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THE LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

OF

ISAAC ABRAVANEL

RABBINICAL THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

One of the outstanding figures in Jewry during the fifteenth century was Don Isaac Abravanel. His ability was not only confined to things Jewish for he distinguished himself as a statesman and financier in the courts of the kings of Spain and Portugal. For many years he fulfilled his duties to the satisfaction of the monarchs under whom he was serving. Rising to prominence in a period of increasing anti-Jewish feeling his successful career in Spain was cut short by the edict of expulsion in 1492. He was a devoted Jew and the thought of apostasy being distasteful to him, he cast his lot with his people.

Three times was he obliged to leave his adopted country. His life was a peculiar mixture of meteoric rising to success and wealth, and quick falling to poverty and hardship. Yet his checkered career was not caused by personal failing. It was inevitable in Portugal and Spain because of the feelings prevalent in those countries. Wherever he went, he made quick adjustments and achieved recognition, only to lose out because of forces over which he had no control. He never found peace in life, and it might be said that he found tranquility in death. Yet even his tomb was desecrated one year after his death!

His life represented a clash of two forces and we shall see in the following pages, the struggle for recognition of the statesman and the religionist.

Don Isaac ben Jehudah ben Shemuel ben Jehudah ben Joseph ben Jehudah Abravanel, as he was in the habit of calling himself, though originally of Spanish extraction, his ancestors having lived in the Kingdom of Castille, was himself born in Lisbon. He traced his descent, and the descent of his family in a direct line to the royal house of David. He speaks of himself repeatedly, usually at the beginning of his works, with a simple, naive, and

3) Jewish Encycl. Vol I, page 129

pardonable pride, as "Isaac of the root of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, of the holy seed, of the family of the house of David."¹

In his commentary on Zechariah XII 7 he speaks with approval of the commentators interpretation of the words *ג'י' א'ל*, as meaning *אברהם אבינו*, He continues and elaborates on the Davidic family. According to Abraham Ibn Ezra, the descendants of the royal house live until the present day (twelfth century) in Bagdad and they are the exilarchs. Benjamin of Tudela also writes in the book of his travels that he saw them in Bagdad. To Spain also, after the destruction of the First Temple, wrote Rabbi Isaac ben Giat, there came two families of the house of David: one, the family of Ibn Daud which settled in Lucena; the other, the family of Abravanel which settled in Seville.² So Isaac Abravanel spoke with pride of his family and he would recount them up to the sixth generation.

His grandfather, Don Samuel Abravanel, who also lived in Seville, was one of two envoys sent by the Spanish Jews to Pope Martin V.³ A distinguished statesman, noble in bearing and comportment, he was recruited to the service of Henry II of Castile.

He was a generous and well known patron of Jewish learning. Menachem ben Zarach, who had to flee from a city when the Jews were being attacked, found a welcome reception in Don Samuel's house. *There*

1) Introductions to commentaries are usually headed in the following manner

אמר יצחק בן לאדני ער ועדו בישראל אדון יהודה אברהם אבינו

2) Zech. 12:7 *יחזקאל* כתב הרב ר' *אברהם אבינו* האחר משפחת בני דוד *אברהם אבינו* המשפחה *אברהם אבינו* המשפחה *אברהם אבינו* המשפחה *אברהם אבינו* המשפחה

3) J.Q.R. O.S. Vol. II page 38.

There he wrote

קרבן אברהם¹, which he dedicated

to his benefactor. The latter's position was undermined by forces over which he had no control. It was doubtless he who was forcefully converted to Christianity during the persecution in Seville on Ash Wednesday 1391. Thereafter, he dropped the traditional name of Abravanel and took the name, Juan Sanchez de Sevilla.²

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- 1) Viz. Introduction to קרבן אברהם - "Provisions for the Way"- a compendium of Jewish law, theoretical and practical.
 2) Encycl. Judaica- Vol. I, page 585.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

What were the events which provoked Spain and which led to the persecutions in 1391? To understand properly the status of the Jew in Spain, it is necessary first to learn how they were regarded elsewhere in Europe during the medieval period. The Jew was thought of, by the church, as an individual without any rights save that of existence because of the guilt of his ancestors. Whenever privileges were accorded, or social equality admitted, to them, it provoked the severest animadversions of churchmen. A mortal anxiety overtook some leaders when they heard that this people was permitted to hold land and that Christians had intercourse with these enemies of God and even rendered service to them.¹ Apparently the relationships between Jew and non-Jew (layman) would be fairly intimate. For, from time to time, the church would institute rigorous measures to create hate and evoke violence. At the council in Paris, in 1212, the church forbade, under pain of excommunication, Christian midwives to attend a Jewess in labor.² In the eyes of the authorities they were regarded as even lower than beasts and as such, not to be considered as objects of human sympathy.

It would be a gratuitous task to recount the dreary catalogue of wholesale slaughters which, for centuries, took place in Europe.

1) H. C. Lea- A History of the Inquisition in Spain, Vol I, page 81.
2) Ibid.

Whenever fanaticism or the disappearance of a child gave rise to stories of the murder rite, or a blood-stained host suggested sacrilege committed upon the sacrament, or any passing evil, such as an epidemic; it aroused the populace to blood-shed and rapine. Medieval chronicles are filled with such terrible scenes, in which barbaric cruelty and greed assume the cloak of zeal to avenge God. When, in rare instances, a high authority would protect the defenseless, he would be accused of being heavily bribed. It was much safer and more profitable to combine piety and plunder.

The Iberian peninsula, cut off from the rest of Europe by the Pyrenees, did not institute the same measures until a late period. The anti-Jewish attitude which was fostered by the church developed late in Spain.¹ In the nascent Spanish states, the Jews formed too large and important a portion of the population to be treated without consideration. They were used by monarchs who were often involved in struggles with mutinous nobles or Saracens, - not particularly for military service but for political and kindred activity. Their shrewd intelligence and practical ability rendered their service in public affairs almost indispensable. With tolerance, their numbers increased until they formed a notable portion of the population. They were held with such great respect that their Sabbath and other holidays were declared inviolate; (on)

1) Lea- A History of the Inquisition in Spain, Vol I, page 84.

on these days they could not be summoned to court or be interfered with, except by arrest for crime.¹

This would seem to indicate a complete absence of hatred but this is not entirely true. Before the crusading spirit was organized for the conquest of the Holy Land, ardent knights sometimes came to wage war with the Spanish Saracen and their religious fervor was outraged by the freedom enjoyed by the Jew. Soon the entire country was pervaded with the hate which motivated the rest of Christian Europe. It was a portent of evil days in the future.

The Kingdom of Aragon, in northern Spain, was one of the earliest to institute stringent legislation against the Jew. Although Castile, in the south, was slower to receive the impulses from afar, similar movements were introduced and with no less severity. Edicts against the Jew were being published with increasing intensity in the fourteenth century. The end of the milder attitude and the beginning of anti-Jewish feeling and persecution was in 1391.

Oppression and attack against the Jews were taking place elsewhere in Europe. The Jew in Germany had been feeling the whip of religious zeal for years. It did not affect his abject condition

1) Lea- Vol I, page 86.

because he had conditioned himself to pain. In Spain it was different. There, the Jew had been accustomed to carrying himself erect, with little or no fear of the non-Jew. He had occupied important posts, attained wealth, position and honor. What happened, thoroughly cowed his spirit and paralyzed his energy.

The outbreak against the Jew was incited by a fanatical ecclesiastic. It arose in Seville, through the agitation of a priest, Ferrand Martinez, who seemed to consider implacable hatred of the Jew, as the essence of his religion. His discourses were devoted to stirring the populace against them and he thundered against their infidelity, their riches, and their pride. In Seville, he found the people eager to listen to him but he was restrained from violence because of the King, Don Juan I. The latter punished lawlessness with utmost severity. The circumstances of the government were favorable to the development of his plans. When Don Juan died, the new monarch Henry III was a boy of only eleven years of age, and in the council of regency there was discord.

One day (March 15, 1391) - the fanatical priest, preaching as usual against the Jews, deliberately incited the mob to riot in the expectation that many Jews would abjure their religion.¹ The passions of the multitude became inflamed, and as the priest hoped, burst into wild uproar. Popular fury was directed against the Jews

1) Graetz- Vol. IV, Chapt. 5, page 167.

and resulted in plunder and bloodshed but at length the authorities, aided, by the nobles, restored order. But by this time the agitation was spreading to Cordova, Toledo, Burgos, and other places. Martinez continued his inflammatory harangues and sought to turn to the advantage of religion the storm which he had aroused, by procuring a general, forcible conversion of the Jews. From Seville, the flame of hate spread through the Kingdom of Castille. Public authority was helpless and in one city after another the Juderias were sacked and Jews who would not submit to baptism were slain.¹

Three months after the original outbreak the mob resumed its (June 6th, 1391) holy work of massacre by setting fire to the Jewish quarter and killing many of the inhabitants.² The result was that the community of Seville was sacked; of the three synagogues two of them were transformed into churches. Thousands of people were killed, but to escape death the majority permitted themselves to be baptized.³ Among the large number who sought refuge from the hostile populace at the baptismal font was Samuel Abravanel, who thereupon adopted the name of Juan Sanchez de Sevilla.⁴ (Lea writes that " When Henry attained his majority in 1395, and came to Seville he caused Martinez

1) Lea., Vol. I, page 107.

2) Graetz, Vol IV, page 169

3) Ibid.

4) Encycl. Judaica- Vol I, page 585

to be arrested, but the penalty inflicted must have been trivial, for we are told that it did not affect the high estimation in which he was held and, on his death in 1404, he bequeathed valuable possessions to the hospital of Santa Maria¹¹).

THE ABRAVENELS IN PORTUGAL

For reasons not given and yet, not difficult to determine, Don Samuel, the grandfather, of Don Isaac Abravanel emigrated from Spain to Portugal, around this period, and established himself in Lisbon. A well-known individual and wealthy, it was not long before he attained honor and consideration. But whatever influence he had was used in favor of his coreligionists.

Not long after Samuel Abravanel's coming to Portugal, Judah, his son, was appointed Treasurer to the Infante Don Fernando. The Infante, who had a small income, stood in need of the banker's riches. He was very appreciative of Abravanel's assistance and in 1473, before undertaking a journey to Tangiers, and having a presentiment of approaching death, he made his will, and ordered that "the Jew Abravanel, inhabitant of Lisbon should be paid in full the sum of 506,600 reis blancos which he had received from him as a loan." ¹

While the Abravanel family still occupied a position of honor in the king's court, a son was born to Don Judah in 1437 in the city of Lisbon. This son, Isaac Abravanel was destined to play a leading role in the life of Jews and non-Jews in three countries of Europe.

Isaac was given a careful education by his distinguished father. Although we are not certain of his teacher, it seems logical to assume that he received instructions from Rabbi Joseph Chayyun, who

was the rabbi in Lisbon in Isaac's youth. And yet, from an incidental remark of Rabbi Joseph Caro, it would appear that he attended and heard lectures of Rabbi Isaac ben Aboab¹, rabbi of Toledo. But this would be later in his life.

In his youth, Isaac Abravanel began to manifest signs of intellectual ability. Very early, he began to interest himself in Jewish religious philosophy. He was moved by an ardent love for Judaism and the Jewish people. And this feeling, combined with a capacity for clear thinking and keen insight gave promise of future greatness. He read the works of Aristotle and he speaks of him as "The Philosopher." Also the writings of Arabian philosophers, on the Stagyrice were read; namely, Ibn Roshd, Ibn Sina, Algazzali and others. These were all read in the Hebrew translation for Isaac Abravanel knew neither Arabic nor Greek. He was familiar with Maimonides Moreh, with Judah Halevy's Cusari, and with the philosophy of Gersonides.² Influenced by these men and other writers, he wrote his first work on "The Original Form of the Elements," (פירוש אלמנטים). This was followed soon after by a second, and more important work, under the title of "The Crown of the Elders", (קרונומיה), taking for his basis and starting point Exodus 23:20.³

"Behold, I send an angel before Thee, etc", he discusses in 25 chapters momentous questions of religion, prophecy, providence of God and its special relation to Israel.

1) J.Q.R. O. S. Vol II, page 39 ff.

2) Vide- Rosh Amana

3) רנה אנה שלח מלאך לפניך למשרתך בדרך ויהי אלהיך
המקום אשר הכינת

Following this, at the age of 20 he formed a plan of a commentary on the Torah, being particularly interested in the (*פ'יעלר ג'א'ל*) who in his estimation had escaped sufficient explanation up to his times. He began this work, however, with a commentary on Deuteronomy. Before proceeding with his work he referred the project to the sages of his day for approval. ¹

Concurrent with his love of philosophy Isaac Abravanel evinced an interest in statesmanship. Even as a youth his astuteness in finance and affairs of state was apparent and his political abilities attracted the attention of royalty.

Because of his father's position before him and because of his natural ability, Isaac Abravanel entered the service of King Alfonso V as treasurer. The latter seemingly had great confidence in Abravanel for he gave him complete jurisdiction over his financial affairs. His noble disposition, devout spirit, and prudence, secured for him the esteem and affection of the Christian grandees. In spite of this friendship, Abravanel retained an intense interest in his own people.

The King under whom Isaac Abravanel served, was a tolerant monarch and his reign is described as the Golden Age for the Jew on the Pyreanean Peninsula.

1) Introduction to Deut. (I. Abravanel's)

He succeeded to the throne in 1438. Finding himself with a small kingdom he launched upon a program of conquest. Most of his fighting took place in Africa and as a consequence he is usually referred to as "The African" ¹ יצחק אפריקני. Soon after his ascension to the throne he besieged and captured Tangiers. Throughout his entire reign he was occupied with battles with the Barbary Moors. And yet, he was a cultured individual despite his military exploits. Knowing the value of an intelligent personality like Isaac Abravanel, he sought to enlist him into his service. The wealthy and cultured Abravanel was no doubt flattered by the king's request and consented to occupy the position for which he was selected. He was entrusted with the office of the treasurer. The monarch must have had great confidence in him, for he consulted him on important questions of state.

Among Isaac Abravanel's closest friends in Portugal were the members of the house of Braganza; particularly the Duke Fernando of Braganza (and his two brothers, the Marquis of Montemar, Constable of Portugal, and the Earl of Faro). The Duke of Braganza, like many feudal lords, had great estates and wielded a powerful influence. He was lord of 50 towns, boroughs, castles, and fortresses; and was able, in the event of an exigency, to bring 10,000 foot soldiers and 3,000 cavalry on the field of battle.² With such contacts, Isaac

1) Otsar Nechmad, Vol II, page 48
 2) Graetz, Vol IV, Chapt. 10-11

Abravanel became an important figure in Portuguese political life. Princes and nobles frequented his home, the learned of Lisbon were his friends and companions. Among them was the scholarly physician Joao Seziro, a man of high consideration at court and a warm patron of the Jews.¹

Isaac Abravanel's life in Lisbon was pleasant and tranquil.

In his introduction to the Book of Joshua, he speaks of his years

שלו הי"ת בבית. He tells us: בית והון נחלת אבות בית מלא ברכה ה' בלשבו"נה המהוללה זיר ואם המלכות פורטוגאל. שם צוה ה' את הברכה באסמי הצדק והכבוד לפני ותענוות בני האדם. בתי לי בתיס וצדיות מרווחות. ביתי בית וצד לחכמים. כי שמה ישבו כסאות למשפט. ומשם יצא מפי ספרים ומפי סופרים טובה לעם וצדק ויראת ה' בבית ובחומותיו הון צדק וצדקה יב ושם תורה וצדקה במבורים אשר מדרש. ורצון בהיכל המלך בון אלפונסו מלך סבור ומשל ממלכת רב. וירד מים צד ים וכל אשר יצא יצאיתו מלך יושב על כסא בין צדקה חסד משפט וצדקה בארץ מלך הולח בה' ירא וסר מרד בורש טוב למלך מלך בהסמל ראשי עם חכם ומי כחובו מורה אבל מלך הצדק חן ושכל טוב ולא אבא ה' שם אל עץ החיים ישלח ינו. ובחזקתו העושה פקד ה' את עמו לתת להם לחם ריוח והצלחה צדק ליהודים בצל חמדת וישראל והיית קרוב אליו והוא נשן על ידיו וכל הימים אשר הוא חי על האדמה על היכל המלכות די בהל מלך היות...

1) Graetz, Vol IV, Chapt. 10, 11- I. A. was not the only Jew to attain distinction in the Portuguese court. The brothers, Ibn Yachya, sons of Don David, were court favorites and received honor.

Written in Spain, following his forced flight from Portugal, this describes the nostalgic yearning of a man for those things he will ever hold dear. He could not envisage a better life than that which obtained under the rule of the benevolent Alfonso V.¹ There he had had friendship, esteem, and under this tolerant ruler his people enjoyed liberty and prosperity.

In the thirty-third year of Alfonso's reign, he fought against and captured the town of Arzilla in Africa.² In war, no distinctions were made between captives, for among them, were two hundred and fifty Jews of both sexes, who were sold into slavery. Upon hearing of this, Isaac Abravanel, called representatives of the Lisbon Jewish community to formulate a plan for their manumission.³ A committee of twelve leading Jews was selected who set themselves to the task of liberating Jews from their captivity. In a short time, ten thousand gold doubloons (16,000) were collected with which the liberty of the captives were to be bought. More money was

Interesting is the story that their father exhorted them not to invest in real-estate. Graetz interprets this as a premonition of banishment.

- 1) Introduction to commentary on Kings, where I.A. mentions life in Portugal- גמ' ו' פ' ד' ס' א' ב' ח' כ' כ"ב' כ"ד' כ"ו' כ"ח' כ"י' כ"ג' כ"ה' כ"ז' כ"ט' ל' ל"א' ל"ג' ל"ה' ל"ז' ל"ט' מ' מ"א' מ"ב' מ"ד' מ"ו' מ"ח' מ"י' מ"ג' מ"ה' מ"ז' מ"ט' נ' נ"א' נ"ב' נ"ד' נ"ו' נ"ז' נ"ט' ס' ס"א' ס"ב' ס"ד' ס"ו' ס"ח' ס"י' ס"ג' ס"ה' ס"ז' ס"ט' ע' ע"א' ע"ב' ע"ד' ע"ו' ע"ז' ע"ט' פ' פ"א' פ"ב' פ"ד' פ"ו' פ"ז' פ"ט' צ' צ"א' צ"ב' צ"ד' צ"ו' צ"ז' צ"ט' ק' ק"א' ק"ב' ק"ד' ק"ו' ק"ז' ק"ט' ר' ר"א' ר"ב' ר"ד' ר"ו' ר"ז' ר"ט' ש' ש"א' ש"ב' ש"ד' ש"ו' ש"ז' ש"ט' ת' ת"א' ת"ב' ת"ד' ת"ו' ת"ז' ת"ט' ת"כ' ת"כ"א' ת"כ"ב' ת"כ"ד' ת"כ"ו' ת"כ"ז' ת"כ"ט' ת"ל' ת"ל"א' ת"ל"ב' ת"ל"ד' ת"ל"ו' ת"ל"ז' ת"ל"ט' ת"מ' ת"מ"א' ת"מ"ב' ת"מ"ד' ת"מ"ו' ת"מ"ז' ת"מ"ט' ת"נ' ת"נ"א' ת"נ"ב' ת"נ"ד' ת"נ"ו' ת"נ"ז' ת"נ"ט' ת"ס' ת"ס"א' ת"ס"ב' ת"ס"ד' ת"ס"ו' ת"ס"ז' ת"ס"ט' ת"ת' ת"ת"א' ת"ת"ב' ת"ת"ד' ת"ת"ו' ת"ת"ז' ת"ת"ט' ת"ת"כ' ת"ת"כ"א' ת"ת"כ"ב' ת"ת"כ"ד' ת"ת"כ"ו' ת"ת"כ"ז' ת"ת"כ"ט' ת"ת"ל' ת"ת"ל"א' ת"ת"ל"ב' ת"ת"ל"ד' ת"ת"ל"ו' ת"ת"ל"ז' ת"ת"ל"ט' ת"ת"מ' ת"ת"מ"א' ת"ת"מ"ב' ת"ת"מ"ד' ת"ת"מ"ו' 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obtained by Isaac Abravanel's writing to a wealthy friend, Jechiel of Pisa, to contribute in their behalf. Then, with a colleague, Isaac Abravanel travelled around the country and ransomed the Jewish slaves.

It was not the purpose of this committee of twelve only to redeem the captives. They realized that they were responsible for the Moorish Jews, even after they were freed. The ransomed Jews were clothed, lodged, and maintained until they learned the language of the country, could make contacts for vocational adjustment, and could support themselves. Then the work of this committee was complete.

In 1472, King Alfonso sent an embassy to Pope Sextus IV, at Rome: first to congratulate him upon his accession to the Papacy and also to inform him of the King's conquests among the Moors. Included in this group which was to appear before the Catholic leader was Joao Seziro. Isaac Abravanel sought him out and asked him to speak to the Pope in behalf of the oppressed Jews in other lands, to bring before him requests and petitions regarding Jewish communities in Portugal and to implore him to regard them benevolently and to grant good decisions to these questions. He also asked the physician

3) Graetz- Vol IV, page 339

1) Otsar Nechmad Vol II - I.A.'s letter to Jechiel of Pisa.

to deliver a letter to his friend Jechiel of Pisa and some of his own and other's works. At this time, Isaac Abravanel sent his book פ'ק'ק' אב'ר' and also the commentary to Debarim as far as he had completed it. This letter, dated 5232, or 1472, describes conditions of the Jews and requests Jechiel to contribute money for assisting Jewish captives. It also asked the recipient to show every consideration to the physician.

In the interim Abravanel's life in Lisbon was bright and cheerful. He had married and his wife had given birth to three sons, Judah, Joseph, and Samuel. His career was undimmed by any clouds until he reached the age of forty-four. Thereupon a whole series of reverses befell him and rarely did he find the peace and tranquility he had enjoyed heretofore.

The King Alfonso V died in 1481 after a successful reign of forty-two years. He was succeeded by his son Joao II, who ruled from 1481 to 1495. Unlike his father, the new King was sullen, selfish, and heartless. Following the tactics of his unscrupulous contemporary, Louis XI of France, he endeavored to rid himself of the Portuguese grandees and strove to create an absolute monarchy.¹ His first step was to rid himself of the powerful Duke of Braganza. The unsuspecting Duke was called to court and there charged with treason. He and his brothers were impeached for maintaining a

1) Graetz Vol IV, page 340

On the frontiers of the Kingdom of Castile. He did not escape too soon, for his flight was made known to the King and troops were ordered to pursue him across the desert even to the borders of the two kingdoms. Frustrated in his attempt to get hold of his person, the King revenged himself by confiscating not only all of Abravanel's property, including his commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy; but also that of his eldest son, Judah Leon, who was only a youth, but already a practising physician. From the safety of his residence in Castile, the refugee addressed a letter to the King in which he protested his innocence of any plotting against the monarch.

אהלן אלו שורתי
 any plotting against the monarch.
 לפניו מן המקום אשר נסתרתיו ביום המדה
 במעלת ספר כתוב עלי, הושיעה המלך האלו
 לך כי תדעוך? השופט כל הארץ לא ידעה
 משפט? למה ידעות לרבה, למה תדעפני
 כמו אל הושיעני על מה תליפני? בחנני
 לפני ונסני כל ימידי לא ימצאו לי דון אשר
 חטא... 2

- 1) Graetz Vol IV page 341
2) Introd. to Joshua-"From the depths of my sorrow I cried to him, from the place where I was hidden. In a letter I wrote him, I cried, 'Save, O, King! Is it right for you to oppress? Shall not the judge of an entire country be just? Why have you done evil to your servant? Why have you thrust me out? Let me know what you have against me, and why you contend with me? Prove and examine me, O Lord, and all efforts will not succeed in finding any guilt in me' ".
3)

All of his pleas were in vain. The King was too suspicious and too shrewd to permit Abravanel to return to his native land. It would have meant relinquishing that which he had already appropriated. He could not tolerate the continued existence of those individuals who stood in the way of establishing his absolute monarchy. As Isaac Abravanel describes him, he was deaf to all appeal and would not withdraw from his cruel, vengeful program.¹ This was the first of three banishments to which Abravanel was obliged to submit during his career.

1) Introduction to Joshua - כמו פתח חכם יאמר אמן
לא רשע יד אבד ואין לאדם וקר אדם לא צדקה
וקר צדקה

ABRAVANEL IN SPAIN

From Segura, Isaac Abravanel turned toward Toledo, the capital of Castille. There he took up his abode in 1484. His fame had preceded him in that land for he was received with honor by his fellow Jews, particularly by the more cultured among them. His intellect was soon seen and a group of learned men and scholars gathered around him. With them, was most of his time occupied.

והנה פה הקרה ה' אל קינו
 לבני א/ש' חכמים וידועים חברים מקשיבים
 לקולו ודבר ה' תמימה משיבת נפש צדקה כל כיוון היא שיחתו¹
 His conclusion was that God had disapproved of his pursuit of a life of state affairs and had caused this misfortune to befall him. Therefore he must perforce devote himself to religious work.

כי אין אל קי בקרבו מצאנו הרשות האלה²
 Among the men whose friendships he cultivated were the learned Isaac Aboab and Abraham Senior, chief-tithe collector in Castille. The latter, it seems, later interested Abravanel in accociating with him to collect taxes.

In the interim, Joao of Portugal, had permitted Isaac Abravanel's wife and two of his sons to join him in Toledo.

1) Introd. to Joshua
 2) Ibid.

Free from the arduous, duties of state, and thankful that his family was once more with him, he began to devote himself to the service of God. At the entreaty of his friends,

אלער בקשו ממנו לפרסם פאר אים א ספר
יהושע, שופטים, שמואל, ואלו כולם

he began to write an exposition of the earlier prophets which had been hitherto neglected because of their apparent simplicity.² Even while in Portugal he had resolved to do this work.³ Since he had given previous thought to the subject, he soon completed his task. It is not difficult to explain the dispatch and ease with which he handled the work. In addition to his knowledge of language, he had his own experience in statesmanship which gave him the insight to understand and unravel the political complications involved in the Israelitish state. He finished in a surprisingly short time. Within sixteen days, he completed his commentary on Joshua; in twenty-five days that on Judges and in three and a half months, that on the two Books of Samuel.⁴

For only a short time did Abravanel devote himself to literary activity. Although he was attached to his people and their literature, life in the court and political

1) Introd. to the book of Joshua (2) Ibid - כ"ב באו - דברי המפרשים בזה ספר מנחם מנדל

3) Introd. to the book of Kings ואלו כולם כ"ב באו - דברי המפרשים בזה ספר מנחם מנדל

4) Otsar Nechmad Vol II, page 48 ff - פירושים ספר שופטים, שמואל, ואלו כולם כ"ב באו - דברי המפרשים בזה ספר מנחם מנדל

activity attracted him even more; so he forsook one for the other. After a half-year of exegetical writing, during which he had written commentaries on Joshua, Judges and Samuel, he was urged to come to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, sovereigns of Spain. At this time he was about to comment upon the book of Kings.¹ He stopped his work and entered the monarchs' service, acting as farmer of the royal revenues. This position he held for a period of eight years, from 1484 to 1492.

In this capacity his acquaintance with Don Abraham Senior was intensified. The latter like Abravanel, acted as chief farmer of taxes and seemingly entered into partnership with Isaac Abravanel when the latter was appointed by the Spanish monarchs.

For eight years Abravanel occupied the position. He seemed to be relatively happy during the time of this period, for he writes that he received consideration and honor from the Spanish grandees and that he grew rich and was able to buy land and estates—

והעסקתי בצדקות שנה שנים, ואם עשרה
אם כבוד אשר יצא אותם האדם וחי בהם
קניתי לי בחצריהם ובאירותם

1) Introd. to the book of Kings - וברכותי לכתוב גירוש ספר מלכים נקראת לבוא אל בית המלך הוא מלך ספרד מלון מלכי ארץ

2) Ibid

He must have entrenched himself quite securely and convinced the royalty of his sincerity and devotion, in view of the fact the Sovereigns, goaded by the Malignant Torquemada, issued canonical decrees, forbidding Jews to hold office in the government. His activity must have rendered him indispensable for at no time does he mention encountering difficulties until the conquest of Granada in 1492.

Nevertheless, his people must have been suffering from the anti-Jewish feeling which was becoming more intense in the Spanish peninsula and which resulted in the expulsion in 1492. As a wealthy and influential Jew, it does seem likely that he must have rendered invaluable assistance to his people even before the expulsion though he, himself may never have felt the barbs and shafts of anti-semitic prejudices.

The inquisition, which had been introduced in Spain years before Abravanel came there from Portugal, was not operating in the manner which some of the lay and religious leaders would have it operate. It had been effective elsewhere in Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but it needed more organization and centralization in Spain. Its judges

were appointed by the Dominican and Franciscan leaders who used a course of procedure and obeyed the rules and instructions which emanated from the Holy See. They were responsible to Rome only, and with an unfixed and poorly organized office, it is readily seen that the individual inquisitors were to a great extent independent. Not being subject to regular inspection, it was rather difficult to call them to account for the manner in which they discharged their functions.

However, Ferdinand and Isabella, who desired to break down all of the loose organization prevalent in their Kingdom, could never countenance such an important organization or office as the Inquisition, to take instructions from anyone save the monarchs themselves. They wished the Inquisition to become a national institution and the measures they resorted to, with this object in view were sagacious, and carried out with unusual success.

The man upon whom their choice fell to assume the duty of reorganization and centralization was Thomas de Torquemada. The confessor of the sovereigns, he was also one of seven inquisitors¹ commissioned by the papal letter of February 11, 1482. His

1) Lea Vol I, page 173

appointment made, the fondest hopes of the King and Queen were realized. With a cold, deliberate zeal, he developed order in the chaotic institution and discharged his duties with pitiless assiduousness. His views were fixed, his character unchanging. He would heed no plea for mercy; nor listen to any compromise of what he regarded as his duty. Under Torquemada, the Inquisition developed rapidly and was extended throughout Spain. It soon became an effective organization, discovering and punishing apostates. As the institution developed, those people who felt that they would be subjected to punishment because of it, were disposed to seek safety at any sacrifice. Many succeeded in doing this, for the statistics of the early autos de fe show that the living victims are outnumbered by the effigies of the absent.¹

The events which led to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 were the fanatical preaching of the Dominicans, the zeal of the monarchs themselves and the machine which Torquemada had established. Among the incidents which were responsible for anti-Jewish feeling was the cause célèbre of the child of La

1) Lea Vol I , page 183

Guardia. "In June, 1490, a converso named Benito Garcia, on his return from a pilgrimage to Compostella, was arrested at Astorga on the charge of having a consecrated wafer in his knapsack. The episcopal vicar, Dr. Pedro de Villada, tortured him repeatedly until he obtained a confession implicating five other conversos and six Jews in a plot to effect a conjuration with a human heart and a consecrated host, whereby to cause the madness and death of all Christians, the destruction of all Christianity, and the triumph of Judaism."¹ From this emerged the crucifixion of the child of La Guardia, whose heart had been cut out for this very conjuration. The account was obviously provoked by the tortures of the Inquisition for the confessions of the accused are contrary and contradictory. Those implicated were put to death. What is significant, however, is the purpose of the auto de fe. According to Lea in his "History of the Inquisition in Spain", the underlying purpose was revealed in the sentence read at the death of the convicted; namely, to bring into prominence the efforts of the Jews to proselytize.² This sentence was brought before the entire population. As a result, the cult of the Saint-Child of La Guardia-El Santo Niño de la Guardia, -was started with miracles and has been kept to the present although the sanctity of the supposed martyr has

1) Lea- page 133 ff, Vol I
 2) Ibid

never been confirmed by the Holy See. Torquemada's object, the effect upon the King toward legislating an edict of expulsion because of the conversion propensities of the Jews was not gained but it is not unlikely that the incident must have made a great impression upon him.

Be it remembered that Ferdinand and Isabella had pledged themselves to unify the Iberian peninsula. For ten years, at intervals, Spain had been fighting the Moors for Granada. Finally, after a long and bloody struggle, the city fell into the hands of the Spaniards in January, 1492. The hopes of the monarchs had been achieved. Among those who had contributed to the Spanish cause were the Jews. But with the accession of a rich territory and an industrious Moorish population; with the absence of war and its drain on his treasury, Ferdinand was persuaded that the Jews were no longer financially indispensable. Besides, popular fanaticism required constant repression to keep the peace; "the operations of the Inquisition destroyed the hope that gradual conversion would bring about the desired unity of faith and the only alternative was the removal of those who could not, without a miraculous change of heart, be expected to encounter the terrible risks attendant upon baptism."¹ And more, not only would the King be acting in consort with the religious leaders of his day,-

1) Lea- Vol I , page 135

but the great wealth of the Jews in real estate, etc., would perforce go to the populace and in this manner, they, too, would be appeased. In this manner the expulsion of the Jews from all of Spanish possessions was resolved upon. Isaac Abravanel describes the thinking of the King in his introduction to the Book of Kings:

והשנה התשיעית שנת מערכה ישראל לכבד
 מלך ספרד כל מלכות ארץ ויהיו השבוע
 ארבעה רבות עם שרתי המדינות והמדינות
 וישובו להם חלף רוחו ויאמרו לו כוחו לא לקו
 ויאמר עשו להם במה אתרצה לאלקי המאמץ
 חיל למלחמה? במה אקדם לקונו אשר נתן
 את הדור הזאת בידי? אם לא בהכניס
 תחת כנפיו הדם יהוה לבין החשק שה
 בצורה ישראל ולהשיב לבו ואמרו
 רבות השובבה או להשליכם אל ארץ
 אחת מאלו פני לא ישבו עוד בארץ
 ולא יבנוו אלמד ענין.

The people were given the choice of accepting Christianity or leaving Spain. Abraham Senior and Isaac Abravanel offered a large sum to avert the decree. Ferdinand, who seems to have been easily moved by the appearance of money, was inclined to accept it, but Isabella was firm. There is a story to the effect, that when the offer was being considered, Torquemada forced his way into the royal presence and holding a crucifix aloft, exclaimed to the sovereigns, "Behold, the crucified whom the wicked Judas sold for thirty pieces of silver. If you approve that deed, sell him for thirty thousand pieces of silver. I resign my power; nothing shall be imputed to me, but you will answer to God!"¹ Whether this be true or not, the offer was not accepted and on March 30, 1492, the decree of expulsion or the Edict of Granada, was signed. It was published on May 1st, and it gave the entire Jewish population until July 31st in which to accept Christianity or leave the country, under penalty of death.² The effect upon the people of the land is described by Isaac Abravanel, - אר"י נחמך הר"ר א"ר

1) Lea- Vol I, page 135

2) I.A. writes in his introduction to Kings of the edict-

קראו זכור מלכות עמ' מארצות ספרד ומצ"ל, א"ר
מור"קא וסב"ל א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר
א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר
א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר א"ר

עֲדָה רַבָּה וְיִתְאֱבֹד וְכֵן מִקּוֹם
 אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ וְצִוָּה מִלִּיד אֲהֵל
 אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהִיא חֲרָדָה אֲדֹנָה
 כְּמַבְכִּירָה אֲשֶׁר כְּמוֹהָ לֹא נִהְיִיתָ מִיָּוֶם
 אֲלֹת יְהוּדָה מִחַל אֲדֹנָתָהּ¹

Even after the decree had been published, Isaac Abravanel implored the King at three different times to reconsider, but he was adamant.

The time drew near for the departure of the Jews. Some of them in desperation accepted Christianity. Among them was the rich tax-collector, Abraham Senior. He and his family were baptized and took the family name of Coronel.² But the bulk of Jewry prepared itself for the departure. The aged rabbi, Isaac Aboab, the friend of Abravanel, went with thirty Jews of rank to Portugal to negotiate with King Joao II, for the settlement of the Jews in that country, or for their safe passage through it. They succeeded in making tolerably favorable conditions.³ The pain of leaving their homeland could not be assuaged. The nearer the day came, the more unhappy and terror stricken did the people become.

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- 1) Introduction to the book of Kings- In the introduction to Deut., I.A. describes the security felt by the Jews in Spain and their pain at being forced to leave; he also recounts the suffering during the exodus.
 2) Graetz Vol IV, page 351
 3) Lea Vol I page 137- A cruzado a head for permission to enter and reside for 6 months, was demanded.

At last the day arrived upon which the Jews had to depart. According to Graetz, they were accorded two extra days beyond July 31st. Their departure fell, ironically enough, on the anniversary of the ninth of Ab. The terror and distress of the exodus were greatly increased by an edict of Torquemada, forbidding a Christian, after August ninth, to give any Jew food or shelter. The sacrifices of the exiles were tremendous. Their nonportable property had to be sold for a trifle. Worse, they could not find buyers, and had to take an ass in trade for a house, a vineyard, was sold for a piece of linen. Their synagogues were confiscated and converted into churches. As they left Spain, they were at the mercy of the people in whose land they found themselves. They were robbed, murdered, violated, and sold into slavery. Many wandered back to Spain, naked, starving and lousy, to be baptized Christians. The number of the exiles is not known exactly. According to Abravanel there were 300,000 who left Spain.¹ Some say there were as many as 400,000, but Lea concludes

1) Introduction to the book of Kings- *לְבָרְכֵי מֶלֶךְ*
עַל הַמִּלְחָמָה הַזֶּה

that even 235,000 is too large an estimate.¹

In the group that left Spain was Isaac Abrevanel. He states in his introduction to the Book of Kings, that the exiles went to different lands; some went to Portugal, Navarre, Provence, to Africa, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. The bitter suffering of the unfortunate cast-offs is also described by the Jewish leader. Together with his family, at the age of fifty-three, he took a ship to Naples:

וְאִנִּי
בְּתוֹךְ יְהוּדֵי בֵּית דָּוִד הַבְּנוּיִם
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל הָעָם הַזֶּה
..... נִאֲבָלִים

This was his second exile.

1) Lea Vol I, page 142

וישם יצחק שלו ושלוה ל ימי החולך פירדנאנדו

1) Otsar Nechmad- Vol II, page 51

ויכתוב את פירושו על ספר מלכים
וישם אותו יום האחרון מחג אלול
שנ' רנ"ג

his son Alfonso II. He, too, had his father's respect for Abravanel's ability and permitted him to retain the position to which he had been appointed by his parent.

When Naples was invaded in 1495 by Charles VII of France, the new king was forced to flee. With him went Isaac Abravanel who, alone, of all his ministers had remained true to him in his misfortune.¹ He stayed with him until the King fell ill with a fatal malady in 1495. At this time Isaac Abravanel was fifty-seven and this was his third and last exile.

So he returned to the mainland forlorn and unhappy. His grief was not so much over the loss of his royal patrons, Ferdinand and Alfonso of Naples, as it was over his property in Naples and his library of precious books.² For while he had been with King Alfonso the French had plundered his house and all his property; books etc., were all taken away. Weary of heart, He turned toward the isle of Corfu. He must have been all but crushed in spirit because of this third forced exile.³ With no political activity to demand his time he

1) According to Carmoly, in the article in Otsar Nechmad Vol II, page 51, the king fled to Messina on the island of Sicily. With him also went I.A. Dr. Mann believes this is unlikely, and rightly so, for Sicily belonged to Ferdinand of Spain, and I. A. would not have been tolerated there.

2) Introduction to Mayene HaYeshuah- י"ל כ"א
י"ל כ"א
י"ל כ"א

3) In I.A.'s preface to Zevach Pesach written in 1496, he writes-- my wife and my sons are far away from me, and in another country, and I am left alone, an alien in a strange land

again devoted himself to literary pursuits. In the month of Av, 1495 he began his commentary on Book of Isaiah. His work was suspended and laid aside because of a special circumstance. To his joy, there was found in Corfu, his commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, begun in his youth, and taken from him when he was obliged to flee from the cruel King-Joao II. Long ago, he had given it up as lost but now he determined to complete it and on a large scale. He himself writes in his introduction to Deuteronomy: "וּבְחִמְלָא ה'

עָלַי הָאֵל הָאֵל עָלַי קִרְבּוֹ וְאֵל פִּי, וְהִנֵּה הִקְרִי
אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵי מִי שְׂמִיטָה בְּפִירוֹשׁ הַסֵּפֶר
בְּדֶגֶשׁ יִפְסֵי צִהְלָה וְשִׁמְחָה בְּחֻזְקָה הוּ
וְנִשְׁקָה לִּי וְתִאֲמַר אֲוִסִּיבָה נָא בְּעִדְלִי וְהִלֵּל
כִּינֹה מְהִיל לִי

Abravanel did not stay in Corfu for a sustained period. As soon as the French departed from Neapolitan territory he went to the city of Monopoli in the district of Apulia, in the kingdom of Naples. There he spent eight years, probably the most active in his literary career, for there most of his works were written or rewritten.

His commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy was finished

there on the twentieth of Shevat in 1496. Shortly thereafter, he compiled *ḥoṣ ḥaṣ* on the Haggadah of Passover. On the eleventh of Tammuz in the same year, at the request of his youngest son, Don Samuel, he completed *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*, Ethics of the Fathers, and in 1497 his work on the Book of Daniel *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*, a work of which he was very proud, was done. His literary activity continued in 1498, with the Book *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*, his discussion of Maimonidean philosophy based on the Moreh; *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*, his discussion of prophecy, the Messiah, Redemption, also *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*. These last three works he labelled *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*. Furthermore, he also finished in that city his commentary on Isaiah in 1498.

Between 1498 and 1502, Isaac wrote Rosh Amana and *ḥaḥaḥ ḥaḥaḥ*. In 1503, he went, at the suggestion of his second son, Don Joseph, from Monopoli, to Venice, where he was to pass the last years of his life. Here, once again, he was to be drawn into the political arena. The city council, being aware of his able and clever statesmanship asked him for counsel in a problem they had, regarding sea trade. He was employed to effect a treaty between Portugal,

his native country, and the Republic of Venice, respecting spice trade. His work was successful and he received honor from the leaders of the republic. Soon afterwards, with his position secure in that land, his oldest son, Don Judah, joined him there.

His interest in literary and theological work was again manifest, for he began to write a commentary on the Book of Jeremiah. This was finished by Erev Shabuoth in 1504. He also began a commentary on the Book of Ezekiel and on the twelve minor Prophets, as well as on the first four Books of the Bible. They were all written or rewritten before his death, although the exact date of completion is not known.¹

In 1507, when he was sixty-eight year old, Isaac received a communication from Candia, from a learned Jew, Rabbi Saul Hacoen. The latter asked twelve questions pertaining to philosophical matters. These were answered shortly thereafter, in a graceful and charming manner. To the very last he worked zealously at his studies. Before his death he wrote a book called *'se shon* to contradict the reasoning of Maimonides. However, the book has never been found. Several other works were begun or contemplated but were never completed.²

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- 1) But at the end of I.A.'s commentary on the book of Shemoth, he writes that it was finished in Venice on the first of Marcheshvan in 1505.
 - 2) E.g. Lahakath HaNebiim

In the summer of 1509, at the age of seventy-one, he died. He was esteemed by non-Jew, as well as Jew, and all paid homage to him in death. His body was taken to Padua and there in an ancient burial ground he was interred. Five days later, the learned Rabbi Judah Menz of Padua passed away, and he was buried beside Isaac Abravanel. Yet the unfortunate Abravanel did not find peace even in death for the following year, Padua was besieged and the battle occurred near the grave yard. The city walls were destroyed and the graves of the learned Jews suffered the same fate so that, the site of Isaac's burial plot was completely obliterated.

It is interesting to observe that in spite of his political career which seemed to be most important to him in early life, Isaac Abravanel found time to write at all, and that his literary activity should revolve about his people. His enthusiasm for the Jews never abated in spite of the honor and wealth he attained in Portugal, Spain and Italy.¹ Most of his works, as we have seen, were written after his exiles and troubles had humbled him and deprived him of his lofty station. In his answer to Rabbi Saul HaCohen,

1) An elegy written in the Kovetz al Yad, Vols VIII, IX (1899)- page 7-- describes I.A.'s ability and interest in his people.

בספרו "התשובה לרבי שולחן ערוך" - חלק א' - פרק כ"ג

Isaac Abravanel confesses that it was only after he had experienced pain and sorrow that he recognized his true destiny, as theologian and exegete, and not as statesman and politician; yet as one leaves the work of this great personality, one cannot help but feel that primarily he was a statesman and that this confession was simply a rationalization and adjustment of a frustrated , helpless man.

THE SONS OF ISAAC ABRAVANEL

Abravanel's children were worthy sons of their father for they distinguished themselves as he had before them. They had attained their maturity in Italy (although they had even distinguished themselves earlier) and soon began to play a vital role in Italian Jewish life. Isaac himself, was becoming too old and infirm to continue his previous active existence. Furthermore, he apparently could not adjust himself as easily as his sons did to his new homeland. For the latter had made an easy and rapid adjustment to this new milieu.

The best known and most outstanding of all was the oldest, Judah Leon Abravanel. He was born in Lisbon in 1460 and died in Venice in 1535. With his death a long chain of profound philosophical intellects isterminated-- and is not linked again or reborn for many years. An astute and capable individual; gifted with a charming personality, he rose quickly into prominence. His thinking, however, had more of an effect upon the non-Jewish world than it did upon his own people. He occupied himself little with the work of biblical and Talmudic

character; his chief interest being in philosophic thought.

When his father returned to Italy from Messina and settled upon the isle of Corfu, Judah remained in Genoa where he practised medicine. But his other interests intrigues him more and he devoted himself to the study of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and poetry. Judah's intellect soon began to impress the non-Jewish world and he gained the acquaintance of a number of cultured Italians, among whom was the great thinker, Pico della Mirandola.¹ In Judah's excursions into astronomy he developed an astronomical instrument or device and also wrote a book about "Heavenly Harmony" (which unfortunately was lost). The diversity of his interests stamps him as a true child of the renaissance and a forerunner of those who began to rebel against the autocracy of the Catholic church.

Like his father, Judah, when the family resided in Spain, had had many friends among the Spanish grandees. It is not unlikely that through their influence he could have stayed in Spain and been unharmed. While he was there his

1) Jüdisches Lexikon- page 51--Art. on Abravanel and Sons- Vol I

acquaintances secured for him the position of physician to General Gonsalva de Cordova.¹ The latter was a benevolent man and friendly to the Jews. He had occasion to demonstrate his fine character by tacitly refraining from carrying out an order of Ferdinand, king of Spain. The latter had ordered that the inquisition be instituted in Naples, which had become a Spanish possession. His purpose was to capture many Spanish and Portuguese Marranos who had escaped there. The Jews under fire were allowed to flee to other Italian cities; Judah was permitted to remain in the community and was untouched by the royal ruling. He continued in his capacity as physician to the general until 1507 and even stayed in Naples when the city was visited by Ferdinand. But when the general was removed from his position of responsibility, Judah went to Venice where his father and brother, Joseph (also a physician) were living.

Because of his literary and philosophic pursuits and his experiences in Naples, Judah had mastered the Italian language and he set himself to the task of writing a book on love in Italian. In 1502 he published his

1) Jüdisches Lexikon- page 51, Vol I-- Art. on Abravanel and Sons.

'Dialoghi dell' Amore' or Sichot HoAhavah, a work which is considered a masterpiece in Italian literature.

This book is a philosophic discussion between a man and a woman about love and the problems of life. In this book Judah declares, that one of the most important things in life, is love or the desire to attach oneself to something, and be one with it. God, he goes on to state, has created the world out of love and through this principle the spiritual world is united with the material world. Man too, must be filled with love and approach God in that spirit. His character becomes finer and better by the presence of this force within him. Judah discusses very little the matter of religion; nevertheless, he takes pains to prove that the world was created in accordance with the biblical account in Bereshith and not in accordance with the philosophic reasoning of Aristotle or any of the other philosophers.

More Christians were familiar with Judah's book than Jews. Cultured Italians were proud of the fact that such a fine piece of writing had been done in their tongue. So the book became popular and was read widely. It was not

long before it was translated into French --and later into Latin and Spanish. The latter translation was made by a Jew, who also dedicated the work to the Spanish monarch.

Many things were written by Judah in Hebrew, particularly a poem to his son, who had been forcibly held in Portugal when Judah left, and raised as a Christian. In the poetry he poured out his cup of sorrow and lamented over what had happened to his offspring. He beseeches his son to remember that he is a Jew, to study the Hebrew language and literature and not to forget the heartache and pain his parents suffered because of this separation.

One of Judah's poems *השמן הרב*, describes in verse the events which occurred during his lifetime; his exiles and all the trouble he was obliged to undergo. Many times the family was separated and Judah writes while in Naples, of the pain of not being together with the other members of his family; --- *ואל ארצה אל*

אבד חיוני
ואל אחי ואל אחי ואבד אחי

השמן הרב
1) *השמן הרב*

Earlier in his life he was also separated from them. The family had moved to Spain but he had remained in Portugal. But family ties drew him to his parents and brothers; so he too went to Spain. For a time he lived in peace. He probably practised medicine in the new land. When the decree of expulsion was announced in 1492, he sent his little son to Portugal to save him from forced baptism. The child was seized by the soldiers of Joao II, the Portuguese monarch. Judah never stopped grieving for his son. What ultimately became of him is not known.

Isaac Abrevanel's youngest son, Samuel was born in 1473 at Lisbon. He was completely unlike his older brother, for he was not interested in philosophy or poetry. A good Talmudist, he played an important part in the life of Italian Jewry. His Talmudic studies, as a youth, were obtained at the famous Yeshibah of Salonica. There he distinguished himself under the able guidance of Joseph Fasi. Samuel was considerably like his father in his Jewish literary interests (although he was not interested in philosophy) and in his

financial ability. Sometime after the Abravanel family moved to Naples he was called to ^{the} Neapolitan court as finance minister to Don Pedro de Toledo. Through his position and contacts he amassed a great fortune (\$450,000). The poet Samuel Usque said that he deserved the appellation "Tremegisto", thrice great, for he was great in scholarship, great in ancestry, and great in wealth.¹ He was very generous and used his wealth to promote the welfare of his people. Many orphans were enabled to marry because of his philanthropy; he supported the needy, redeemed captives, and embodied, as a whole, the characteristics of the prophet. His home was a meeting place for the Jews, particularly for scholars and students. He was a patron of any Jewish literary endeavors. Among his friends were the Portuguese refugee David ben Yahya, who became rabbi of Naples and the cabalist, Baruch of Benevento.

When Charles V issued an edict to expel the Jews from Naples, Benvenida, wife of Samuel, an intimate of Leonora, the Duchess of Tuscany, was able to have the edict revoked through the assistance of the latter. Several years later when Charles V told the Jews to either leave the land

1) Jewish Encyclopedia-- Vol I, page 129

or wear a badge, Samuel and his family moved to Ferrara. There Samuel lived until his death in 1551. Many of the other Jews who left Naples went to Turkey.

In the home Samuel there gathered not only prominent Jews but also many learned Christians. Talmud was studied there and Jewish literature in general. Italian Jews who were Cabbalists came there to expound the Zohar. Among the Christians was the learned Johan Wiedmanstadt, a disciple of Reuchlin, who came there to learn Hebrew. Other non-Jews who visited Samuel came in contact with the proponents of the Cabbala and were influenced by their teaching.

The other son of Isaac Abravanel, Joseph, was also born at Lisbon in 1471. He, too, was a physician and when the Abravanel family moved to Italy, he established himself in Venice where he was very successful. Later in life he moved to Ferrara and joined his brother, Samuel. He died in 1552.

Some descendants of the family were to be found in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century.

THE WRITINGS OF ISAAC ABRAVANEL

Distinguished as Abravanel was as a statesman, even so was he as a writer. Though not entirely original or rich with ideas, his writings contain much interesting material based upon his cultural and religious interests, and also upon his worldly experiences, which merit reading. A convenient division of his work is suggested by the author of the article in the Jewish Encyclopedia. It is divided into three classes. The first is exegesis, consisting of his commentary on the Bible, with the exception of the Kesubim; the second is philosophy; and the last is in the nature of apologetics, written in defense of the Jewish doctrine of the Messiah.

His commentary is more valuable than some written before him because of his accurate estimation of the historical viewpoint in the life of the Jewish people. Those biblical scholars who preceded him were too far removed from the actual conditions of the work to have a proper perspective of the historical epochs and episodes described in the Bible. Abravanel, who had himself been identified with the politics of the day, correctly perceived that a mere

consideration of the literary aspects of the Scriptures would not suffice, but that the social and political life of the people must also be taken into account. Moreover he recognized the value of prefacing the individual Books of the Bible with a general introduction concerning the character of the Book, its date of composition, and the authors' intentions. The virtues of Abravanel's commentaries were especially appreciated by Christian scholars of the succeeding centuries. Men like Buxtorf (the younger), Buddeus and Carpzov, scrutinized Abravanel's biblical writing closely; condensed it and translated it, thereby introducing it to the world of Christian scholarship. Perhaps a great deal of their appreciation was due to Abravanel's tolerant attitude toward the Christian exegetes Jerome, Augustine, and Nicholas de Lyra, all of whom he studied and quoted.

Important in Isaac's commentary on the Torah is his writing upon the Book of Deuteronomy. Originally planned while he was a youth in Portugal, it was not finished until he was in Italy. He had become interested with the problem of

Deuteronomy even when he lived with his father. In his introduction he states that he placed questions before some of the well-known men of his time regarding Deuteronomy and each man answered according to his own experience. In short, there was no general explanation of the book.¹ His purpose was to point out the fundamental teachings of the book, which old and contemporary commentators had never pointed out.

A traditionalist in his outlook, Abravanel believed in the divine origin of the Torah. He writes that every thing emanates from God, even until the word ² *lo yirf* *here*, which conclude the Book of Deuteronomy. For him, everything is the word of God, without deviation or change; only it was written by Moses under divine inspiration or ³ guidance. He quotes Nachmanides' opening comment on this work to indicate the purpose of the Book, only to disagree with it.

מלאני לבי לשאול שאלה גדולה כוללת ספר אחד העברים
משה מורה אשר עם משה לפני בני ישראל ואתה אותה לפני
כל יודי דת ודין וכן גדולי חכמי הארץ יושבי ירושלים ודוכי
נתיבות ורבות, וראשי הישיבות, וישיבו אותי דבר איש איש כשאלו דם לבבו...
ועודי לי ציון בהתחלה גדולה וצדקה לי מלמדים יחדיו יהיה תמיד
בפרוש הספר הזה

2) Introduction to Deut. הדברים ספר אלף ר' זנוני לומר

השנים והדברים אשר בו משה אמר היה מאת ה' מן תורה חבור/שית עד צדן כל ישראל הבטורה בית דברי

I.A. declares, if Moses actually compiled and wrote the Torah, he did it as he understood the divine intention; that is, he did what God would have wished one to do.

3) e.g. I.A. quotes Baba Bathra, 15 a, to show Moses wrote under divine guidance. Even the last eight verses of Deut

For Nachmanides it was threefold. Firstly, to warn the people and to remind them of their sins, how they rebelled against Moses in the wilderness and how they were treated mercifully despite their murmurings;¹ - secondly, to inform them of new commandments which were not stipulated in preceding books and last was, to repeat some of the laws for those who were to enter Canaan and to add some explanation of them, inasmuch as many of those who entered Canaan were not present at Mount Sinai. With a shrewd eye, Abravanel attempts to see everything logically and he grouped all arguments, for and against, in one, two and three, order. In answer to the earlie exegete, Abravanel writes that Debarim would be a weak book if its purpose were only to comfort the people and tell them their sins would be forgiven. His rejoinder to the second and third

from *Devarim* and following, God dictated and Moses wrote; the latter continued writing while the Lord said 'Moses died'.

1) Introduction to the book of Deut.

arguments is that all the laws were explicit or implicit on Mount Sinai.

Then Isaac goes on to declare that it was not Moses' idea in this book to warn Israel, nor did God utter new Mitzvoth which were not declared previously but it was his purpose to explain laws and commandments which required explanation. This alone was its intent.¹ He did not feel it necessary to explain those laws which are treated at length elsewhere but did elucidate upon that which was implicit or discussed briefly previously.

His comments on the book proper are very verbose and unwieldy because of their length. Yet they are interesting because of Abravanel's unusual approach. He examines each Parashah closely, and sees questions which might vex a reader. For example in Parshas *ויקרא* , he finds fourteen *פסוקים* . He enumerates them and answers them in detail.² With these obstacles removed he can continue with his interpretation and comment on verses and words. In this manner he discusses every obstacle which confronts him. Endeavoring first to discover the outstanding

1) Introduction to the book of Deut. -

כוננו בזה לבאר את התורה והמצוות אותם שדין
צריכים ביאור וכמו שאמר הואיל משה באר את
התורה בלשון פשוטה

2) Ibid

difficulties, he lists them; then follows a discussion and explanation of each. Many times in an effort to explain one thing, he simplifies and breaks the subject down so completely that the reader is lost in a labyrinthian maze. For example, in commenting upon the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4 is

שמו ישראל ה'
 אלֵהינו ה' אחד וא' עד כי יביאך וא'. בְּזוֹרֶךְ
 חמשת הפרשיות האלה שבאו אחר עשרת
 הדברות רצופות זו לזו וצנינים ראיתי אני
 אחר ההסתכלות אברשם דעה בדרכי הדעה והוא
 שלביות כונת חשה אפונינו להיכיר לישראל
 ששמואל אשר שמו חבי הלבורה זכר אליהם
 עשרת הדברות אשר שמו חסין יש
 בכללן ערב מרדים צליונים שאם לא הבין
 וילמדו אותם מפיו ... ולפי הדבור הראשון
 היה אנכי ה' אלֵהינו וא' הא צליון הפרשה
 ראשונה מאלה החמשה פרשיות והיה שמו
 ישראל וא' וביאר אליהם ה' חמשה מרדים
 יקריק בלולים האות דבור ראשון ...
 המדבר הראשון הוא יחוד אלֵהינו ...
 והנה באחד יכלול שני מיני אחדות

First he associates the Shema with the Ten Commandments; then he points out that in the verses of the Shema there are embodied five important principles which require explanation. He cites one, which is unity, then points out that there are two kinds of unity. Before long he is lost in a philosophic discussion and he spends two pages in discussing various aspects of the problem. Be it remembered, however, that the sum of his conclusions is by no means to be laughed at. His difficulty was one of expression. He could not express himself with the lucidness of a Rashi; nor could he be as concise as the French Jewish commentator. But his views are sound and intelligent. And for his day, his historical approach, as we shall see soon, was something new and a distinct contribution.

It was most evident in his commentary on the *פירוש* *הנביאים*, the earlier prophets which was written in Toledo shortly after his flight from Lisbon. Here is clearly evidenced his political insight. Seeking to describe the political intrigues and events in Palestine of the biblical period, his experience as minister and identification with worldly affairs

and foreign languages and literature, helped him considerably. Previous to him, exegetes had done little work on the early prophets and the life of Israel when it first settled in Canaan. His was one of the first adequate treatments of that period. In spite of his keen perception of the life of his people and his knowledge of philosophy he nevertheless, maintained in his Perush a strong conservative point of view. He was a fundamentalist in his outlook when the subject was the Bible and he would not countenance any diminution or addition of it as advocated by some Jewish philosophers. He excoriated Apikorsus and his feeling was that the Spanish Jews suffered the Inquisition and the Exodus because of this very failing.

Abrevanel's commentary on the Book of Joshua is most interesting because of the auto-biographical matter contained in the introduction.¹ Following this, he launches into a discussion of the book proper. His desire, at the outset, is to point out why the Holy Books are divided into three classes; namely, Torah, Nebiim, and Kesuvim. The rabbis made this distinction to indicate the perfection of a certain section. The first section was called Torah, to distinguish the book of the teaching of God from the other holy

1) See autobiographical refs. on previous pages

books, because of its noble category. It contained *מגילות האק"ו* as distinguished from the other books. The next book is called Nebiim, not to distinguish it from the book of the Torah, for the latter is in a class by itself by virtue of its being Torah, but to show its high category as distinguished from the Kesuvim, so that all would know that its (Nebiim) authors were prophets and that those who wrote the Kesuvim were not, but only individuals who spoke through the Holy Spirit.

Then Abravanel treats the Christian division of Scriptures into four sections.¹ The first was called

"*חוק*", the Legal Section, the Torah or the five Books of Moses: the second was "*חזק*", the Historical Section, the Books of Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Daniel, Ezra, Esther; the third, "*נביא*", the Prophetical Section, consisting of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, the twelve minor prophets (Hosea, etc.), end of book of Daniel, Psalms; the last, "*חכמה*", consisting of wisdom literature; the Books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastics, and the Songs of Songs.

1) Introduction to Joshua-

ואתחנן	חכמי	הנזירים	ואתחנן
הקדש	הקדש	הקדש	הקדש
נבואה	נבואה	נבואה	נבואה

Another three fold classification of Scriptures is described by the exegete. This one is in reference to the time of writing. In the first division is again the Torah, - those books written before Israel was in Palestine; the second contains the group of books written while the Jews were in Palestine before the exile and the destruction of the Temple, - they are the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Megilloth, Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah (these men prophesied in the days of the kings of Judah and Israel), Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes (which David and Solomon collected): the last group is composed of those books collected and written after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel, - they are Ezekiel, Esther, Ezra, Chronicles, the prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The writing of the book of Job is difficult to determine. Abravanel writes, if it were written by Moses, as the sages believe it was, it should be placed into the first division.¹ If Job lived in the days of the Judges,

1) Baba Bathra - א"י א"

as rabbi Eliezer believes,¹ the book should be placed into the second section. If he lived in the days of Esther, as rabbi Joshua ben Korcha thinks, or if he were one of those who returned from exile and he lived in Tiberias, as rabbi Jochanan believes, his book should be placed in the third division.²

The author, after the introductory remarks as regards the division of the Scriptures, proceeds to discuss the four books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings.) Four things interest him in each book; the writer, the form, the ethical principles, and the purpose of each book. The last point is examined first. A general statement is made about the purpose of the four books which is to teach us to use and learn the noble and exalted truths uttered in them. The purpose of the book of Joshua is to describe the entrance of Israel into the land of Canaan, how it conquered and possessed it (in short, to fulfill the promises of God uttered in the Torah). The remaining books purpose is to show that, when the Israelites were bad and sinned against God, they were defeated

1) Baba Bathra-
2) Ibid

by their enemies but when they obeyed God they would prevail over them.¹ When Abravanel comes to regard the author of the book of Joshua he departs from the tradition that it was written by Joshua himself. The rabbis of the Talmudic period believed that he did but Isaac advances reasons for not making a similar statement. For example, at the conclusion of the book it says, וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Moreover it is written regarding הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל, this statement (Joshua 4:9) וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Many other discrepancies and anachronisms are cited which would prove that the Book of Joshua was written after his death. The same criticism is applied to the Book of Samuel and, to Abravanel, it is patent that Samuel didn't write his book. In the incident of the ark of the covenant in the land of the Philistines, it is written (I Samuel 5:5).

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל

The phrase "unto this day," shows that it was written after the actual incident. Another example is that of Saul's experience with Samuel (I Samuel 9:9) וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל

All this would seem to show that the book of Samuel was written at a time when the seer was no longer alive.

1) Abravanel raises this question- since Samuel was also a judge, why was not this book included in the book of Judges. A separate book of Samuel, declares the author, as a token of Samuel's greatness.

Abravanel's conclusion, although unsupported by proof,¹ is that Samuel wrote the books of Joshua and Judges, for it never says (as it says in the Torah, that Moses wrote it), that Joshua wrote the book of Joshua. As for the book of Samuel, Abravanel believes that some statements of David were undoubtedly written by Samuel and others were written by Nathan and Gad: that is, Samuel began his book but it was completed by the two last named prophets. Each man wrote about what took place in his day. Then Jeremiah collected the writings of these men and edited the books, adding wherever he thought it was necessary.² He may even have edited the book of Joshua.

These four books are written in the same manner as the prophetic literature. The reasons given are, - because Samuel and Jeremiah were prophets, the writers were commanded by God to write these books; God revealed things to them which were only revealed to prophets. The ethical utterances are embodied, more or less, in the purpose of

1) Introduction to the book of Joshua ומנ' זה
 כאלו חשבה אני שיהיה לא כתב ספרו אלא
 שמואל הנביא כתבו וכתב יד ספר שופטים

2) Introduction to the book of Judges ושמואל
 שאלו ידעו הנביא קצתם ופירם יחד וסדר הסדר
 כאלו ידעו פיהם וזה כאלו אמרו עד היום עד זכר והא
 היה מה שכתב לפנים בישראל ודו -

the books, and involve, of course, faithfulness to God and adherence to his commands.

The introduction to the book of Judges deals with the differences between judgeship and kingship. Before the commentary proper, Abravanel divides the book into twelve parts; the battles of each tribe after the death of Joshua; a general description of how Israel forsook God on numerous occasions and the punishment which followed; the prophecy of Deborah and the war of Barak with Sissera and salvation through God and Song of Deborah; activities of Gideon before his battles, the wars of Gideon with the Midianites; the activities of the sons of Gideon; Jephthah and the Amonites'; vision of Manoach; battles of Samson; incident of Micah and the Levite; story of the concubine at Gibah and what Israel did to the men of Yabesh Gilead. There follows a number of questions and before each new chapter Abravanel raises problems which are answered in the course of the commentary upon the chapter.

The introduction to the book of Samuel contains no biographical material but is devoted to the subject exclusively. Since Abravanel has declared that Samuel did not write the entire book of Samuel, he must now answer a doubt or question which might arise in the minds of his reader, - why the book is called by his name. Moreover, a deed is usually accredited to the person who completes a task. Moses brought the bones of Joseph out of Egypt, but the credit for the work goes to the children of Israel who actually completed the task. According to this reasoning, Nathan or Gad, who completed Samuel should have their names on the book.¹ But there were two reasons which operated in favor of calling this book Samuel. The events and activities all bear the imprint of Samuel's thinking and power (Saul and David anointed through him). It would have been fitting, true, to incorporate the stories of Eli and Samuel, in the book of Judges and those of Saul and David, in the book of Kings. Although the kingship of David is the ultimate concern

1) Introduction to the book of Samuel- I.A. quotes Jerome's organization of the Bible, in which the book of Samuel is included in the book of Kings.

of Samuel, the book is named after the latter because of his holiness and consecration (story of Hannah) and because he prepared the way for David.¹ Furthermore, a book is usually accredited to the teacher or father, and not to the son or disciple, - and since David stood in relation to Samuel as a son to a father, the book bears the same of the seer (כַּל שֶׁן בְּיָוֶה שְׁמֹאל)

הוא הרב הוא האב ואב הוא הבן
הוא התלמיד הוא הנמשך אל יבו
שכר הדין היה ראוי שיקרא הספר על שמו

Another question is brought forward. "Why is it that Samuel did not recount all of the acts of David; why did he omit some, (e.g. דָּוִד וְהַלְלוּ יְיָ, the song of David, the words spoken by David unto Solomon, the Levites and their duties, the organization of the army, the treasury, agricultural legislation, pastoral life, the building of the Temple).

This problem provokes another. Why does Ezra the Scribe (whom Abravanel credits with writing the book) repeat in the book of Chronicles what had already been

1) In the introduction to Samuel, Abravanel discusses the difference between Samuel and David. To his mind, Samuel was greater because he reached the heights of prophecy אֲזִינוּת תְּבוּאָה but David only merited אֲזִינוּת יְיָ הַקָּדֹשׁ. This is an interesting sidelight on the exegete's evaluation of Biblical figures and his religiosity.

said in the book of Samuel? And why does he omit some things mentioned in Samuel if he does repeat some. For example, there is no citation of the Jews in Egypt or in the wilderness, ^{of} the works of Moses, even though Ezra began with the generations of Adam: nor is there any mention of the books of Joshua and Judges. Also omitted are the story of Eli, the priest, Samuel, the Seer, Goliath, Bathsheba, and Uriah, Amnon, and Tamar, the famine in the days of David, rule of Jeroboam, and other Kings. There must have been a reason for Ezra's deliberate omission of these events and individuals.

Abbravanel answers the first question in the following manner. The book was interested in the deeds of David only as they were related to the purpose of teaching the worship of God.¹ It was interested in his sins, his punishments, his wrath, but not in those acts which did not come within the realm of religion. The story of the return of the Ark is related because it describes

1) Introduction to the book of Samuel. ואומר
ש'הקב"א פנה כוון אל עבר ציון ד"ה וחדש הרבאים ...
אמרת האמוה ארבות האל יתברך

David's perfection and saintliness. Therefore, the incident of the Levites and their song is not mentioned because they do not testify to David's perfection. The manner of building the Temple is not written in order to credit the building to Solomon since God wished it to be built by him¹ (I Samuel VII ואמר ה' אלפי הוא (יבנה בית לשי).

The answer to the second question follows. In the preface to the book of Joshua, Abravanel tells us that the books which follow the Torah were written by prophets inspired by the word of God. They included certain things and omitted others for a purpose. Ezra had no such divine command to write the book of Chronicles. Hence, he wrote a great many details of the reign of David but the book of Samuel is didactic in purpose, - endeavouring to teach the people the knowledge and fear of God. והספר הזה כב' ההכרח והרצון האלקי לאמר בני אדם יראו וייראו "ה. Many historical events are left untold by Ezra because he was interested in leading up to the growth of the Davidic dynasty; in discussing its past, its present,

1) The rabbis said that the Temple was said to have been built by Solomon, because it was known that it was destined to be destroyed and God did not want other nations to say it was destroyed because it was built out of the money realized from the plunder and robbery of David. This, however, is a weak argument, Abravanel rightly observes.

and its future. That which was unrelated to this purpose was intentionally overlooked. Ezra also described David's perfection and nobility, but not his sins and wrong doings because the latter did not fit into the picture he wished to portray - פ'רצת וכל

וסאל היזב ר'ק
 מ'חטא'ו וע'שו וסאל ע'ני'ו לא רא' ע'נא
 אספ'ר'ק

Similarly those stories disregarded in Chronicles had to be, because they did not lead up to David's greatness.

The introduction to the book of Kings is again autobiographical in character.¹ Following the personal narratives, the author begins a study of the Kings of the Jews and concludes ten things regarding them. All the Kings after Jeroboam were idolaters and false worshippers of God;² the Kings of Judah were superior to the Kings of Israel, because they were lineal descendants from the stem of Jesse, while the Kings of Israel were recruited from any tribe. In addition, the Kings of Israel were not anointed while those of Judah were. The third fact is the righteousness of the Kings and their wickedness. The Kings

1) See biography in part I

2) Introduction to the book of Kings - וואאס אגראד
... צו זיין צומאקען דעם ספר

of Judah were both good and bad but those of Israel were all bad.¹ There were nineteen Kings in Judah and Israel after the division of the kingdom. This conclusion is strange for Abravanel, - that each kingdom should have had the same number of kings. Yet the kings of Judah ruled one hundred and fifty-two years longer than the Kings of Israel. This was no accident, nor inexplicable, declares the exegete. This was the word of God. It showed that fear of God meant long life. He writes:

ואם תדין בספורי המלכים כלם המלכים
אלקים וחושבי שמו אשר היו במלכות יהודה
האריכו ימים הם ובניהם, לקיים מה שכתב
למען יאריכו ימים עם מלכותו הוא ובניו
הקרב ישראל (דברים י"ג ז')

The exiles sustained by Judah and Israel were seven.

The first one was carried out by Pul, King of Assyria; then came the exile of Tiglath Pileser, followed by Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, Nebuchednezzar (twice), and the last took place when Gedaliah was governor. Ishmael ben Nathaniah slew the appointed head of the Jews and exiled some people to Amon.

1) Introduction to the book of Kings - מלכי אמן
ישראל כלם בקצון כבודו ודחילו את ישראל
ועבדו אלקים אחרים.

Another exile took place in the days of the second Temple. According to Abravanel, this Temple lasted for four hundred and twenty years. Then Vespasian and Titus, his son, besieged and destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled many Jews to Rome.¹ They were later exiled by Hadrian to (ספרד) Spain. There were two other exiles, making a total of ten. Abravanel then describes the nature of the exiles, and the similarities between Judah and Israel. The difference in the exiles is also cited e.g. Israel was sent to the river Chebar and not Judah; Israel was sent far away but Judah was sent to Babylonia, to Egypt, to Amon; Israel was exiled one hundred and thirty-four years before Judah; Judah returned from its exiles but not Israel. The ninth matter deals with the men who prophesied during the reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah. Abravanel found there were more prophets in Judah than in Israel and he comes to the conclusion that this obtained since the men in Judah had Jerusalem as a fount of inspiration. The last treats of the appearance of the Messiah; when Israel will be gathered together and returned to their land, and a King (of the seed of Jesse) will rule over them. To substantiate this, he quotes

1) Introduction to the book of Kings ה'רמ"ב פסוק י"ג
 $\text{קיסר ואיל"ם קין ודור"ב ו'רמ"ב / אר"ב ה'}$
 $\text{וה'א' את ישראל אר"ב}$

from Ezekiel: ודשית אתם לאני אחד בארץ
 בברי ישראל ומלך אחד יהיה לכם למלך
 ולא יהיה עוד לפני אדום ולא יחזו עוד
 לפני מלכות עוד ... ועד כי בוא מלך עליהם

This was not merely a perfunctory statement of a general way of concluding a subject. This was a pious wish of Abravanel and a number of his works, as we shall soon observe, were devoted to the Messiah, the literature written about him and what the author himself thought of the possibilities of his appearance.

This introduction ends with a calendar of the Kings of Israel and Judah, the manner of succession to the throne, the length of their rule, and the priests who officiated in their times.

There is a second introduction to the book of Kings. Here is mentioned the fact that the information for these two books was gleaned from the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah. The reasons for the prophet's (Jeremiah)

writing the book at all, was as follows: Jeremiah wanted a book free from the unnecessary impedimenta which were contained in these Chronicles. He was not interested in details except as they described the reign of the Kings in so far as they were related to goodness and wickedness.

THE PHILOSOPHIC ACTIVITY OF ABRAVANEL

Although we cannot say that Isaac Abravanel was an original thinker, a profound philosopher or that he introduced anything new, we must, however, admit that his thinking did exert a wide influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As we have intimated previously, he believed completely in the Torah and would not admit any liberal interpretation of it. One of his best philosophical works was *פ' ענין פ' נע*, In this book, he endeavours to point out that the world was created ex nihilo. The question as to whether the world was created or not, was debated constantly by the philosophers of the Middle Ages. With Aristotle as an authority, many adhered to the Stagyrte's belief in the eternity of the world. For Abravanel, this would lead to all sorts of metaphysical problems; so he rejects it and clings to the biblical interpretation of *פ' ה' ו' א' ב' ג' ד' ה' ו' ז' ח' ט' י' י"א י"ב י"ג י"ד י"ה י"ו י"ז י"ח י"ט י"י* with the implication that God was the creator.

Another work which shall be treated more fully is indicative of Abravanel's philosophy is *פ' ה' ו' א' ב' ג' ד' ה' ו' ז' ח' ט' י' י"א י"ב י"ג י"ד י"ה י"ו י"ז י"ח י"ט י"י*. Here he takes issue with the liberal philosophers (especially Maimonides) and points out where they erred. The book consists of twenty-four chapters and deals with what Abravanel regards as the cardinal principles of religion. But first are enumerated the fundamental doctrines and principles of Maimonides. Then follow the views of other philosophers.


I) Rosh Amana --- Chapter I --- The existence of a creator who is a perfect essence in all aspects, the cause of all existences and their continuing existence; His oneness, is not unity of a general kind, nor a compound unity capable of being divided, nor a simple unity which may be susceptible to infinite division; Lack of corporeality, the Deity is no body or force within a body and has no attributes of body as motion, rest etc. either in essence or in accident; God is the First truth; God only to be worshipped by man and there is no mediator between God and man; Prophecy, every person should understand that man possesses many qualities and potentialities, so that his soul can be purified to such a degree that he becomes susceptible to the most abstract intelligence and the human intellect can be joined with the active intellect, by which exercise he attains an exalted quality of discrimination and penetration; Prophecy of Moses --- we should believe he was the father of all prophets, of those who preceded and followed him (Moses' prophetic power, says Abravanel, was distinguished from the other prophets in four ways; they were inspired by intermediaries; Moses was inspired directly by God, as it is written --- $\text{וְהָיָה כִּי יִרְאֶה אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָמָּוֶת}$. They They prophesied only in dreams, in visions when corporeal sensation

pe 7f 573/11. The prophets were overawed by
their vision; their bodies trembled and shook so that some-
times they almost died. As Daniel wrote ו כע, 6f1

Not so Moses. He never trembled because his intellect was closely connected with the universal intellect. The prophets did not receive divine messages whenever they wanted them but only when God desired to communicate through them, Moses, however, could prophesy whenever he wished, as it is written,

1.3.7. יאמר לו מזה נא , whoever

doubts the Messiah denies the Law which testifies to his coming; Ressurrection -- if a man believes these things he belongs to the community of Israel; if not, he excludes himself from the community.



Crescas stated in contradistinction to Maimonides that there were fundamental doctrines for Revealed Religions; these are, the existence of the deity, (which contains two other doctrines; namely the unity of God and lack of corporeality in God.)¹ The Revealed dogmas are, -- the omniscience of God, His Providence, Omnipotence, Prophecy, Moral Freedom of man, Object of existence. Next come the principles we believe and whoever denies them is a */ 'N* . They are the creation of the world by God, immortality of the soul, reward and punishment, resurrection, eternity of the Law, highest degree of prophecy in Moses, Urim and Tumim rendered divine messages, the coming of the Messiah. There are fundamental truths which are based upon particular commandments, which consist of prayer, repentance, Rosh Hashonah and the four seasons of the year. Crescas cites twenty attributes. Albo reduces them to three in his Ikkarim; these comprise, existence of the deity (including unity and spirituality), the Law revealed by God including a belief in prophecy and the superiority of Moses and the doctrine of reward and punishment which includes God's

1) Rosh Amana- Chapter 2

omniscience, providence, the Messiah and resurrection.

In the third chapter of Rosh Amana, Abravanel repeats the criticism of Maimonides fundamental principles by Albo and Crescas and also cites his own. Abravanel declares that the fifth principle of worshipping God is not fundamental but a particular command; the Messiah too, is not essential. He takes Maimonides to task for failing to mention certain principles like belief in miracles, the revelation on Mount Sinai, moral liberty, immortality of the soul, etc.¹ Then too, he wishes to know why the author of the Moreh stopped at thirteen attributes. Surely, he says, not because of the *אין דבר אלה*.

Later Abravanel describes his study of *אין דבר אלה* and the *אין דבר אלה*². He finds in perusing these works that there is a lack of consistency on Maimonides' part; that is, in the *אין דבר אלה* he breaks up the fundamental principles and in the first chapter he (Maimonides) declares there are only three. In another chapter he mentions three more. Finally a later chapter reveals still one more doctrine or seven in all. How then, can we correlate these

1) Seventeen objections are listed containing not only Abravanel's criticism, but also Crescas' and Albo's

2) Rosh Amana, Chapter 5

with the thirteen cardinal principles. The same criticism is given to the Mishneh Torah. Several doctrines are omitted here like love of God, fear of Him, etc. But most pointed of Abravanel's criticism is his remark that Maimonides lacked religiosity. He began with the Sefer Hamada by uttering the first doctrine as the "principle of all principles", when he should have said there is no such thing as principle of principles. The whole Torah was given by God, everything in it is fundamental and we can not say some things are more important and others are not important. Another criticism is the proof of Maimonides for resurrection. The latter obtained his from the Mishneh. To this Abravanel objects because the same doctrine is embodied in the Torah.

Although Abravanel criticised others for their theories about God we do not have any particular series of arguments of proofs for the attributes of God by the author himself. His commentary on Maimonides' Moreh, I, is composed of only six chapters in which he expresses his agreement with the opinion of Maimonides and defends the latter against Crescas' objections.¹

1) Guttman- Lehren d. Isaak Abravanel-Chapter 3, pages 48-50, discusses the argument

His argument is that no human being can penetrate to the being of God for He can only be known by his effects. When Moses says "God, show me your ways", it meant that he wished to comprehend God, through his actions. The phrase, God's existence, for Abravanel as it was for Maimonides, was not an amphibolic, but a homonymic designation. Moreover, we cannot apply attributes (in the sense of qualities), to the Deity because these would imply plurality. But the concept of the ten Sefiroth does not show anything but the actions or effect of God's work and do not supply us with an insight into his being. The difference between the various spheres do not necessarily mean plurality in God, for they are dissolved in his being where they become an absolute unity (not a unit in the sense of number for God is beyond number).

Abravanel's remarks about divine providence are interesting. They also proceed along Maimonides' interpretation of the same subject. It is bound up with the astrological and philosophical thinking of his day. Guttmann writes, " Es ist eine alte, allseitig anerkannte Wahrheit, dass die Schicksale der Völker von den Gesternen bestimmt werden und dass jedes Volk unter der Leitung eines bestimmten sternes stehe."¹ The fate of every people, as well as the fate

1) Guttmann- page 51

of every individual is determined by the course of the stars. Their movements cause the elements to combine and take form. The differences between people have their basis in the heavenly constellations. Man, says Abravanel, is divided into two parts; namely, the sensual world of corporeality and the intelligible world^{of} spirituality. In his corporeality he stands like the dumb animal under the influence of the stars. But in his spirituality he is subjected to the influence of the spirits of the spheres or to the separate intelligences. Since Israel is excellent both in body and soul, he stands directly under the hand of God, without the mediation of the spheres,- "Das israelitische Volk, durch körperliche und seelische Vollkommenheit besonders ausgezeichnet, untersteht, ohne Vermittlung einer Himmelssphäre oder eines Sphärengestes der unmittelbaren Führung Gottes. ¹

In each one of the three spheres there is a particular portion which is capable of receiving Providence. Among the three spheres is the uppermost one which emanated directly from God and which was directly moved by God. And Israel is like the uppermost intelligence or sphere among the nations. As Abravanel writes in

1) Guttman- page 52- In needs of the body, mankind as a whole depends upon the stars; in needs of the spirit, mankind depends upon the leadership of the intelligences. Biblical verses in proof- Deut. 4:19; Exodus 12:12

הנה אף כן עקבה עקבה — מנחם יצחק
 הקב"ה את העולם תלמיד ב' ישראל

Indeed Israel is subjected to the will of God without any restriction even as it was at Sinai when the entire nation, even though it was unprepared, received the revelation from God. The connection of a human being with God is possible only when an individual has risen to the splendor of the first sphere or intelligence.¹

And just as the ultimate purpose of man as a rational being differs from that of man as a creature of nature, in the same way, the ultimate purpose of a Jew as a Jew differs from his purpose as a human being. Because of this point of view, the Torah does not offer a speculative philosophy, for happiness is not achieved by logical deductions, nor is a higher stage in the human intellect achieved by logical deductions but by belief, by godly deeds $\leftarrow \text{2} \rightarrow$ and by the mediation of the teachings of the Torah. This point of view differs sharply from that of the philosophy of Averroes. The

1) Guttman, page 55- This, too, is part of Maimonides argument regarding Providence.

2) Guttman, page 55

latter declared that happiness is only possible through philosophical study. Continuing the argument for the hypostization of man, the statement is made that earthly goods are only given by Providence to man so that he may attain greater spiritual perfection. A place that is especially fit for Providence is the Holy Land. Those who live there are fortunate because they are connected directly¹ with God. Nevertheless, providence watches and will watch Israel forever.

From Providence we come to God's prescience and free will. All these matters, naturally, are bound up with theodicy. God is perfect; all perfect things and the knowledge of all things is united in him. The misfortune which comes upon man and does not seem to fit into his conception of Justice and God's knowledge of all things has its origin in man's lack of will and deed. There is a difference between the wisdom of the author of things and the wisdom of man. This argument, of course, is no argument at all, but an evasion. In sum, it means that man can never achieve the intelligence to understand

1) Abravanel is in accord, at this point, with Halevy-
vide Kusari II 8-15

the pain or woe which comes upon him. Man can only know things through sensual perception but God's knowledge is different. Though He is a spiritual being, He knows all material things. His knowledge does not depend upon existing matter nor can it learn anything through it. It is impossible to answer the question of how man obtains free will if God knows everything, because we can never say anything definite about God's knowledge. For the teaching of God's existence and God's unity, are axioms which are not to be doubted. A loop hole is provided by Isaac Abravanel, following the teaching of the Moreh; that although there is an absolute knowledge of God of all things, ----- there still remains an element of possibility or potentiality.¹

The matter of freedom of the will is restricted even further. Only rational beings have the right to freedom of the will. Freedom of the will and the realm of the possible allow themselves two aspects; namely, the principles of good and evil. Even though the stars dispose man to receive certain impressions, he is not completely determined by them. He has the possibility, through reason, to counteract these dispositions and to choose freely. Scriptures

1) I.A.'s comment upon Psalm 139-

ולכן מה שראו
 שיאמר בזה כפי הדיון האלו הוא שכל
 כפי השקפה האלו הוא הכרחי, אמנם ידועים החלקים
 המובאים אליו הם אפשריים בחירות כי היה
 אפשר שימנע אותו התכלית השנויה לפני ית' באופנים
 רבים מתחלתם ולא ישיג הכרח לאדם מהם.

teaches freedom of the will (viz. Dt. 30;15,19). Only reward and punishment are predestined by God. Guttman writes, "Was von Gott vorherbestimmt ist, das sind die Folgen des Menschlichen Handlungen, der Lohn und die Strafe, die durch sie herbeigeführt werden und die sich, es sei denn durch Reue und Busse, der Einwirkung des Menschen entziehen!"¹

Abravanel's work *Mifalot Adonoy* deals with the problem of the temporality of the created world. Maimonides had written before him that God was eternal, and if the world were the same, then what would be God's position? He would not have any influence and we could not believe the miracles of which Scriptures informs us; nor in reward and punishment which presuppose God's power over nature. Therefore the temporality (generation and decay) of nature is one of the fundamental doctrines of Judaism. Plato's concept of matter existing before creation is rejected. This for Maimonides would have constituted two first causes. So too Abravanel. Then to uphold his statement of temporality, the latter resorts to tradition. God created the world through free will. This means

1) Guttman, page 69

that creation was done with consciousness and that an effect that ensues from free will, can bring about two contrasting things. (It can cause fire to burn and to cool.) God is not only the creator of the world, but also He who upholds it. The world was created ex nihilo. After a time which will be set by God, it will again return to nothingness. The ultimate purpose of the world is God. The strongest proof for the temporality of the world, according to Abravanel, comes from Johannes Grammaticus, a proof which is based upon Aristotles' teaching of the finality of things.¹

Within the mechanism of nature, there is necessary at times, radical change or miracle. Miracles and prophecy are not caused by intelligence but by God. God's will causes good and therefore miracles do not cause a change in his will or being. Prophecy is a direct revelation from God. Sometimes it touches reason in a clear manner; sometimes it reveals itself to the imagination but in a quality different from the revelation, which the philosopher experiences. Prophecy is independent from the brain or other mental qualities. It has nothing to do with dreams because it is divine inspiration.

1) Guttman, Chapter 7- pp 69-82

Wisdom does not make a prophet but purity of morals. Moreover prophecy is not determined by age or weakness. There are four aspects to prophecy;-- where God enlightens one's reason as He did with Moses; when God gives pictures unto the imagination of the prophet; inspired reason and imagination, and inspiration of the senses.¹

For Abravanel, as for many philosophers before him the rational soul was a spiritual thing apart from the material soul. Every human soul existed before the creation of the body, being created like the other independent beings, the intelligences. It is to be connected from its incipency with something like air. God created a certain number of souls, corresponding to the number of human beings. Through divine reason which is potential in the soul, man comes to recognize God.

Following the death of the body, every soul lives its individual life with God but its immortality depends on the observance of Torah and P'arv P'ern 2 . Happiness in the world to come depends on complete recognition of God. Punishment does not mean there will be no immortality.

Abgravanel believes in resurrection and states that its

1) Guttman, page 92, based upon I.A.'s commentary on Deut. 34:1 (Mayene HaYeshuah III 3)

2) Rosh Amana- cap. 21 s. 28 b.

purpose is to give messianic happiness to Israel and to convince the other people and religions that they erred not to acknowledge Israel's belief and Israel's God.¹ The regeneration will be directly after the coming of the Messiah. For Abravanel, messianism was the ending of the history of the world. All men would become as Adam before he fell into temptation. He thought that the Messiah was born already and that he would soon appear.

1) Abravanel's commentary on Isaiah, Chapter 2 - אפ
 ישו בן דוד ונביא הישועה ונביא חכמים דבליסופים המפורסם
 שיקומו וישיגו לפני בני אדם אחת האמונה אין ספק שכל
 ימשיכו אחריה ויטו מדרך הרעה אל הטוב ואלו חזק להם
 אל דבר מיוחד ודאי כי אם אל האמת והאמת היא קיימת

1) Mayene HaYeshuah- Introduction- חפצת אלהים
הגד וחדשן חבית ה" יכל להשקות עמי בחיורי
מים קרים על פס ציפה ודו"

namely, how Daniel, Hananiah, Michael, and Azeriah came to Babylon, when they came, who brought them and their descent; the narration of the first dream of Nebuchednezzar, what his interpreters said, the coming of Daniel, and his interpretation through divine knowledge; a description of the golden image which Nebuchednezzar set up and how Hanniah, Michael, and Azariah refused to bow down to it, their subsequent experience in the fiery furnace and redemption by God; the second dream of Nebuchednezzar and its interpretation by Daniel; the subject of Balshazzar and the writing on the wall as interpreted by Daniel; the rule of Darius and Daniel's status in his court, how he was cast into the lion's den and his salvation; the dream of Daniel regarding the beasts; the vision of Daniel in the third year of Balshazzar's reign and what Gabriel, the angel, said; the prayer of Daniel and finally, the vision of Daniel by the river Hidēkel and what he envisaged.

In the second part of the book Abrevanel informs us that he is not going to describe the rule of the kings of Persia and Babylon; nor delineate any historical events. The

*Daniel
did not
intend to*

latter are more adequately treated in a book like Chronicles. To the author's mind, the book of Daniel was written to indicate the subject's great wisdom and saintliness, to demonstrate that which was to befall Israel; the troubles, the exiles, the redemptions, and salvations.¹ Daniel's was a message of hope, lending courage to a hapless, despairing people. This is the same approach practised by the other prophets.

The last section analyzes the language of the book. Abravanel wishes to determine the reason for the use of both Aramaic and Hebrew. He concludes that those words of Daniel, addressed to the Jewish people, were written in Hebrew while those employed in conversation with the Chaldeans were spoken in Aramaic.

In the conclusion of the book, Abravanel traces the many prophecies of Daniel (70), and attempts to point out how they were substantiated by the passage of time e.g, Darius and his conquest, Alexander the Great, rise of Rome, Jesus, spread of Christianity, the Crusades. Sixty of the prophecies have been fulfilled and of the remaining ten, Abravanel writes:²

שכן ידע ה' אותם הנאמרות ולא יבול
מכל דבריו ארצה

1) Mayene HaYeshuah - Introduction -
זל עמו לספר ענין מלכי בבל... אלה היה כונן קיאל בספר הזה
אבאר בו חכמות נבואות... ולכונן אל ספר הדברים
דברים אלהים על האומה ישראל ואומות... וישיגם ואלותם
2) Ibid- page 60 d.

The redemption is yet to come but come it surely will:

כי קרוב יום ה' על כל הימים והא
 יבא ולא יאחר - וקרובה ישועתו
 לבא על ישראל עם קרובו אברהם
 אבינו וכו' ¹

Two other books, apologetic in nature, were written by Abravanel. They are *ישועת משיח* and *מנחת משיח*. The former deals with the remarks of the Talmud and the Midrash, regarding the Messiah. Here too, the author describes the languor and sorrow which has overtaken Israel and how the Jews despair of succor. Declaring that he has undertaken the task of finding an answer to his people's problem, Abravanel searches through Jewish literature for a hopeful answer. The Talmud and Midrash are filled with answers as well as the Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer. He searches through these to find the *התשובה* *לכן*. The conclusions reached in Perek Helek and other places, the author rejects. The writers who made those studies believed that the Messiah had already come, but that our ancestors had not recognised him. Abravanel's rejoinder is quite weak. If that is so, he declares why are we still dwelling in exile and waiting

1) Mayene HaYeshuah, page 60 d

for him. However, this remark is only another indication and proof of his devoutness and faith. He also states that his feeling is that the Messiah will be a man, as the prophets taught.

In the book proper, Abravanel discusses the great figures of the Bible, how God appeared to them, and what the significance of that appearance was, e.g., the incident of 112

is mentioned to describe the emergence of four great kingdoms, - their dominion and decline.¹ He discusses

Rabbi Eliezer's statement: הרא"ה הק"ה
בין הבתרים אברהם אלכיות אחיה ואבדן

The reason for showing these pictures, it is declared, is not for the sake of redemption, but to test Abraham, and to observe how he would accept the enslavement of his people.

Further on, Abravanel gives ten proofs for the coming of the Messiah and substantiates them by Biblical verses. ²

In the last work, *וְיִהְיֶה דִּין*, he considers all of the passages which consider the Messiah. To them, he attaches his own opinion and comment, together with a sharp criticism of Christian interpretation of those passages. Its

1) Yeshuos Meshicho, page 9

2) Ibid- pages 26 a,b.

scope is to illustrate the oracles of the seventeen prophets, which speak of the future redemption of the Jews. These cannot be understood in the spiritual sense as is usually interpreted. This is considered a splendid compendium of the medieval Jewish attitude toward the Messiah, as opposed to the Christian standpoint.

ABRAVANEL'S WORKS

1. (תורה) פירוש
2. (נביאים ראשונים) פירוש
3. (נביאים אחרונים) פירוש
4. דרכי זקנים
5. צדקת היסודות
6. נחלת אבות
7. צבא פסח
8. ראש אמת
9. מפתחות אלפים
10. שמע חכמים
11. פירוש על ספר מורה נבוכים
12. מדיני היסודות
13. יסודות חכמה
14. מסתרי יסודות
15. גיבורות על שאלות ר"שאלה הכהן

Books Lost

1. צדק דולמים
2. מאג'ה שדי
3. צדקת זקנים

EVALUTATION

It has been intimated upon several occasions in the preceding pages that Abravanel was primarily a statesman and it is the writers feeling that this may have been stressed too strongly. In spite of his political activity, Abravanel always retained his interest in his people and their fate. It is this which prompted him to choose the rocky, thorn-strewn path of exile. For he realized the futility of doing otherwise. He only retired from active public life when he was forced to. Political activity always attracted him and he was willing to forego his literary interest as soon as he was asked. This is clearly evidenced by his work in Spain, Naples, and Venice. He must have been an unusual minister for where¹ ever he went, his fame preceded him. His personality, too, must have been magnetic, for his friendships³ among non-Jews was wide in Portugal, Spain and Italy. His funeral was attended by the high dignitaries of the Venetian republic. Both Jew and non Jew rendered homage to this statesman and scholar.

Because of his position he amassed a large fortune in the countries in which he happened to be. And his use of this money indicates how attached he was to his people. Through his

1) His perspicacious political outlook is clearly evidenced in his commentary on Deut. 17:14, where he speaks of the republic as the best form of government.

organized philanthropy, several hundred enslaved Jews were redeemed. Together with other prominent Jews he helped organize the Lisbon Jewish community for that purpose.

This rational attitude was not a constant factor in his thinking. On religious matters he drew the line. He was interested in exegesis and philosophy and oftentimes he did not distinguish between the two. His exegetical method, we have already mentioned. He was influenced by the scholastics in this regard, by starting with arguments ¹pro and contra, and concluding with the decision ~~solutio~~. He put questions before the explanation of a certain section of the Bible, questions which showed the difficulties of the text and which were later resolved by the commentator.

Abravanel is sometimes criticised for being a plagiarist. This is not exactly true. While we must admit that he was not an original thinker, either in philosophy or in exegesis, he was familiar with the literature of Arabic or Aristotelian philosophy, as well as patristic and Jewish apologetics. Recognized as a conservative, his *Rosh Amana*, was probably read by a wide group of men who shared sentiments

1) Guttman, page 6

similar to his own, and incidentally, made Maimonides accessible to these people. Although he respected the author of the Moreh, he was wont to disagree with him in many respects. He did not like Maimonides' theory of creation and treats it as an allegory, nor did he care for the Egyptian Jews' interpretation of prophecy. He used to conclude his lectures about him with the words- these are the words of rabbi Moses but not of our teacher Moses.¹ For Gersonides, he also had great respect, particularly because of his astronomical contributions, but he felt that his philosophy was tangential to Judaism. Crescas too, he recognised as a remarkable thinker, but he defends Maimonides against him. He points out how Crescas was indebted to Algazzali.

The former's work, Or Adonoy, was translated into Hebrew by Joseph ibn Shem Tov. This translation was used by Abravanel in a pamphlet against Christianity.

Toward the Kabbala, his attitude was somewhat reserved, but not unsympathetic. It is easy to see how his Messianic belief would fit in with Kabbalistic conjectures. His value to posterity was in the field of exegesis. Unlike his Jewish predecessors, his studies included Christian

1) Guttmann - page 7 ff

interpretation of Scriptures. This opened an avenue of study and investigation heretofore neglected by Jewish scholars. Moreover, it disposed Christian students to be more interested in this type of Jewish scholarship.¹ His commentaries were verbose, unwieldy, and even uninteresting, but as an expositor of the purely historical books of the Bible, of the *Nehim Rishonim* in particular, he stands high and with few equals. His knowledge of Jewish literature, religious and philosophic, and his keen insight into political situations and crises, made his comment on these books invaluable. He represents the end of a period in Spanish Jewish history. In him was found not one distinctive force, but two. He was not only a master of exegesis, a student of philosophy, and apologetics, but also a great statesman and leader.

Although he himself, was not sure of his mission and in his Italian exile regarded his true destiny as theologian and exegete, as we turn from his work and activity, we cannot but help feel that he executed whatever he did with unusual ability. A well rounded man, his activity as statesman and politician never impaired the quality of his other work, nor did his interest in Jewish literature act as a hindrance to the quality of his statesmanship. Of him it may truly be said;

וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה
וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה
וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה
וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה וְיָדָעוּ אֲנִי בְּתוֹרָה

- 1) Christianity, as a whole, Abravanel thought, could not be resolved with reason.
- 2) Berochoth 17 a

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