 121 different Biblical texts to support his definitional and grammatical conclusions.[13]

Abraham Ibn Ezra, the grammarian, is ever-present in this exposition. He uses many grammatical terms in his search for the correct meaning of a word. Ibn Ezra worked to establish a consistent vocabulary for grammatical

discussion, writing several treatises on this subject, as well as translating those in Arabic into Hebrew.[14]

Ibn Ezra's attempts to determine the meanings of words led him to resort to his knowledge of Hebrew's cognate languages. He frequently indicates when he finds a word which is unexplainable by available Hebrew knowledge, but when a word in Arabic will shed light on its meaning. His name for Arabic is "the language of Ishmael." His familiarity with Arabic can be seen in his ability to locate Arabic cognates for Hebrew words, and in his translation of Arabic grammatical works into Hebrew. The Aramaic of Targum Onkelos is an additional resource Ibn Ezra uses in uncovering a possible meaning for an unfamiliar Hebrew word. He refers to the Targum several times, and mentions Onkelos in 2:14.

Ibn Ezra frequently uses the phrases "ayn lo ḥaver" or "ayn lo domeh", but these do not indicate that the word to be explicated is a hapax legomenon. Rather, Ibn Ezra is indicating that the word cannot be interpreted through reliance on his usual sources, the cognate literature, classical Rabbinic literature, or the Biblical text. There is not enough evidence to support a conclusion about its meaning.[15]

At the conclusion of the First Exposition, he includes an apologetic paragraph, justifying his use of Arabic to explain the Hebrew in Song of Songs. He writes,

> One who views this composition may perhaps wonder why it says here 'in the language of Ishmael.' [This is] due to our lack of knowledge, for we only have knowledge of the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) through that which is written in Scriptures, for the Prophets needed to speak, and that which they had

> no need of, we cannot know. [This is also] due to the fact that the 'Arabic language' is very close to 'Hebrew' for with respect to verbal patterns, the letters yod, hay, and aleph, the servile letters, the nif'al and the hitpa'el, and the construct state, both (languages) have one method. And so too, with numbers; and in more than half the language, one (word) just like it will be found in the Holy tongue. For this reason, when there is a (Hebrew) word for which no similar one can be found in Scripture, there will be a similar word in Arabic, and we will say that perhaps its meaning will be so (according to the word's meaning in Arabic), although the matter is in doubt.

Ibn Ezra states the similarities between Hebrew and Arabic very clearly in this paragraph. As noted above, he was very familiar with Arabic grammatical works, and worked to transmit the information to non-Arabic speakers in Christian countries in the North. Arabic was not the language of intellectual discourse in this geographical region, and this fact may have caused him to be more tentative about using Arabic as a foundation for establishing the meaning of Hebrew words. On the other hand, this paragraph may simply be serving an explanatory purpose, of describing the similarities between Hebrew and Arabic to an audience with no knowledge of Arabic, in order to justify his use of Arabic in the commentary. Although he recognized many similarities between Hebrew and Arabic, he also recognized the limitation of constantly drawing parallels between the two languages. This causes his reticence in stating that there is some doubt about their linguistic correspondence. This reticence does not prevent him from presenting the Arabic when he feels it is appropriate, but he does utilize great selectivity in its use.

Ibn Ezra also uses the Rabbis as sources for establishing the meaning of the text. He calls them, "Our Predecesors," or "Our Sages," and presents their interpretations of words as "the language of classical rabbinic literature." Although Ibn Ezra may, in the Third Exposition, reject their interpretation, he does rely on them here, in the First Interpretation, to establish the plain meaning of the text.

Ibn Ezra also utilizes the works of writers in the post-Talmudic literature as a source for his lexical investigations. The only time he ever names the scholar whose opinion he presents is with reference to Saadiah, who he calls "The Gaon." Most of the time, these scholars go unnamed, referred to only as, "Some interpret," or "Some say," or "The Grammarians," or "The Masoretes." Just because he mentions them does not mean that he agrees with them. His disagreement can be registered in a variety of ways: from a simple "This is far from the meaning," in 2:5, or "We have no need for this interpretation," in 1:5, to scathing denunciations of an interpretor's knowledge, as in 1:3. Sometimes, Ibn Ezra simply presents a diversity of explanations without really committing himself to any of them, as in 1:13, on "bundle of myrrh," or in 2:1, on "lily." Other times, he makes it clear which the correct interpretation is, as in 8:6, on "the flame of the Lord" when he says, "the nearer interpretation is ...", or on 3:10, where he says, "and this is the correct interpretation, in my opinion." This frequent citation of scholars' opinions could serve several goals. One might be that through mentioning so many different opinions, he could show

off his own erudition and familiarity with literature. Another possibility is that the presentation of various opinions, punctuated by Ibn Ezra's own conclusions, serve to point up the inadequacy and/or inaccuracy of other interpretations. His is the most correct, and only those writers who present this correct opinion will be mentioned by name. Those whose opinions are incorrect are subject to anonymity and censure from Ibn Ezra's pen.[16]

Ibn Ezra's purpose in using a methodology based on grammatical, linguistic, and lexical analyses, is to establish the true meaning of the book of Song of Songs. He does accomplish this task in the First Exposition. In doing so, he may also be establishing a foundation for the Second and Third Expositions. The narratives which unfold in these two expositions may be completely dependent on the analysis made in the First Exposition, synthesizing the information contained within it into the narratives.

In the Second Exposition of the book, Ibn Ezra presents his understanding of the narrative of Song of Songs. It is, as he explains in the introductory paragraph to this section, a love story between a young girl and a shepherd who desire one another. In this section, the lexical text of the Song of Songs is incorporated into a developing narrative, describing the relationship between these two characters, with the Daughters of Jerusalem as the accompanying chorus. The text of Song of Songs is woven into the story line as Ibn Ezra understands it. Since the text of the book does not give all the details necesary for its understanding as a narrative,

the Second Exposition expands the basic story found in the text. An example of this expansion of the narrative can be found in 1:3, on "the scent of your oils". The expansion reads, "The scent of your oils, for your oils have a good scent from afar, and whoever remembers your name, it is as if myrrh were poured out before you. Therefore the maidens love you. And just as your oils are fragrant from afar, so too are the kisses of your mouth." (All underlined words are found in the text of Song of Songs.) This is also found in his comments to 4:6, 4:16, 5:1 and 6:7. The narrative is enhanced by Ibn Ezra's comments, just as his comments prove the viability of developing the literal understanding of the book itself. This expansion of the text is one way he justifies this reading. The objective of the First Exposition is to establish without any doubt, the peshat meaning of the text. Ibn Ezra could not ignore the literal meaning of the text any more than the Rabbis could.

The narrative, as it unfolds from a literal reading of the book with Ibn Ezra's commentary is as follows: The young girl has desire for the shepherd, for he is alluring, not only to her, but to many women. She tells the other women not to look down upon her, just because she is dark. She goes out to the fields to meet her lover as he goes to pasture his flocks. There, they praise one another's beauty, and express desire for one another. She returns to her home and he comes to her. This happens when the winter has passed and the summer has begun. They go out to the vineyard to spend the night and when the day ends, he leaves her. She

has a dream vision, in which she seeks her beloved in the city, asking the guards if they have seen him. When she awakens, she goes out to find him. He sees her, and tries to protect her from outsiders, just as King Solomon might do for his beloved. He praises her physical attributes with imagery. He joins her in the garden, and they share their love there. She then praises him and his physical attributes to the women of Jerusalem. The lovers recognize each others' uniqueness, and praise each other again. They go, the following day, to another secluded area, the vineyard, to be together. They desire only each other, and decide to be married, and never to separate again.[17]

The commentary in this section is characterized by a lack of explanatory comments relating to definition of words, etymology, or grammer. Unlike the First Exposition, there is no need for Scriptural texts to prove a particular meaning of a word or phrase. Rather, Ibn Ezra utilizes an alternative method to establish the meaning of the words, utilizing them within the narrative established by his commentary. Thus, the style of the commentary conforms to its purpose. The only Scriptural texts cited by Ibn Ezra in this exposition are from Song of Songs. The only time Ibn Ezra gives a definition of a word is in 1:9, where he defines susati as the feminine form of the word 'horse' (sus). This enables the reader to apply the word to the woman in the narrative. Ibn Ezra explains the many similes found in the text, to facilitate their comprehension on the level presented in this exposition. In 4:1, on "your hair is like the flock of goats,"

Ibn Ezra states, "the meaning of this is that it is in the manner of goats to perch on tall mountains, and to stand on their legs to gather leaves from here and there. Thus did he compare the hair on her head which falls this on that." In 5:1, in commenting on, "I have come to my garden," and "I have plucked my myrrh," he says, "This means that I am sated from all goodness, and I lack only your countenance." Or on "A king is held captive in the tresses," in 7:6, he writes, "The reason for a king to be held captive in the tresses is that he likened the hair which cascades this upon that to the image of water in water-troughs, with the king being the head, or its meaning could be that the king longed to be held captive and tied up in the cords of her hair." In each of these explanations found in the Second Exposition, Ibn Ezra is explaining the words' meanings, as well as supplying the reader with the context for the meaning of the words. In addition, the presentation of two possible meanings for the verse 7:6 shows that the text itself was difficult to understand, and that Ibn Ezra's expansion was not always easily derived.

In this exposition, the commentary develops the text into an on-going narrative, as a love story between a man and a woman, with other groups, the Daughters of Jerusalem and the watchmen, also participating in the story. Ibn Ezra shows that the Song of Songs does consist of a whole narrative, and therefore his utilization and expansion of the text is the vehicle he utilizes. He thus establishes a context into which the words' meanings (as developed in the First

Exposition) can be fully integrated.

On the third level of exposition, the narrative of Song of Songs moves beyond a love story between a young man and woman. Ibn Ezra reads the text as the history of the Jewish people's relationship with God, in the form of God's presence, the Shechinah. This history can be divided into nine sections, tracing the development of this relationship from the days of Abraham, to the Messianic Age with the return of the Exile to Zion. The literary form of Ibn Ezra's exposition is similar to the form employed in the Second Exposition, in which the narrative progresses according to the text of Song of Songs, which Ibn Ezra will utilize in his comments. A significant difference in method between this exposition and the second is the reliance on Scriptural citations from Biblical books other than Song of Songs, and the inclusion of some grammatical issues into the comments. These lexical comments then set a framework for the new narrative. Ibn Ezra's comments to 1:2 would serve as a useful example. "He begins with Abraham, for he is the primary person; and 'kisses of the mouth' are the Torah and the mitzvot, as it is written, 'because Abraham listened to my voice, and kept my mandate, my commandments, my laws, and my teachings.' (Gen. 26:5) And do not be surprised that it says 'let him kiss me' (in the future) with respect to something in the past, for such is the way of the scriptural text, as in 'Then Moses Sang,' (Ex. 25:11) and 'They made a calf at Horeb,' (Ps. 106:19). The opposite is also found, 'God, heathens will enter your temple,' (Ps. 79:1), and there are many such as this." In

this comment, Ibn Ezra does several things. First, he establishes the historical context of the verse in Canticles as referring to Abraham. Secondly, he explains the new, allegorical meaning of the "kisses of his mouth," meaning the Torah and the commandments. The signs of love, the kisses, are re-interpreted to mean the revelation of both the Written and the Oral Law. Ibn Ezra substantiates this meaning by referring to a text, Gen. 26:5, in which Abraham is praised, not only for his obedience to God, but also for his performance of the commandments. In this way, Abraham is understood as the first member of the People Israel, those who receive, accept, and affirm God's Revelation. Ibn Ezra then provides a grammatical discussion of how the future tense in the Bible is often understood to refer to the past, and vice versa. This enables him to interpet, "he will kiss," as referring to a past event, i.e. the life of Abraham. Ibn Ezra gives several other examples of this linguistic use in the Bible.

Ibn Ezra's primary task in this exposition is to show the validity of the meaning of the book on an historical-allegorical level. This is achieved through a re-explanation of the book's meaning in accordance with this theme.

The narrative created in the Third Exposition follows the chronology of the canonical Biblical text. It examines the history of Israel and her relationship with God in different periods. These include: Abraham; the Egyptian Enslavement; Moses and Aaron and the Wilderness wandering; the building of the First Temple; the Exile to Babylon; Rebuilding; Ezekiel's Prophecies; Building the Second Temple; and the

Future Return of Israel to Zion. This context for the understanding of the book, i.e. Jewish history, is not one which Ibn Ezra created. Allegorical exegesis of Song of Songs is, historically, an acceptable mode of exegesis, and can be seen in the Targum, Midrash Canticles, Saadiah Gaon, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra's interpretations. A comparison between them will be found later on in this work, as will a fuller description of the actual narrative that Ibn Ezra creates in his allegory.

In dividing the history of Israel into these periods of time, Ibn Ezra is setting up the context for the Third Exposition. At the beginning of each section, he will indicate that a new historical period is about to be addressed. The first chapter illustrates this method in his comment on 1:2, on "kisses." The exposition states, "He begins with Abraham, for he is the primary person," and then proceeds to interpret the next two verses with respect to events in Abraham's life, his good deeds, and his rewards. At 1:5, "This begins the (period of) servitude in Egypt." The exposition of 1:7-3:8 includes the leadership of Moses, the prophet, Israel's departure from Egypt, and the beginning of the on-going relationship between the Congregation of Israel and the Shechinah. This section also addresses the main events of the wilderness experience, such as the Golden Calf, the Revelation, and Israel's arrival in Canaan. Ibn Ezra's comments to 3:9-4:15 focus on the establishment of the Temple and the presence of the Shechinah with Israel because of their righteousness, as well as festival observances in the Temple. In the comments to 4:16-5:4, the Shechinah leaves Israel, causing the people

to go into exile. Despite their attempt to rebuild the Temple, as seen in 5:5-10, the Shechinah does not come to Israel's aid, and the Temple is not built. In the section 5:11-6:3, Ibn Ezra's comments are based on Ezekiel's prophecies made while Israel was in Exile, and thus addresses cosmological ideas, such as the creation of the world, and Ezekiel's chariot. The interpretation of 6:4-12 illustrates the building of the Second Temple, a period of Jewish sovereignty in Israel, the rule of the Hasmoneans, and the Shechinah's descent to Israel. This historical period ends with Israel's exile, and the disappearance of the Shechinah. The final section of the commentary, based on chapters 7 and 8, includes the anticipated return of Israel to Zion, the return of the Shechinah to Israel, the restoration of Israel's grandeur among the nations, and the unification of the tribes. At that time, Israel will remain by God's side, performing the commandments, presenting sacrifices, and doing God's will. God will always remain by Israel's side, for all eternity.

In constructing the allegory, Ibn Ezra relies on three methods. The most prevalent method seems to be a simple redefinition of the text in accordance with the particular historical reference. Ibn Ezra views the text as possessing a deeper meaning, which he hopes to bring to the surface. In "redefining, he is really discovering the true definition of the word. Examples of this are found throughout the entire exposition. In 2:8, Ibn Ezra explains "the voice of my beloved," to refer to God who appeared out of the bush.

The phrase, "For the winter has passed," is interpreted as a metaphor for Israel's Exile in Babylon. In 4:1-4, a section which he interprets as referring to Temple functionaries, Ibn Ezra simply presents another meaning for the words; e.g. "your eyes" are the prophets, "your teeth" are the warriors, "your lips" are the singers, and "your forehead" is the king. These redefinitions are not arbitrary, but are consistent with the allegorical method in which texts are invested with double meanings and can be interpreted on two levels.[18] In 4:5, the phrase, "your breasts," is understood as the two Torahs, the written and the oral. This particular interpretation is found not only in Ibn Ezra's work, but is deeply rooted in traditional allegorical exegesis of Song of Songs. In 5:2, he divides the phrase, "I am asleep but my heart is awake," into two parts, the first part referring to the Israelites while in Exile in Babylon, while the second part refers to the peoples' longing to be with the Shechinah. Ibn Ezra interprets "the watchmen," in 5:4, as the Kings of Greece. Thus, in this method, Ibn Ezra creates a new system of meaning, based on a newly created context.

Ibn Ezra does buttress his redefinitions with Scriptural citations. An example of this is found in 7:5, in the comment to "your nose," interpreted to refer to the High Priest, based on Deut. 33:10, "They shall place incense in your nostrils." In 7:1, "Return, return," refers to the future time when "God will return the captives of Zion," as found in Ps. 126:1. The meaning of "Let me hear your voice," in 2:14 given by Ibn Ezra, is based on Ex. 24:7. Hosea 5:15 is

utilized to show that "My beloved ran away to his garden," really means that the Shechinah went up to heaven. God's eternality is seen in 5:15, in the phrase "excellent as the cedars," because of Ibn Ezra's use of Lam. 3:23.

Ibn Ezra uses the Biblical text in this exposition to support the history he is writing in his commentary. His citations are always from the portion of the Biblical text which is descriptive of the period of history he is addressing. That is, he utilizes both the text of Song of Songs and the text of the Bible to establish the historical periodization in the commentary. For example, the citations supporting Ibn Ezra's interpretation of 1:2-3 as referring to Abraham are Gen. 26:5, Isa. 41:8, Gen. 13:4, and Gen. 12:5, which all refer explicitly to Abraham's relationship with God. The interpretation of 1:7-3:8 as the years of wandering in the Wilderness incorporates Scriptural citations from Ex. 4:13, 12:35, 3:7, 3:17, Ezek. 34:12, Hos. 9:10, and others which mention the time Israel spent in the wilderness. The interpretation of 6:4-12, referring to the time of the Second Temple, is supported by Daniel 9:24, II Sam. 7:23, Deut. 32:15, 33:29, and Isa. 58:14, which relate to the historical period of the Second Temple. By using Sciptural texts in this way, the chronology Ibn Ezra derives from Song of Songs is supported by the chronology established in the Bible itself. One could conclude that Ibn Ezra was able to create an historical-allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs without leaving the Biblical text of the book behind. There was a recognition of several different layers of meaning for the

text itself, for the Bible could be used to support both the literal sense and the allegorical sense of the book.

In the following chapters, an analysis of the structure of the commentary as a whole will be made. This analysis will focus on the intersections of the three parts of the commentary, in order to determine the presence of a pattern inherent in the commentary. This will be preceded by an in-depth analysis of other allegorical interpretations to Song of Songs, and of Ibn Ezra's allegory, both on its own and in comparison with other allegories.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNITARY NATURE OF ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S TRIPARTITE COMMENTARY TO SONG OF SONGS

The tripartite structure of Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Canticles causes the reader to question the relationship between the three parts. Does each section stand independent of the others, or do the three parts intersect? What elements do they have in common? What distinguishes them from each other? What is the organizing principle of the three parts in the commentary? In this chapter, I will demonstrate the presence of a pattern of interrelationship among the three parts of the commentary by looking at the points of intersection between them.

In his introduction to this commentary, Ibn Ezra explains that the purpose of the three Expositions is to present three different types of interpretative material. The First Exposition is designed to present the lexical meaning of the difficult words. The second interpretation deals with the narrative of the text, i.e. the love story between the young woman and the shepherd. The Third Exposition creates an allegorical-historical meaning for the book (one which is consistent with the peshat meaning of the text), in which the Shechinah and the Community of Israel are in a dynamic relationship which unfolds throughout Jewish history. At first reading, there does not seem to be any apparent relationship between the three Expositions. They each have an unique task, a different objective. Since their presentation within the commentary is as three separate expositions, one would think that each part would be totally independent of the others. In addition, nowhere in the introduction of this commentary does Ibn Ezra state that there is a direct relationship between them.

A more careful reading reveals otherwise. There are indeed many examples of intersection between the three parts of the commentary. That is, when the three parts of the commentary comment on the same word, a relationship between the three parts becomes discernible. In examining the verses and words on which the different expositions intersect, one sees that the meaning established through grammatical exegesis, or through lexical analysis based on the Biblical text, will be utilized in the Second Exposition within the context of the love story. This meaning will be further expanded in the context of the love relationship between Israel and God, as it is reflected in the unfolding of Jewish history. There is a hierarchial tendency, in which the movement or progression exists, not just within one exposition, but also across all three expositions, so that one's understanding of the text increases with each exposition. Each exposition gives a different layer of meaning. One will not understand the intention of the author if one does not recognize the inherent hierarchy present in this commentary, from the first, to the second, to the third exposition. The three parts of the commentary are not separate entities, but are rather three expositions, whose content and purpose are integrally related to one another. Several examples, illustrative of this hierarchic tendency, will be presented. [1]

The first example is in 1:2, on the word "yishakeni." In the level one of the commentary, Ibn Ezra utilizes scriptural citations to present the difference between lenashek l' and lenashek m', a grammatical distinction which then creates

a semantic distinction. In the case of lenashek m', the meaning is "to kiss on the mouth." In the Second Exposition, the commentary tells the reader that the young girl wants the shepherd to kiss her again and again, for she is not satisfied from only one. In the third part of the commentary on this verse, the historical context is Abraham, and the "kisses on the mouth," really mean the Torah and the commandments, those things with which God blessed Abraham and which Abraham was very willing to obey. Abraham is the recipient of these "kisses from God" because of his obedience to God, and his observance of God's mandate, commandments, laws and Torah. In this third part, Ibn Ezra utilizes a Scriptural citation which emphasized Abraham's great merit. In all three parts of the commentary, the meaning of "a kiss on the mouth" appears. The context of the young girl and the shepherd demands peshat understanding of the kisses, as a sign of love between them. While the peshat meaning of the word is appropriate to this setting, kisses must be understood in a different way to fit with the context of Abraham and his relationship to God. We know from reading the Second Exposition that the kisses are the sign of love between the shepherd and the young girl. The Torah and the commandments are the sign of love between God and the People Israel who are represented here by Abraham. The meaning of the word in its literal sense, to kiss, is retained; however, a deeper level of meaning is added on to it. This new meaning will be congruent with the historical context created by Ibn Ezra in the third part of the commentary.

In Ibn Ezra's comments to alamot in 1:3, in the First

Exposition, he defined this word as "young maidens." In the Second Exposition, the meaning of alamot as maidens is used in the context of the maiden praising her lover, and claiming that because of his "fragrance" and the goodness of his name, all of the maidens love him. The meaning of "young maidens" is integrated into the context created by the narrative of the Second Exposition. In the Third Exposition, Ibn Ezra creates a metaphor; these maidens, who have no husband, are like people who have no God. These god-less people were brought into the Covenant and came to believe in, and love, the God of Abraham. This interpretation is supported by the verse in Gen. 12:5, which reads, "and the souls which they had made in Haran," a verse interpreted to mean that Abraham actively sought to convert these god-less heathens in the land of his birth. The peshat meaning of alamot as maidens cannot be maintained in the third level of exegesis; rather, its meaning is developed by means of the metaphor created. In addition, the Biblical text is then brought in to support the metaphoric meaning Ibn Ezra presents. In the interpretation of this verse, the young maidens are not just those who are in love with the young shepherd; they are also the people converted by Abraham, who come to love God and keep God's laws. Again, the word is interpreted and given two meanings; the meaning established in the First and Second Exposition will form the kernel of metaphoric meaning established in the Third Exposition.

Another example is found in 1:12, on the word nardi. In the first part of the commentary, Ibn Ezra translates this word as a type of fragrant spice, like saffron. In the Second

Exposition, this word is understood in its context as the scent which the young girl exudes, and which the king longs to inhale. In the Third Exposition, this is understood in its context as the scent of the incense offered up by Israel as a sacrifice, on God's Holy mountain, which God desires. The incense becomes the scent of the Children of Israel when they reach the mountain of God in their preparations for the Revelation. Again, the meaning found in the Third Exposition is directly derived from the meaning established by the First Exposition and from the context created in the Second Exposition. This peshat meaning and context receive another layer of meaning when transferred to the Third Exposition. In that context, the word develops a meaning consonant with the new context created in the Third Exposition. As in the other examples, the metaphor does not destroy the basic meaning of the text.

Ibn Ezra's comments to "Grab us the foxes," in 2:15, also show the progression within the three parts of the commentary. In part one, Ibn Ezra provides a grammatical category for the word "Grab", saying that it is an imperative form, and he gives several other examples from the Biblical text, of imperatives which are similar: "Love" in Ps. 31:24 and "Offer" in Job 6:22. In the second part, this is given a meaning. In the context, the young girl is talking to the young men, and commanding them to guard the vineyard from foxes so that she may go there with her lover without any danger. In the third section, the foxes are re-interpreted to mean those who worshipped the calf, and thereby destroyed

the "vineyard of God," which is Israel, who were fragile. The command is given to Moses. Again, while the kernel of the peshat meaning is retained in the Third Exposition, that additional layer, the allegorical meaning, comes to be the meaning accepted. It is totally derived from the plain meaning of the text and from the context presented in the Second Exposition.

The comments to apirion in 3:9 are: in part one, the word is described as a "hapax legomenon," having no other appearance in the Biblical text. Ibn Ezra defines it as an honored building. In the Second Exposition, Ibn Ezra puts his readers in the historical context of King Solomon, who needs a palanquin for his beloved. Ibn Ezra has already indicated that all occurrences of the name of Solomon indicate the true historical personage of the King. In this verse, then, one understands this word as referring to the structure into which he will bring his beloved. In the Third Exposition, we are again confronted with Solomon, but in this interpretation, the King desires to build a "palnquin," the Lord's house,into which he will bring the People Israel. The word comes to refer to the Temple built by Solomon.

The meaning of dagul mer'vavah in 5:10, is derived from the word, degel, meaning flag or standard. In this First Exposition, Ibn Ezra does not give any Scriptural basis for this interpretation, but simply states the meaning of the word degel. In the second part of the commentary, the meaning is extended to include the entire phrase dagul mer'vavah, and a simile is created. The young man is being praised by

the woman, for his beauty. He is compared to a flag, which stands higher than all others, just as he stands out among all of his companions, because of his characteristics.

In the Third Exposition, Ibn Ezra brings in a verse from Daniel 7:10, which describes a vision of an ancient man with white hair, seated upon a throne, with thousands of thousands and tenthousand ten thousands of people serving him. The verse comes to refer to God who is pre-eminent above all others, for God has so many who minister to him. God is absolutely unique, with no equal.

This pattern is also seen in the comments to shor'rech, in 7:3. In the First Exposition, this is explicated as the navel, and Ibn Ezra provides the reader with a Scriptural text in which this word is found, which supports this definition. In the Second Exposition, this word is understood as a belt around the area of the woman's lower abdomen, which bears the shape of the crescents of the moon. In the third part, the round shape implied by both the navel and the moon is maintained. This section is interpreted as the description of the great Sanhedrin which will again convene in the future, when the Messianic Age begins, when all Israel will return to Zion. In this context, shor'rech is taken as the physical description of the Sanhedrin, which was arranged like half of a threshing floor, which was itself round. This description of the Sanhedrin is found in the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:3. A connection between the Sanhedrin that was, and the Sanhedrin that is yet to be, in the future time of Redemption, is created through this comment. In addition, it maintains the peshat

meaning established in the first and second parts.

What pattern emerges from these examples? It certainly is not one of three independent exegetical methods. The reader is given, in part one of the commentary, all the definitional information needed for understanding the book. The narrative given in part two of the commentary, serves not just to justify reading the book on its literal level. It also functions as the foundation for the creation of the allegory as it is found in the Third Exposition of the book. Each level of interpretation is dependent on the information contained in the level which immediately precedes it. The allegory depends on the literal meaning of the book, which, in turn, depends on the lexical, grammatical and definitional information found in the First Exposition of the book. This pattern, seen when the three parts converge to interpret the same word, enables Ibn Ezra to develop an allegorical interpretation that will be based on a clear enunciation of the plain meaning of the text, and on the literal reading of Song of Songs. It seems that the first two expositions do not just function to provide the information contained within them. Their true function is to support the allegorical narrative of the Third Exposition.

However, the allegory does not destroy the literal meaning, nor does its presentation denigrate its importance. Ibn Ezra was a product of his culture and as one of his culture's foremost spokespeople, he utilized all available tools to make his imprint on Bible exegesis. His reliance upon the grammatical and lexical forms of the words within Song of

Songs is reflective of the importance of grammar in Ibn Ezra's system of exegesis. This scientific method allowed Ibn Ezra to acknowledge the literal meaning of the book, and also to prove the scientific basis of the allegorical mode of exegesis. In addition, Ibn Ezra's familiarity with other allegorical exegeses of the Song of Songs, particularly of the Midrash, prevented him from denying its importance. But the grammatical and lexical exegesis found in the First Exposition became the necessary scientific proof and justification for the allegorical interpretation. The allegory was justified by the same information that justified the literal reading of the book. Thus, Ibn Ezra proved the malleability, flexibility and utility of the First Exposition, by using it to support both the Second and the Third Expositions.

All roads in this commentary lead to the allegorical interpretation as holding the ultimate meaning of Song of Songs. By backing it up with the material found in the first two expositions, and by grounding it in the history of exegesis to Song of Songs, Ibn Ezra legitimizes his own particular contribution to the history of allegorical exegesis of Song of Songs, thereby guaranteeing its survival and transmission.

CHAPTER V.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S COMMENTARY TO SONG OF SONGS

The achievements of Abraham Ibn Ezra in his lifetime can be seen in microcosm through the prism of his commentary on Song of Songs. The commentary reflects diverse cultural and intellectual influences in his culture, and the values and standards for the creation of Biblical exegesis.

The commentary on Song of Songs reveals the development of grammar as a significant mode of understanding the meaning of the Biblical text. The advances made in the fields of lexicography, philosophy, and grammar were not, in Ibn Ezra's view, ends in themselves. They were important fields, but only insofar as they could provide access to the deeper understanding of Sacred Scriptures. Ibn Ezra's principal aim was to understand the peshat of the text. Thus, the fruits of contemporary scholarship of his day served the traditional goal of Biblical exegesis, which was to give meaning to the text, while also enabling Ibn Ezra to create a new and unique synthesis. This use of grammar as a foundation for exegesis is seen very clearly in the First Exposition of this commentary, and in the way in which the grammatical explanations serve as a basis for both the literal narrative in the Second Exposition, and the allegorical narrative in the Third Exposition. Ibn Ezra is unique in this regard, for this type of exegetical work had never been done before. Grammatical exegesis is found in many of his works, but its separation into a separate exposition which is an integral part of a larger commentary allows his readers to view his method more clearly.

Another achievement of his commentary on Song of Songs is his presentation of the meaning of the narrative within the book. As we saw, allegorical interpretation of the book was considered to be part of the rabbinic tradition surrounding the exegesis of Song of Songs. Jewish exegesis prior to Ibn Ezra reflected a reading of Song of Songs as an allegory of the love between God and Israel. His presentation of the literal meaning of the book serves as the proof of the achievements of the science of his day. Through his utilization of grammar, he was able to construct the narrative of the book, based on the literal understanding. For a medieval Jew, raised in a culture which encouraged objective study and which saw "reason as the mediating angel between man and God " (as he claims in his Introduction to the Torah commentary), a denial of the literal sense of the book would have weakened his argument of the utilitarian nature of grammar study. As he presents the literal meaning of the book, as a separate exposition, he shows that it must be acknowledged, and that it also serves a purpose. The basic theme expressed through the literal reading of the book is the erotic desire expressed by the two characters in the story. This "desire" serves as the narrative which establishes the metaphor between God and Israel. The desire between the man and woman does not serve to cloud our understanding of the God-Israel relationship; rather, our understanding of this relationship is illumined by an acknowledgment of it.

However, the presentation of the narrative based on the literal meaning of the book serves only as a basis for the

presentation of the allegory in the Third Exposition. There are several strengths inherent within Ibn Ezra's allegorical interpretation. First, it is based on the chronology of the text of the entire Bible, so that the history of Israel, as it finds expression in Ibn Ezra's commentary is consistent with the history of Israel as it is found in the Biblical text. Second, the allegorical understanding of this book is totally consistent with the earlier exegesis of Song of Songs found in traditional Jewish sources, so that the historical legitimacy of Ibn Ezra's exegesis is assured. Third, the presence of the First and Second Expositions provides validity to the allegory which is not found in previous commentaries. By presenting the grammatical and lexical support for his exegesis, and by acknowledging the literal meaning of the book, Ibn Ezra subjects his allegory to the rigorous standards of objectivity and reason which were so prevalent in his era and important to his contemporaries. By creating a foundation which includes both traditional exegesis and utilization of the new tools of his age, Ibn Ezra creates a very strong basis for the acceptance of his allegorical exegesis of Song of Songs.

However, it is my opinion that the major accomplishment of the commentary is its structure. Ibn Ezra has created a commentary which enables the reader to add on to his/her existing knowledge at each step. The grammatical information facilitates a better understanding of the second interpretation; this exposition, in turn, facilitates a clearer understanding of the allegory. The inter-relationship of the three expositions, in which each is dependent on the one(s)

which preceded it, show at once, the importance of each exposition and the importance of all three. No one interpretation could stand alone. They rely upon one another,for the full presentation of the meaning of the book is accomplished only through an understanding of all three levels of interpretation. In this way, Ibn Ezra demonstrates extraordinary pedagogic skills. In its tripartite structure, his commentary allows the reader to move step-by-step into the world of the text. First the reader learns the meanings of the words, based on the most important resource, the Bible. Once this is accomplished, the reader moves to create a context for these words. The literal reading of the book becomes the proving ground for the lexical and grammatical information. The information ascertained in the First Exposition is proven by its application to the literal meaning of the book. However, the progression to the Third Exposition is the attempt to understand the actual meaning of the book, for it is not simply a love story. The longing for closeness expressed by the shepherd and the young girl reaches its fullest expression as the paradigm for the love and longing for redemption expressed by Israel to God. To Ibn Ezra, this was the meaning of the book of Song of Songs. This meaning may have been reflective in Ibn Ezra's own feelings of estrangement from his homeland, and his own desires for personal "redemption".

The power of Ibn Ezra's commentary is its transformation from a simple narrative to a narrative which encompasses national meaning and personal meaning. All educators struggle to create contexts of meaning for their students, particularly

when discussing sacred texts. The bind is how to preserve the sacred nature of the texts at the same time as one encourages personal and individual attempts to uncover the texts' meaning. I believe that Ibn Ezra shows us how to accomplish this task. One must always strive to decipher the text. What do the words mean? What forms do they take? Where else is that word mentioned? Then, one can attempt to create a context for the plain meaning of the text. The student of the text is forced to put definitions into a context which will enable the text to be read on a literal level. However, the most important task is discovering what the text means, not on a literal level, but on an historical level, whether that be personal, or national, or religious history. The exegetical task is further complicated by the need to have the personal meaning derived totally from the text, and its literal meaning.

This goal of discovering the deeper meaning, of discovering and uncovering the potential meaning hidden behind the literal meaning of the book, is one which all educators should struggle to attain with their students. Abraham Ibn Ezra has epitomized that "ideal educator" in his commentary to the book of Song of Songs.

APPENDIX I.

A COMPARISON OF PERIODIZATION FOUND IN ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS TO SONG OF SONGS

APPENDIX I

A COMPARISON OF PERIODIZATION FOUND IN ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS TO SONG OF SONGS

TARGUM ONKELOS	SAADIAH	ABRAHAM IBN EZRA
1:2-3:6 Exodus, Revelation at Sinai, Sin of the Golden Calf, Moses' interceding for the Jewish people, the merits of the Patriarchs, construction of the Tabernacle.	1:2-3:5 Servitude in Egypt, the emancipation, Giving of the Law, Battles with Sihon and Og, God's displeasure at Israel's reaction to the Spies report.	1:2-4 Abraham's life, his faith in God, conversion of other people to Judaism, his travel to Canaan. 1:5-6 The Egyptian enslavement, Israel's sinfulness and attempts to maintain the Covenant, their punishment is enslavement. 1:7-3:8 Moses, Aaron, wandering in Wilderness, the Shechinah brings Israel nearer the Land, they receive the Revelation, God is seen at the bush, the Golden Calf, the Shechinah withdraws, Israel enters Canaan and kills its inhabitants.
3:7-5:1 Solomon's Temple, its dedication, description of cult functionaries, the protective value of the cult.	3:6-4:7 The erection of the Tabernacle, Wilderness Wandering, Moses and Aaron's status. 4:8-5:1 Entry into Canaan, building of the Temple, pilgrimage festivals.	3:9-4:15 Solomon builds the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant is brought in, the Temple functionaries, Shechinah dwells on Moriah, Israel is praised for her faith. 4:16-5:4 Exile, Shechinah's ascent, Israel goes to Babylon, Cyrus brings the people back.
5:2-6:1 Israel's sin, repentance and lovesickness for God, praise of Torah study and the Sages, the power of penitence.	5:2-6:3 Destruction of the Temple, Babylonian Exile and return, Building of the Second Temple, renewal of the Covenant.	5:5-5:10 Israel attempts to rebuild the Temple, but the Shechinah was not with Israel, the Kings of Greece rule, but Israel does not sin. 5:11-6:3 Visions expressed through Ezekiel's prophecies, during their Exile, God's omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, the security of the God-Israel relationship.

TARGUM ONKELOS	SAADIAH	ABRAHAM IBN EZRA
6:2-7:11 Rebuilding of Temple, Israel keeps the cult and maintains its scholarship.	6:4-9 Spiritual welfare of those who returned from Exile. 6:10-7:9 The ongoing dispersion, the people have no king or priest.	6:4-12 Israel repents, the Shechinah joins them, the Second Temple is built, Jewish sovereignty is established, the Hasmoneans are praised, the peoples' hatred increases and Exile again descends on Israel.
7:12-8:14 Exile of the Roman Empire, Israel's desire for Redemption, the Messiah teaches Israel of God, they wait to return to Jerusalem, the righteous return because of their Torah study, but the Land is still defiled and cannot house God, so God waits in heaven until the cult can be restored.	7:12-8:4 The sufferings of the Messiah, son of Joseph, the manifestation of the Messiah, son of David, and obedient Israel. 8:5-8:14 Israel's restoration, building of the Third Temple, Israel's obedience to God's law.	7:1-8:14 The future Return of Israel to Zion, reconvening of the Sanhedrin, the rule of the King Messiah, reinstatement of the priesthood, restoration of Israel's prominence, unification of the tribes, observance of commandments, Israel will dwell in God's garden, where God will join them.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1

[1] The introduction to the Torah commentary is found in two recensions. The first version is thought to be that found in Mikraot Gedolot. The second recension, more recently discovered, is supported by manuscript versions and is explicated in several works on Ibn Ezra. On this issue, see Morris Golomb, "A Critical Study of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Pentateuchal Introductions" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, 1970), pp. 28-36. Since the purpose of the Introduction is to analyze and evaluate exegetical principles, the second recension will be used, because these principles of exegesis are more clearly explained. We will, however, utilize some elements from the first recension.

[2] M. Friedlander, Essays on the Writing of Abraham Ibn Ezra, vol. 4 (London: Trubner and Co., Inc., 1877), p. 144; Golomb, "Pentateuchal Introductions", p. 30.

[3] Golomb, "Pentateuchal Introductions," p. 66.

[4] Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 17 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 7:46-55.

[5] Asher Weiser, Ibn Ezra Al HaTorah (Jerusalem, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1977), p. 10.

[6] Gerson Cohen, Sefer HaQabbalah by Abraham Ibn Daud (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), p. xlv, n.5.

[7] Ibid., p. xlvii.

[8] Ibid., p. xlviii.

[9] Henry Malter, Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works (New York: Hermon Press, 1969), p. 46.

[10] Baron, History, 6:276.

[11] Ibid., 6:283.

[12] Ibid., 5:37.

[13] Ibid., 5:38-39, 6:290-291.

[14] Golomb, "Pentateuchal Introductions," p. 88.

[15] Friedlander, Essays, pp. 109-117.

[16] Ibid., p. 117.

[17] Golomb, "Pentateuchal Introductions," p. 93.

[18] Baron, History, 6:174-175.

[19] Ibid., p. 177.

[20] Friedlander, Essays, p. 126, n.1, third example.

[21] Golomb, "Pentateuchal Introductions," p. 110.

[22] Baron, History, 7:26.

[23] Ibid., 7:42-46.

[24] Ibid., 7:51.

Chapter 2

[1] H.J. Matthews, Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Canticles (London: Trubner and Co., 1874), p. ix.

[2] Friedlander, Essays, p. 211.

[3] Matthews, Commentary, p. vii.

[4] Friedlander, Essays, p. 181.

[5] Ibid., p. 144-153; Richard Bloch, "Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Song of Songs (Rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1982), pp. 35-36.

[6] Friedlander, Essays, p. 120.

[7] Ibid., p. 122.

[8] Bloch, "Song of Songs,", p. 15, 16.

[9] Friedlander, Essays, p. 182.

[10] Ibid., p. 182, n.2.

[11] Ibid., p. 123.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Bloch, "Song of Songs,", p. 16.

[14] Baron, History, 7:21-27, 39-46; Weiser, Ibn Ezra, p. 16.

[15] Frederick E. Greenspahn, "The Meaning of 'Ein Lo Domeh and Similar Phrases in Medieval Biblical Exegesis," AJSreview 4 (1979): 61,66.

[16] Friedlander, Essays, p. 105.

[17] Ibid., p. 180

[18] J.A. Cuddon, ed., A Dictionary of Literary Terms (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc, 1977), s.v. "Allegory", p. 23.

Chapter 3

[1] C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 30.

[2] Ibid., p. 82.

[3] Ibid., p. 166.

[4] Isaak Heinemann, "Scientific Allegorization During the Jewish Middle Ages, in Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit: Wayne State, 1981), p. 248.

[5] Ibid., p. 262.

[6] Ibid., p. 263.

[7] For a fuller description of Jewish salvation history as expressed in the Bible, see The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abington Press, 1962), s.v. "Salvation," pp. 169-171.

[8] E.E. Urbach, "The Homelitcal Interpretation of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," in Scripta Hierosolymitania, ed. Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), p. 247.

[9] Ibid., 249.

[10] Ibid., p. 249-250.

[11] Ibid., p. 248-249.

[12] Midrash Rabbah, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, vol. 9 Song of Songs (London: Soncino Press, 1951), p. vii.

[13] Marvin H. Pope, Song of Songs, Anchor Bible, vol. 7C (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1977), p. 94, 100.

[14] Ibid., p. 95.

[15] Ibid., p. 100.

[16] Malter, Saadia Gaon, p. 321-322.

[17] Pope, Song of Songs, p. 101-102.

[18] Benjamin J. Gelles, Peshat and Derash in the Exegesis of Rashi (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 81.

Chapter 4

[1] Other examples of this pattern are found in Ibn Ezra's comments to the following verses: 1:2, dodecha; 1:5, shechorah and navah; 1:9, l'susati; 1:12, b'm'siboh; 1:14, eshkol hakofer; 2:1, havatzelet; 2:17, ad sh'yapuah; 4:9, libavtini; 5:2, dofek; 6:11, egoz; 7:1, Hashulamit; 7:6, k'karmel; 7:14, haduda'im and others.

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