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"Opposition to Sacrifice within the Bible:
An Overview of the Positions taken by
Commentators and Theologians throughout
the Centuries about this Problem"

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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Digest

Isaiah 1:11-15, Jeremiah 7:21-23, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-25, Psalm 50:8-13, and Psalm 51:18-19 all seem to suggest either that God never commanded Israel to offer sacrifices, or at least that He has no desire of them. This message contradicts numerous places in the Torah which suggest just the opposite. This thesis examines how the Rabbis, classic commentators, and medieval philosophers employed these verses in their writings. Do these men perceive any tension between the Prophets and Hagiographa vis a vis the Pentateuch? If they perceive a problem of contradiction how do they respond to it? These are the questions I seek to answer.

The authors who I will be examining all believed that the entire Bible was of Divine origin. For them to see a possible contradiction within it, would give them a problem not only of determining the meaning of the passages, but also a theological problem. We find that these contradictory passages are generally harmonized in various ways.

The Talmud and Midrash frequently quote the above mentioned verses, however they often cite them in a discussion which does not center on sacrifices. Where the verses are quoted in an exposition on sacrifice, the Rabbis often stand the verses on their head, totally ignoring the meaning of the verses, so as to have them read in such a way that they support a sacrificial practice.

The commentators, more than the Rabbis, seem to perceive a problem of possible contradiction. Various comments

indicate an awareness that the above mentioned verses seem to express a common theme. The commentators make a specific point of demonstrating that the verses are not contradictory with the Torah. None of the commentators make an effort to reconcile all of the verses. One commentator may write on a certain verse, and be silent on another verse, while another commentator might choose to make his remarks on just the opposite verses.

The philosophers' mode of expression is quite different from that of the Rabbis and commentators. It is because of this difference that the commentaries of Abravanel are here included in the section on philosophers. His philosophical orientation clearly sets himself apart from the commentators treated before. In spite of the philosophical orientation of all the authors dealt with below, it is evident that there is no one philosophical position on the matter. Maimonides presents the most radical understanding of the meaning of these verses, while Jehuda Halevi's position is most orthodox.

After presenting the above viewpoints, I give the opinion of a number of modern biblical scholars, and in responding to their thoughts I give my own understanding of the problematic verses. Very basically, I feel that the passages from the Prophets and Hagiographa contain a great deal of rhetoric, and as a result much overstatement. It is my contention, however, that if the reader differs with my interpretation, this would only strengthen my premise that the above mentioned verses are extremely problematic with respect to the views of their authors on sacrifices.

To My Family

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Preface

There are numerous places in the Torah where we read of God commanding Israel to offer sacrifices to Him, and yet there are verses in the Prophets and Hagiographa which seem to contradict this position. Isaiah 1:11-15, Jeremiah 7:21-23, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-25, Psalm 50:8-13, and Psalm 51:18-19 all seem to suggest either God never commanded Israel to offer sacrifices, or at the least that He has no desire of them. One might suggest that Malachi 1:7-14 also expresses this point of view, but a careful reading of that passage will lead the reader to conclude that Malachi is announcing that God has no desire of inferior sacrifices, not that He rejects all sacrifices.

In this essay I intend to examine how people who see the Bible as of Divine origin and hence maintain that it could not contain any contradictions of principle view these passages. To this end, I shall study pertinent statements in three types of literature: (i) Talmud and Midrash, (ii) biblical commentators of the Middle Ages, and (iii) philosophical treatises of the same age. In researching the statements in the Talmud and Midrash I checked all references to these passages listed in Torah Hactuvah V'hamisurah by A. Hyman. In the section on commentaries it has not been my goal to review the maximal number of authors but to examine those who are most representative. As to philosophers, I have investigated three of the most prominent ones, who are at the same time dissimilar men: Jehuda Halevi, Maimonides and Abravanel.

It is the premise of this thesis that the biblical passages listed above present problems when seen in the light of the pentateuchal legislation about sacrifices. This has been briefly said in the opening sentences. In the last part of the thesis the justification of this premise will be attempted. This might appear as an unusual procedure. Normally premises are analyzed when they are formulated and, if possible, their testing is explicitly planned. The reason I have chosen another order is this: The very presentation of the traditional attempts to deal with the issue of Prophets and Hagiographa versus Pentateuch will show, I am confident, the difficulties of the traditionalist approach. If the harmonistic solution proposed by most traditional authors, is not satisfactory, there may be genuine contradictions within the biblical material.

After the study of the Talmud and Midrash, commentaries, and philosophers, I shall therefore, proceed with an attempt to establish the true intention of the Prophets and Psalmists. Here I shall be aided by the writings of some modern biblical scholars. In the light of what I will find I shall evaluate the ways of traditional Judaism in this limited field.

I wish to thank Dr. Tsevat for all the help and guidance he has given me during the past year. Without his insights to pave my way, I could have easily misunderstood a number of key passages. I am only disappointed I did not get exposed to him earlier in my studies.

Talmud and Midrash

These two bodies of literature both recognize the authoritative nature of scriptures, and of the first five books of the Bible in particular. Both the Talmud and the Midrash operate within rules of logic. The rules by which inferences are made are referred to as the hermeneutic principles. According to these principles inferences can be made from the Torah to the rest of scriptures, but the reverse is not true. The supremacy of the Torah is clear.

In this chapter we are examining a number of verses from the prophets and the writings which at least on the surface contradict the Torah. Numerous passages in the Pentateuch indicate that God commanded the Israelites to offer sacrifices but the verses that we are focusing on from the prophets and writings would seem to indicate that God either made no such command, or in any event has no desire of sacrifices. The question is how these verses from the prophets and writings were reacted to in the Talmud and the Midrash. Did these bodies of literature respond in any way to the tension created by the verses we are examining?

There are numerous times when a particular verse or part of a verse is used to make a point about a subject other than sacrifices. Because these passages do not help us determine whether the authors of the Talmud and Midrash perceived any sort of tension between the Torah and the other parts of the Bible I will not comment on them. I will be limiting myself therefore, to talmudic and midrashic passages which deal in

some way with the question of sacrifice. The talmudic and midrashic passages that cite a verse with which we are concerned, and employ it within a discussion of sacrifice can be divided into two groups; those that ignore the context of the verse, and those that in some way recognize the context.

Let us begin by examining those talmudic and midrashic passages that totally ignore the context of the Biblical verses. In the Talmud, in tractate Hagigah 4a-b, there is a discussion about who are excluded from appearing at the Temple. According to the Mishnah, certain people are not committed to pilgrimage. Included in this group are those who cannot make ascent on foot. The Talmud understands this to mean that delicate persons are exempt from making pilgrimage. This is derived from Isaiah 1:12 ("That you come to appear before Me- Who asked that of you? Trample My courts no more.") in the following stages. 1) The passage from Isaiah uses in a prohibitive clause. 2) *ON* is explained to mean "shod" (shoes made for heavy treading). 3) Delicate persons always walk shod. 4) Steps one, two, and three lead to the conclusion that shod persons should not enter the temple area. Thus Isaiah 1:12 is used as a proof-text to excuse delicate persons from the duty of pilgrimage. While Isaiah 1:12 deprecates and possibly denounces the value of Temple service, the Talmud values it.

The person excluded from making pilgrimage is being denied a privilege. The context of the Isaiah verse is clearly contrary to that of the Talmud. The Talmud is ignoring the fact that Isaiah is questioning the value of sacrifice, to the extent

that it includes Isaiah 1:12 in a discussion which is based on the opposite premise. This particular talmudic passage is halahic in nature. It is common in halahic passages that the context of a Biblical verse is ignored in order to make the verse read in such a way as to support the halahic position being presented.

Several pages later in Hagigah, on page 10b, we come to an even better illustration of the Talmud ignoring the meaning of the prophet's words. The Rabbis are engaged in a discussion to show that the feast referred to in Exodus 5:1 ("And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.'") was to be observed with sacrifices. The Rabbis make a gezara shava between Amos 5:25 ('Have ye offered unto Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?') and Exodus 5:1. Given that wilderness is mentioned in both verses, and in the Amos verse wilderness is associated with sacrifices, so wilderness in the Exodus passage, by implication must have been associated with sacrifices. In this talmudic passage the Rabbis are attempting to prove that the Israelites made sacrifices in the wilderness by appealing to a verse which is clearly expressing the idea that the people did not make sacrifices in the wilderness! The context of Amos' speech is being totally overlooked.

The Midrash as well as the Talmud is capable of ignoring the context of a scriptural passage. In Leviticus Rabbah

(Tsav VII.2) R. Abba Judan is quoted as saying that "what makes an animal invalid for sacrificing is declared valid in the case of man." By this R. Judan means that whereas an animal which is in some way broken or maimed is not accepted as a sacrifice by God, a man that is broken, in the sense that his heart is broken, is accepted. This is the insight R. Judan gives to Psalm 51:17 ("The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise"). R. Judan is speaking of a sacrificial system, and is not bothered that the previous verse in Psalm 51 says, "For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering." R. Judan is totally ignoring the anti-sacrificial position taken in the verse.

There is another midrash which is a perfect example of how the Rabbis can totally reverse the meaning of a text to make their point. In the section on Pinchas in Numbers Rabbah (Numbers Rabbah XI,16) there is a discussion whose major premise is that God does not require sacrifices. The text also says that God commanded man to bring sacrifices from among only the three types of animals which are in man's domain, and not from all ten of the clean animals which are in man's domain. (see Leviticus 22:27 and Deuteronomy 14:4-5). The Rabbis say that the fact that God demanded sacrifices from only three animals explains verse nine of Psalm 50, "I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds." The Rabbis do not read this verse as a statement but as a rhetorical question "Do I not take bullocks

out of thy house, he goats out of thy folds?" Clearly the Rabbis are standing the text of Psalm 50:9 on its head to make their point.

The talmudic and midrashic passages cited so far ignore the meaning of the verse to the extent that they do not seem even aware of a possible contradiction between the verses cited and the Torah. There are significant passages, however, which do seem to recognize the possible tension between the verses that we are concerned with and the other sections of the Bible. For example, a section in the Midrash Rabbah on Exodus (Exodus Rabbah XV,29) draws our attention to this whole question of consistency. The problem is how a verse such as "And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes from you, Though you pray at length, I will not listen" (Isaiah 1:15) can exist together with the verse, "And it shall come to pass before they call, I will answer" (Isaiah 65:24). The question is how is it possible for God to both not listen and listen to man's prayers. The answer, according to the Midrash, is that in the first case God says these words when He is acting as the accuser, while in the second case God is acting as Israel's defender. Both verses see Israel as standing before God, where God is determining their guilt or innocence as a people. God, unlike a human judge, takes both sides of the argument.

The passage just cited is aware of an apparent contradiction between two verses, and recognizes the problem of God not listening to man's prayers. Both verses, however, are from Isaiah. A more difficult situation occurs when the contradiction is between a verse from the Prophets or Writings,

and a verse from the Torah. Such a situation is to be found in the Midrash Rabbah on Numbers (Midrash Rabbah XXI,25). In Numbers 29:35-6 we find, "On the eighth day ye shall hold a solemn gathering; ye shall not work at your occupations. Ye shall present a burnt offering..." On the other hand, God tells Israel through His prophet Isaiah, "Your new moons and fixed seasons fill Me with loathing; They are become a burden to Me." (Isaiah 1:14). According to the midrash, a heathen confronted Rabbi Akiba with the latter verse, and asked why, in light of Isaiah's message that God hates the new moon and seasonal celebrations, Israel still observes festive seasons. In effect, the heathen is asking Rabbi Akiba to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the passage from Numbers and the passage from Isaiah. Not too surprisingly, Rabbi Akiba had an answer. He pointed out that the significant word in the Isaiah passage is "your"; Rabbi Akiba says that God hates the festivals Jereboam instituted (see I Kings 12) but not the festivals that God Himself ordained. The author of this midrash recognizes that the Isaiah passage is against sacrifices but the author understands sacrifices to have a very restricted meaning. In this way the author has no problem of having Isaiah oppose a sacrificial system rooted in Torah.

Rabbi Akiba, in Numbers Rabbah, addressed himself to the problem posed by Isaiah 1:14. He saw a problem in the first part of the verse; namely, with the idea that God hates the festive seasons. An anonymous passage in the Talmud saw a problem in the second part of the Isaiah verse, specifically

with the reason why God would find the festive celebrations a burden. The answer suggested is that not only do the people sin, they offer sin-offerings to God. It is because the people offer these sin-offerings that God must consider what punishment the sins require. The Talmud sees a problem in God not finding pleasure in the sacrifices but resolves it as did the Midrash, by seeing the sacrifices in a very limited context; namely, it is only sin-offerings God finds a burden, and not all sacrifices.

Tractate Berachot 32b treats Isaiah's rebuke of sacrifice much differently than we have found so far. Quoting Rabbi Eleazar, it says that since the statement, "When ye spread forth your hands" (Isaiah 1:15) is made following "What need have I of all your sacrifices? says the Lord" (Isaiah 1:11) then it follows that the spreading out of ones hands, that is prayer is more efficacious than offerings. The Talmud would argue that the prophet is building his speech climactically. Because of Israel's sinfulness God rejects not only their sacrifices, but even their prayer. Were prayer of the same or lesser standing, it would not have been mentioned after sacrifice. Since it is of higher standing, but must also be rejected, it is mentioned separately. In this approach Rabbi Eleazar is not saying that there is no room for sacrifice, but that prayer is better than sacrifice.

The Midrash Tanhuma (Vayera I) picks up on this point and carries it one step further. While it does not explicitly state that there is no point in offering sacrifices, I would

say that the point is nonetheless made explicitly. This midrash clearly states that prayer is more efficacious than sacrifices. It is because of the effectiveness of prayer vis a vis sacrifice that God asks the people, "What need have I of all your sacrifices?" The midrash goes on to state, "Even if a man is not worthy to receive mercy (Hesed) as soon as he begins to pray and recite supplications (tahanunim) God grants mercy unto him.

This statement in the Tanhuma that prayer is greater than all sacrifices is very unusual in talmudic and midrashic literature. This is the only statement of all the talmudic and midrashic comments that were made in connection with the Biblical verses with which we are concerned that speaks negative by sacrifice. Even here the negative description of sacrifice can really only be inferred from the elevated significance ascribed to prayer. Much more typical of the way the Rabbis handled these problematic verses is a passage we find in Hagigah 6b. Rabbi Akiba makes the point that the continual burnt-offering was offered at Mount Sinai and has never been discontinued. To make this point he must explain the meaning of Amos 5:25, "Have ye offered unto Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" This verse is a rhetorical question, expecting the answer "no", and it would seem to contradict Rabbi Akiba's argument. It is necessary for him, therefore, to explain the verse from Amos in light of his position on burnt offerings. Rabbi Akiba answers that while Israel

as a whole did not offer sacrifices in the wilderness, the tribe of Levi, who were not guilty of idol worship in the incident of the golden calf, did offer sacrifices. This Hagigah passage cites the Amos verse and comments on it in terms of the sacrificial system. It is not standing the verse on its head as we have seen other comments do, but it is reading a foreign idea into Amos' speech.

We have seen how the Talmud and Midrash perceive the apparent contradictions of the texts. In some cases they ignore the problem altogether. Where the Talmud and Midrash respond to the statements about sacrifice within a discussion of sacrifice, the talmudic and midrashic passages can follow one of two approaches. It can ignore the context of the verse, for example, by turning the verse on its head. It can also respond to the implication of the verse. When the Talmud or Midrash is responsive to the implications made in the Biblical verse, the usual approach taken is to give the Biblical verse a very restricted understanding. This gives us the position, for example, that God does not reject all sacrifices, but only certain specified types of sacrifices. In a very few cases we found that the Talmud and the Midrash state that sacrifice is not as effective as prayer. The Midrash Tanhuma, for example, implies that man does not need to make sacrifices since he can recite prayers which are more effective than sacrifices anyways. Though implied, this is not stated explicitly. No talmudic or midrashic passage which quotes any of the verses we are focusing on, comes out and

says that God does not want sacrifice any longer.

What is also significant for us is the fact that most talmudic and midrashic texts that employ the verses with which we are concerned, ignore the problem of contradiction. There would seem to be three ways that the Talmud and Midrash get around the problem of responding to the contradiction. I have already pointed out two ways; namely, discussing the verse in a context other than sacrifices, and by interpreting the Biblical text in a way other than its obviously intended meaning. The new interpretation given the verse can be arrived at either subtly by giving a very restricted understanding to the verse, or by reading the verse in a way which is totally opposite to the way the verse is intended. The third way the Talmud and Midrash avoid dealing with the problem is by not making any statement at all which quotes a problematic verse. Most glaring in its absence is the fact that there is not one statement from the Talmud or Midrash which quotes the verse from Jeremiah, "When I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I said nothing to them, gave them no orders about offerings and sacrifices. (Jeremiah 7:22) Here is a verse which more than any other confronts the Torah, and yet the Talmud and Midrash are totally silent about it.

The authors of the Talmud and Midrash viewed the entire scriptures as being the revealed word of God. Given their vantage point, they could not explore apparent contradictions in a scientific way, the way a modern Biblical scholar can

today. Neither the Talmud nor the Midrash represent a running commentary on the scriptures. Both quote scriptures extensively, and they appeal to scriptures when arguing a position, yet the Rabbis who wrote the Talmud and Midrash were not compelled to confront every verse of scriptures and comment on its meaning. They chose whatever verse suited them when they made their comments. Commentators on the scriptures cannot avoid confronting the texts the way the Rabbis, at least in part, had done. We shall now examine what the various commentators have said about those verses which concern us.

Commentaries

In this section I will be examining the statements made by the commentators on the various Biblical passages on which we have been focusing. In discussing how the Talmud and Midrash dealt with these verses I presented the material according to how it was employed. In dealing with the commentators, it is more practical to examine what various commentators have said on each individual passage. I will be considering the passages in the order that they appear in the Tenach.

I will be referring to the commentaries of the following men: (i) Rashi (Rabbi Shelomoh Yitschaki), who was born in France in 1040, (ii) Ibn Ezra, who was born in Spain in 1092, (iii) Eliezer of Beaugency, who was a French exeget of the twelfth century, (iv) Kimchi, who was born in Narbonne in 1160 and died in 1235, (v) Menahem ben Solomon Meiri, who was born at Perignan in 1249 and died there in 1306, and (vi) Isaiah di Trani (the younger), a thirteenth and fourteenth Italian commentator.

In discussing the commentaries to Isaiah, as with other sections, I will be dealing only with those passages which I think are significant to this thesis. For example, I will not be concerned with a discussion as to why a certain vowel appears and not another vowel instead. I might refer to such a comment only in passing, and then only if this was the only comment made on the verse. In the previous section on the Talmud and Midrash I quoted the verses we are examining as

they came up in the talmudic or midrashic text. This reflects how that literature was written. In this section I shall first quote the verse and then the discussion which is based upon it.

What need have I of all your sacrifices? says the Lord. I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and suet of fatlings, and blood of bulls; And I have no delight in lambs and he-goats. (Isaiah 1:11).

In discussing verse 11, Rashi is bothered by the phrase "I have no delight in lambs and he-goats." Rashi's comment to this verse begs the question, why does God not delight in the sacrifices? Rashi's answer is that since the people have transgressed God's Torah, the offerings the people have made are those of evil people and such sacrifices represent an abomination to God. Earlier we saw how the Rabbis gave a very restricted understanding to the sacrifices which God objected. Here Rashi is doing exactly the same thing. In effect, Rashi is saying that it is not that God does not delight in sacrifices; it is only the sacrifices of the evil people that He finds objectionable.

The approach taken by Rashi in his comment on this verse is typical of many comments we shall examine. Kimchi, like Rashi, says that the people have transgressed the Torah, but Kimchi makes an additional point. He says that if the people truly repented of their evil ways and offered sacrifices to God as they confessed their sins, then God would accept their sacrifices. It is because the people offer sacrifices without repentance that God makes the comment that He does not delight in their sacrifices.

Ibn Ezra in discussing verse 11 juxtaposes the offerings with the people's habitation of the land. He suggests that the sacrifices do not represent the reason God allows the people to remain in the land. Ibn Ezra writes, "Why should I (God) leave you longer in the land? Is it for the sake of the multitude of your burnt offerings?" Ibn Ezra is also bothered by the anthropomorphism suggested when God says, "I am full of burnt offerings." Ibn Ezra suggests that God does not really need food. He gives a verse which similarly talks of God eating, (Psalm 50:12ff, see below) but which also will be interpreted to mean God does not eat.

That you come to appear before Me- who asked
that of you? Trample My courts no more
(Isaiah 1:12).

In his comment on this verse, Rashi says that the people's hearts are not at peace with God. As with almost all of Rashi's statements, we must ask what question is Rashi answering with this statement. The unasked question, as much as the statement itself, provides us with the significance of Rashi's remarks. In the statement Rashi seems to be answering the question, why is God so upset that the people are coming to the Temple Mount? Reading Rashi's comment as an answer to this particular question we see that once more Rashi is giving a very limited understanding to this verse. God does not object to the people being at the Temple Mount, per se, but to their being there given that they lack sincerity.

Kimchi also comments on the attitude of the people. He says that the people have come to the Temple Mount not to give honor to God, but as a contentuous act. Like Rashi, Kimchi is suggesting God objects to the motivation of these particular people who trample the Temple Mount and who lack the proper attitude, but God does not object to those who are sincere.

Ibn Ezra is bothered by a possible anthropomorphic understanding of this verse. He comments that "the word 'My face' does not represent the object of נִקְוָה ." The text as vocalized נִקְוָה could never have יְהוָה as an object. Ibn Ezra at this point disregards the Massoretic pointing which makes the form a passive one "to be seen" and thus would be impossible to have an object. He presupposes an active vocalization, נִקְוֶה , ("to see") which can take a direct object "My face." It was possible that he was attracted by the active vocalization favored by many modern critics, but decided that this is not acceptable for theological reasons. He thus arrived at the terminal of the Massorites without going their route.

Bringing oblations is futile, incense is offensive to Me. New moon and sabbath, proclaiming of solemnities, assemblies with iniquity I cannot abide (Isaiah 1:13).

In his comment on this verse, Rashi suggests a reason that God cannot endure the calling of solemn assemblies by the people. According to Rashi, the people have deviated

from monotheism and now act as the idolatrous nations. Rashi adds that it is not fitting to declare a holy convocation and gather in God's Presence, and at the same time act and think as an idolator.

Similar to Rashi's comment is the remark that Kimchi makes. He defines "vain oblations" as the people bringing offerings to God "but their hearts are not toward God." Kimchi, unlike Rashi, does not state to what the people have turned. Like Kimchi and Rashi, Ibn Ezra comments on the phrase, "I cannot abide iniquity along with the solemn assembly." Ibn Ezra's explanation is that it is of no use to keep holy days, and to do evil at the same time.

Rashi, Kimchi, and Ibn Ezra are all suggesting that the offering of sacrifices and the holding of solemn assemblies are not rejected by God in and of themselves. It is the evil actions of the people that causes God to reject them. Isaiah di Trani makes this point very succinctly. He says, "the solemn assembly of a holiday is good (when it is accompanied) without iniquity.

Your new moons and fixed seasons fill Me
with loathing; they are become a burden to
Me (Isaiah 1:14).

In my opinion this verse and verse eleven represent the most difficult of the Isaiah verses to reconcile with the Torah. I would imagine that this verse begs for a comment, a clarification of some sort, and yet Rashi is totally silent on this verse. Did Rashi not see a problem, or did he perceive one, but chose to ignore it? We will never know, and yet

Rashi's silence would seem significant in either case.

Kimchi does make a comment on the phrase, "My soul hates your new moons and your appointed seasons, they are a burden to Me." Kimchi says that "God many times condoned and forgave the people's sins, but He could no longer endure them." Once again Kimchi is suggesting that God finds the people's sins a burden, but not their observing of the appointed seasons.

Ibn Ezra, as in verses eleven and twelve, is bothered by a possible anthropomorphism. He explains God's statement that He is weary by saying that the expression is merely figurative. In commenting on "they are a burden to Me" Ibn Ezra says that "God is going to banish the people and the sacrifices will then cease." As in his comment on verse eleven, Ibn Ezra is suggesting that sacrifices were not sufficient reason for God to allow the people to remain in the land. Here Ibn Ezra is saying that God will indeed exile the people. It is said that hindsight has twenty-twenty vision. Ibn Ezra is taking advantage of his position in history to read the exile of the people into these verses.

And when you lift up your hands, I will turn
My eyes away from you; though you pray at
length, I will not listen. Your hands are
full of blood (Isalah 1:15).

That comments that Rashi, Kimchi, and Ibn Ezra make on this verse and which are significant to this thesis amount to one statement. Rashi and Kimchi appear to be answering the question, why would God not respond to the people when

they pray to Him? Ibn Ezra appears to be answering the question, why does God not listen to the people's prayers, virtually the same question that Rashi and Kimchi asked. All three suggest that we can understand the verse properly if we insert "because" before the expression "your hands are full of blood." All three suggest that God does not reject the prayers of men generally, but rejects specifically the prayers of those whose hands are full of blood. In giving this suggestion all three men are giving a very limited understanding of the verse.

Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat flesh (Jeremiah 7:21).

Rashi, Kimchi and Isaiah di Trani all make similar comments on this verse. They all suggest that the people should go ahead and eat the sacrifices that they offer to God, the only way the people would get benefit from them would be if they ate the offerings. This is obviously rhetorical, the force of which is that the sacrifices are pointless. Kimchi, much more than the other two commentators, expands on this position. He says that the people have willfully sinned and offered sacrifices, not out of sincerity, but rather to make it appear that they worship the Lord. Kimchi adds that since the peoples' actions are not acceptable to God, then neither are their sacrifices.

For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices (Jeremiah 7:22).

Earlier I commented that the Rabbis did not make one single comment on this verse. Rashi and Kimchi do not join in the Rabbis' silence. Both men understand Jeremiah very literally, though their interpretations differ slightly. Both men answer the unasked question, how can Jeremiah say that God "did not command the people in the day He brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices"? There are numerous references in the Torah to the laws concerning sacrifices offered in the desert, and Jeremiah must have known this. What did he mean, therefore, by this rhetorical question?

Rashi and Kimchi suggest that Jeremiah is not saying that none of the revelations the people experienced during their forty year wanderings had to do with sacrifices. Rather, Rashi and Kimchi would argue that Jeremiah is referring to a specific revelation that occurred specifically when God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt. The question is when was that specific revelation, and what did God reveal? Rashi identifies this specific revelation as the one described in Exodus 19:5, "Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people: for all the earth is mine." For Rashi there can be no commandments prior to the people resolving to obey God.

Kimchi also understands Jeremiah not to be referring to all commandments given during the wilderness experience, but to the very first command God gave Israel right after He had brought them out of Egypt, thus reflecting the expression, "on the day." Kimchi, however, suggests a different revelation which he feels should be associated as the event to which Jeremiah is referring. First Kimchi says, "that the first commandment given (after God brought the people out of Egypt) is that which He spoke to them at Marah." Kimchi then quotes Exodus 15:25, "...there (at Marah) He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them."

Kimchi does not state his reasoning in suggesting that God, in giving the people a statute and an ordinance, is giving commandments. One can speculate however, that Kimchi has in mind a Rabbinic interpretation found in Sanhedrin 56b which posits that the law of Shabat is inferred from statutes (שְׁמוֹת), and that civil laws are inferred from ordinances (פְּדוּתוֹת). Kimchi does refer to a Rabbinic saying which presents this interpretation, but does not state his source.

Kimchi, sensing the difficulty of the passages, gives other possible referents for Jeremiah's statement. He suggests that Jeremiah is not talking about any specific commandment but is referring to the essence of commandments. Kimchi suggests that the essence is "listen to My voice so that you shall be a people unto Me " (Jeremiah 7:23). There can be no commandments given to Israel until they agree to listen and pay heed to them. This is the second understanding that

Kimchi gives to this troublesome verse, but he gives two other interpretations as well.

Kimchi's third suggestion is that Jeremiah is referring to the ten commandments which he describes as being, "equal to all of the Torah." Kimchi's point in saying that Jeremiah was referring to the ten commandments when he made his statement is that the ten commandments make no reference to the offering of sacrifices.

Kimchi's final suggestion is that the individual was not commanded to bring sacrifices. Burnt offerings and peace offerings were optional. To support this argument he quotes Leviticus 1:2, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, 'If any man of you bring an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.'" The continual burnt offering, while obligatory for the community, was not obligatory for the individual.

Isaiah di Trani, unlike Rashi and Kimchi, did not look for a textual referent for Jeremiah's statement. He says that "God did not command the people that He would delight in sacrifices, but that if the people would do God's will and listen to His voice, then the sacrifices would be a pleasant odour to the Lord." This comment resembles Rashi's statement but Isaiah di Trani's statement, unlike Rashi's, is not a Biblical quote.

For I desire mercy, and not sacrifices; and
the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings
(Hosea 6:6).

This verse can be divided into two thoughts. The first part of the verse is an absolute statement; God desires mercy and not sacrifice. The second part of the verse, can be seen as either an absolute or a relative statement depending on how it is translated. If it is translated as "God desires the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" it is an absolute statement, but if it is translated as, "God desires the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" it is a relative statement. Certainly the first part of the verse must be seen as opposed to the Torah. The second part of the verse may contradict the Torah, depending on which translation one chooses.

The theme of this verse in Hosea is clearly similar to the other verses we have been considering. How do the commentators react to this verse? Remarkably, they make no comments on the problem of contradiction. Rashi's comment consists of stating that the verb is understood in the first part of the verse is "I desire."

Ibn Ezra, while he makes a lengthier comment than Rashi, does not address himself to the problem of the verse contradicting the Torah either. Ibn Ezra comments on the type of mercy God desires; namely, steadfast love and not that which is like a cloud. This reference to a cloud would seem to be based on Hosea 6:4, "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your goodness is a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes up." The imagery of the cloud suggests something of no real substance.

Kimchi points out that neither sacrifices offered in Israel nor those offered in Judah were acceptable for the people were not dealing with each other mercifully. Eliezer of Beaugency comments on this in the form of a rhetorical question. He asks, "Why should God desire the people's sheep or cattle since He has no delight in them?" This basically repeats the thought of the verse and does not take note of the question. None of the commentaries on Hosea 6:6 respond to the problem of contradiction.

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I
will not care about your solemn assemblies
(Amos 5:21).

This verse reads as an absolute rejection of the feast days and solemn assemblies. Did the commentators feel this was Amos' real message, or must we look below the surface to determine the real message of the prophet? When we check the commentators we find that they do not really address themselves to this question. Rashi for example, explains what he feels is the meaning of **אֲנִי מִשְׁנֵא**. Perhaps he feels the need to clarify the meaning of this word because in this plural form it represents a hopax legomenon.

Ibn Ezra does give a reason why God hates the feast days. He suggests that the people are making sacrifices to give the appearance that they are not wicked. Again we see the argument that God does not hate the feast days per se, but only the purpose for which they are being offered in this particular case.

Eliezer of Beaugency repeats basically Rashi's comment that **אֲשֶׁר יִזְבֹּחַ** refers to the sacrifices which the people offered on the festival. He adds that the holidays the people are celebrating are being dedicated to God. This interpretation would oppose those that suggest that the celebrations were not acceptable to God because the people had become idolators. He does not specify why God hates the sacrifices.

When you offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them:
neither will I regard the peace offerings
of your fat beasts (Amos 5:22).

In this verse we find another absolute rejection of sacrifices and burnt offerings. As I have said many times now, this would certainly seem to contradict certain sections of the Torah. We would expect to find the commentators address themselves to this problem, but none of the men we examined come close to approaching the matter. Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Kimchi and Eliezer of Beaugency all discuss what **אֲשֶׁר** means, but ignore the problem which we are examining.

Take away from Me the noise of your songs:
for I will not hear the melody of your
viols (Amos 5:23).

The question we ask ourselves after reading this verse is why is God so upset with the people that He will not listen to them. Ibn Ezra does not comment on this question at all. He does comment, as do Rashi and Kimchi, that the people who are offering the songs are the Levites. While Ibn Ezra

makes no comment beyond this, Rashi and Kimchi do address themselves to the question as to why God will not listen to the people.

Rashi suggests that the people have robbed and sinned. I feel that behind Rashi's words is the fact that the people have not stopped their evil ways. I believe that Rashi connotes this by using the noun form to express this idea and not a verb in the perfect form. Rashi says the people are robbers when he could have said they robbed. I feel the idea behind expressing himself in this way, is that the people have not repented.

Kimchi says that the people's sacrifices and songs are not acceptable since the people's deeds are evil. He says that the sacrifices will not benefit the people if they offer them but also act in a way that indicates they are revolting against God.

But let judgment run down as waters, and
righteousness as a mighty stream
(Amos 5:24).

This verse by itself does not contradict the Torah. In context however, the message appears to be that God does not want sacrifices and does want men to act justly. The question is does God want sacrifices if men acted justly. While Rashi basically repeats the verse, Ibn Ezra and Kimchi address themselves to this question. Ibn Ezra states, "the meaning of the verse is that the people should act justly and not make sacrifices for I (God) have no delight in them, only

in justice." Kimchi says the same thing, although not as plainly. Here we see something quite unusual; two commentators stating very clearly that God does not want sacrifices. This statement goes remarkably beyond anything we have seen the commentators say up to this point. Prior to this the commentators may have suggested that sacrifices were subordinate to acting correctly, or they may have said that the acceptance of sacrifices was dependent upon the person who makes the sacrifice being righteous. This is the first time that anyone has said sacrifices are not wanted by God.

Have you offered sacrifices and offerings to Me in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel ? (Amos 5:25).

This rhetorical question would seem to seek the answer, "No." That being the case, it, as much as any verse we have considered so far, would pose the problem of contradiction. Earlier we asked how Jeremiah could suggest that God did not speak to Israel about sacrifices during the forty year period of their wandering in the wilderness. This verse in Amos raises the same question.

Rashi answers this question exactly as he answered it with respect to Jeremiah. He draws our attention to Leviticus, the second verse of the first chapter (see above). This verse is understood by Rashi to mean that sacrifices are optional and not obligatory. Rashi also comments on the law of the Passover sacrifice. He says that the Israelites disregarded the commandment to observe Passover in 39 out of

40 years of their wanderings. For Rashi this also explains why Amos' question would be answered with a "No."

Rashi's comment to this verse cites his comment to Jeremiah 7:22. Kimchi actually quotes the Jeremiah verse in his comment. He goes on to cite various authorities who maintained that Israel as a whole did not offer sacrifices to God, but only the tribe of Levi. It was this tribe alone which was not implicated in the Golden Calf story. Ibn Ezra says basically the same thing as Kimchi, although he gives other illustrations to make this point. He too, cites the Jeremiah verse, but he also quotes Hosea 6:6 and Amos 5:24.

Eliezer of Beaugency takes a different position. Rashi, Kimchi, and Ibn Ezra all suggest that sacrifices were not offered by Israel as a whole during the wilderness experience. Eliezer's comment would suggest that he believes sacrifices were offered by Israel during that forty year period. He says that "it was not on account of the sacrifices that the people were saved, but on account of justice, righteousness, commandments, and ordinances." It is clear that all four commentators see sacrifice during the wilderness experience of Israel as being very minor.

Not for your sacrifices do I reprove you,
nor for your burnt offerings that are ever
before Me. (Psalm 50:8).

In the context of Psalm 50, this verse seems to suggest that God does not forgive the people because of any sacrifices

they might offer, but rather because they acknowledge the sovereignty of the Lord and offer praise to Him. This idea becomes especially clear in verse 14 ("Offer to God thanksgiving; and pay your vows to the most High.") and verse 23 (Whoever offers praise, glorifies Me; and to him that orders his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God"). This idea that God does not want the sacrifices of man would contradict various sections of the Torah. Is this what the commentators will perceive? It is possible to read this verse out of context and say that God does not punish the people because they offer sacrifices which He accepts. Will the commentators read the verse in this way?

Rashi, in his comment on this verse, makes it quite clear that the people will be forgiven, but not on account of the sacrifices. He comments that God tells the people, "It is not because of the sacrifices that I will not reprove you, for I would not reprove you if you did not bring them before Me continually. Further, I do not even look upon them."

Ibn Ezra and Kimchi share Rashi's view that God has no real interest in sacrifices. Kimchi says that God does not pay attention to the fact that the people do not bring sacrifices to Him, but does consider the sins that the people have committed.

Rabbi Meiri takes a different position. He suggests that God does not look upon the sacrifices if they are not accompanied with confession and repentance. Meiri is concerned with the

motivation of the people, while the other commentators seem to make their statements in absolute terms.

I will take no bullocks out of your house,
nor he-goats out of your folds (Psalm 50:9).

The question we must consider when reading this verse is why does God not accept the sacrifices of the bullock or the he-goat. Rashi says that the animals are not man's to give, but they belong to God anyways. Kimchi repeats this position in slightly different words. He says that if God would need sacrifices He would not take man's animals for all is under God's domain. None of the other commentators we consulted addressed themselves to the question we are considering.

For every beast of the forest is Mine, and
the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know
all the fowls of the mountains: and the
wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I
were hungry, I would not tell you: for the
world is mine, and the fulness thereof
(Psalm 50:10-12).

The first two verses quoted above do not present any challenge to the Torah, and we do not find any commentaries that do much more than restate the verse, or define what beasts or cattle are being referred to in these verses. Verse twelve does force us to ask a question about the consistency of this verse with what is found in the Torah. This verse suggests that God does not ask for sacrifices. This is contrary to various sections of the Torah. Do the commentators see this verse as presenting an idea not

found in the Torah?

Rashi makes no comment on this verse at all. Ibn Ezra does perceive a problem; he is bothered with an anthropomorphic understanding which may arise from this verse. He tells us that God is not like man that requires food. Ibn Ezra is clearly bothered by having God appear to require food, but he is not alone in being bothered by this.

Kimchi, like Ibn Ezra, comments that God does not really need food. He writes, "If I (God) were like a man that experienced hunger..." Kimchi's point, like Ibn Ezra's, is that God does not really require food. In a commentary by Alshech we again find the position that God does not require sacrifices, and this is seen as the reason behind God's making sacrifices optional for the individual (see Lev. 1:2 quoted above).

Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the
blood of goats? (Psalm 50:13).

Here we have, once again, a statement which clearly opposes sacrifices. This verse might seem to be the best example of a verse which contradicts the Torah, but the commentators do not see any problem. They see the verse as coming to discuss the sin offering and no other form of sacrifice. Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Meiri, and Kimchi all comment in this way. A sin offering may be given for a sin which is committed unintentionally, but not for one which was intentional.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:19).

One might assume that this verse teaches that God does not want animal sacrifices at all. Does this represent a new view of sacrifice, or did God ever really desire animal sacrifices? These are questions we might ask ourselves upon reading this verse. Did the commentators ask these same questions?

Very few commentators concern themselves with any of these questions. Rashi makes no comment on this verse at all. Ibn Ezra, although he makes a comment, also avoids discussing any of the questions I suggest would be important given the concerns of this thesis. He points out that the "sacrifices of God" mean "repentance", but does not say whether repentance comes to replace all forms of sacrifice.

Kimchi does little more than repeat the thought of the verse. He says that the sacrifices that God desires are the broken spirits of men. Meiri and Alshech, like Ibn Ezra and Kimchi, do not speak about whether sacrifices are no longer desired by God.

Summary

When considering all of the commentaries together it becomes painfully obvious that it is next to impossible to make a general statement about them. Certain verses stand out as being problematic to anyone who sees the Torah and Prophets as Divine works. Certainly the commentators we

have referred to felt that the prophet's utterances are also the words of God. Given this we expect that the commentators would have reacted to those verses which seem to contradict the Torah.

Sometime the commentators do respond to this problem. Generally, when they do comment about this tension, they do so in a way which reconciles the texts. By understanding sacrifices in a very limited way, they alleviate the possible disharmony that might be suggested. This is generally true, but not always. There are times when the possibility of contradiction is present in the text, and yet the commentators are silent about this issue.

Why is it that Rashi and Kimchi give explanations to clarify what a problematic verse in Jeremiah means, such as Jeremiah 7:21, but may be totally silent on another problematic verse, as Rashi is on Psalm 50:12? One possible answer is that the commentators were not looking for contradictions. They operated in a world that viewed the entire Bible as being divine in one form or another. It is possible that because they did not believe there could be contradictions they did not perceive them.

Medieval Philosophers

In this section we will be considering how three men known for their philosophic orientation reacted to the verses we have been considering. We will look at Jehuda Halevi's Kuzari, Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed, and Abravanel's commentary to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Let me remind the reader that we will not be dealing with all of those sections of the Kuzari or of the The Guide to the Perplexed that deal with sacrifice. We will consider only those passages that are being examined throughout this essay and that were mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis.

Jehuda Halevi

There are a number of sections in the Kuzari which deal with sacrifice, but only one of these passages quotes a verse we have been focusing upon. For the convenience of the reader who wishes to read the other sections, I have included a listing of them below.¹

One might ask why I include Jehuda Halevi in this thesis, given that he makes only one reference to the verses we have been examining. I would suggest that although we have little, quantitatively speaking, about how Halevi reacted to the verses we have been studying, he is important as a counter-position to the rationalist view which will be found

¹ Book one, sections 79 and 99, and the foreword.

Book two, sections 25, 26, and 48.

Book three, section 23.

Book four, sections 3 and 25.

Book five, section 23.

in Maimonides and Abravanel.

The section of the Kuzari which quotes a verse which is among those which we have been studying, is book 2, section 48. In this section Jehuda Halevi quotes Jeremiah 7:21, "Add your burnt offerings to your peace-offerings." Before we present how Halevi uses this verse, let us see the context in which it is presented.

Halevi distinguishes between rational laws and those, like the laws of the sacrifices, which are not rational. He suggests that the rational laws ought to be followed by everyone. Jehuda Halevi gives justice as an example of a rational law. He points out that "even a gang of robbers must have a kind of justice among them; otherwise their confederacy cannot last." Halevi reasons that the rational laws are incumbent on even the lowest of men.

Sacrifices, the Sabbath and circumcision are not rational laws. On the other hand Halevi would say they are not irrational laws. They are things which Halevi says, "reason neither demands nor forbids, ordinations especially given to Israel as a corollary to the rational laws." Sacrifices, as Halevi would view them, are on a different plane than the rational laws. Since even the basest of humans should follow the rational laws, the sacrificial laws are on a higher level than the rational laws.

It is in this context that Halevi quotes Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you?". Halevi then quotes Jeremiah 7:21, "Add your burnt offerings to your peace-

offerings." Halevi means to say that Micah 6 and Jeremiah 7 emphasize the rational commandments. These are the presuppositions to the superrational ones. Emphasis of the former is intended to secure a solid basis for the latter, but it is inconceivable that the emphasis meant to weaken, let alone deny, the superrational laws. Could one maintain that the superrational commandments are null because of emphasis on rational ones? In short, Halevi creates his own two-tier edifice of commandments; none is superfluous, least of all the one to which the sacrifices belong.

It should be clear from the earlier chapters on the Talmud and Midrash, and on the commentaries that the Jeremiah verse is rhetorical. The point of the verse is that making burnt offerings is valueless. Halevi is ignoring this meaning, and reading the verse as if it were saying there is a positive value in giving sacrifices.

Halevi has ignored the meaning of the verse he quoted. We have seen others do this before him so in a sense, this approach is historically sound. What we have not seen before is the distinction between rational laws and laws which are not rational (and yet not irrational). Halevi places those laws which are not rational, including the laws of sacrifices, above the rational laws. The approach taken by Maimonides will be radically different.

Moses Maimonides

In his Guide to the Perplexed Maimonides quotes several

of the verses which concern us. In only one case does he quote a verse in a discussion which is not pertinent to this thesis. In section III:32 Maimonides quotes Isaiah 1:11, Jeremiah 7:22-23, and Psalm 50:7-9. It is this section which is most interesting to us.

Before I state how Maimonides uses these verses, let me present the context in which they occur. Chapter 32 begins with Maimonides presenting a striking analogy. He discusses how the human organism develops, and receives nutrition suitable for the stages of development through which it passes.

"For when born, such individuals are extremely soft and cannot feed on dry food. Accordingly breasts were prepared for them so that they should produce milk with a view to their receiving humid food, which is similar to the composition of their bodies, until their limbs gradually and little by little become dry and solid."

That individuals develop like this is not accidental, but thanks only to the wisdom of God. Paralleled to the development of an individual is the development of Judaism. In its early stage there was an emphasis on sacrifices, but this did not represent the goal, which Maimonides suggests is a pure religion of righteousness.

In the same way an individual has to mature and develop, the religion, too, had to develop. The reason this was necessary, Maimonides suggests, is that if people were given a command not to offer any sacrifices they could not

See I:45, where Isaiah 1:15 is quoted in a discussion of what the word "to hear" (Shamo'a) connotes.

obey it for the people all around them were offering sacrifices.

"God did not require that He give us a Law prescribing the rejection, abandonment, and abolition of all these kinds of worship. For one could not then conceive the acceptance of such a Law, considering the nature of man, which always likes that to which it is accustomed...Therefore He, may He be exalted, suffered the above mentioned kinds of unreal things to His own name, May He be exalted, commanding us to practice them with regard to Him."

Maimonides sees sacrifices being commanded only as a ruse. When the people offer sacrifices to the Lord they are fulfilling a need they had because of their idolatrous history, and because idolatrous nations still surrounded them. Maimonides suggests God did not really want the sacrifices. He gave the commandment that they be offered to accomodate man, not Himself. In point of fact, God gave numerous commands which made the offerrings of sacrifices much more limited than it was for idolators. Sacrifices had to come from certain animals, they could be offered only in a specified spot and by only one family. Maimonides sees sacrifices as something the people needed to offer during the time it took them to evolve from a people with an ancestry of offering sacrifices to a people devoted to a religion of righteousness.

Look at the radical difference between Maimonides and Jehuda Halevi. The latter saw the laws of sacrifice as that which makes Israel unique. The sacrificial laws were viewed by Halevi as non-rational, and one who is observant is presented as offering sacrifices unquestiningly.

For Maimonides the sacrificial laws are aimed at the more primitive needs of man. God commanded man to offer sacrifices for a very specific reason; man had the need to make sacrifices. God, in His wisdom, knew that if man were prohibited from offering sacrifices to God, he might return to his idolatrous ways. Having established Maimonides' position generally with respect to sacrifices, we can now turn to the verses he quotes and see what he says about them.

Maimonides quotes Isaiah 1:11 ("What need have I of all your sacrifices? says the Lord.") and Jeremiah 7:22-23 ("For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying; Hearken to My voice and I will be your God, and you shall be My people."). Maimonides gives these verse as examples of "people being blamed because of their zeal for sacrifices and it is explained to the people that the sacrifices are not sought for their own sake, and that God can dispense with them." Earlier we have seen commentators say that the people placed too much value in sacrifices. They made burnt offerings but acted unrighteously. Commentators suggested if the people truly repented, then their sacrifices would be acceptable; they said that sacrifices were not the essence of commandments God gave Israel. The commentators never suggested that God commanded the people to offer sacrifices because men had the

* Jeremiah 7:23 was not discussed in the section on commentaries because none of the commentators made any significant remarks on it. The only one to comment was Kimchi, and he said, "The verse is clear."

need to make offerings, nor did they ever suggest that "God could dispense with the sacrifices."

Maimonides comments in connection with the Jeremiah verse,

"This dictum has been regarded as difficult by everyone whose words I have seen or heard. They say: How can Jeremiah say of God that He has given us no injunctions concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, seeing that the greater part of the commandments are concerned with these things? However the purpose of the dictum is as I have explained to you. For he says that the first intention consists only in your apprehending Me and not worshipping someone other than Me; 'And I will be your God and you shall be My people.'"

Maimonides then gives two explanations of the verse. First he suggests that Jeremiah is speaking of fundamental principles. As a fundamental principle, God never commanded the people to bring sacrifices for their own sake. The principle behind sacrifices is that God's unity would be established as idolatry would be effaced.

The second suggestion that Maimonides gives is the same interpretation Kimchi gave to Jeremiah 7:22 (see above). It is possible that Kimchi, being a younger contemporary of Maimonides by 25 years, may have made his comment based on Maimonides'.

Maimonides ends chapter 32 by quoting Psalm 50:7-9.
"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against you; God, your God, am I. Not for your sacrifices do I reprove you, nor for your burnt offerings that are ever before Me. I will take no bullock out of your house, nor he-goats out of your fold."

Maimonides suggests that these verses express the same

notion stated in Jeremiah 7:22; namely, that the people are guilty of mistaking God's real intent with respect to sacrifices. The people think that God wants sacrifices when truly God's goal is the elimination of idolatry and the establishing of His unity. Maimonides makes use of the verses that we have been focusing upon, in order to reduce the significance of sacrifices. He does not do it for the prophetic reason, but for theological reasons of his own which have nothing to do with the Bible.

Abravanel

Abravanel wrote a commentary on the later prophets, and it is from this commentary that the following has been taken. Abravanel wrote a commentary on only two of the four prophets we have been considering, Isaiah and Jeremiah. In his commentary there are many comments which tend to repeat the idea of the verse or else focus on a question not pertinent to this thesis. I will not be referring to either of those types of statements.

The first comment that Abravanel makes that is significant to us occurs in his remarks on Isaiah 1:12. In commenting on God telling the people He does not want them to trample His courts, Abravanel brings the question of motivation into the situation. He suggests that the people lack the proper dedication when they come to the Temple Mount. Abravanel suggests that God would prefer that the people offer no sacrifices than trample His courts.

In commenting on verse thirteen ("I cannot endure the iniquity with the solemn assemblies") Abravanel says that

the people are not really repentant of their evil ways. Their bringing sacrifices is very much of a superficial act on the peoples part. As Abravanel says, "I (God) cannot bear the two things together; your sinful acts on the one side, together with your gathering together and sitting there as a nation which acts righteously."

In commenting on verse fourteen ("Your new moons and fixed seasons fill Me with loathing; they are become a burden to Me, I cannot endure them.") Abravanel quotes the Midrash Tanhuma. He tells us of the non-Jew who asked Rabbi Akiba why the people offer sacrifices if God said that He hates them. This midrash was quoted earlier in the chapter on the Talmud and Midrash.

Abravanel's position on Jeremiah 7:21 ("Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat flesh.") is very much like what we had seen earlier. The sacrifices are not worth anything so the people may as well eat them and get some benefit from them.

The comment that interests us most is the one he makes on Jeremiah 7:22 ("For I spoke not to your fathers nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices."). Abravanel quotes the two explanations that Maimonides gives to this verse and says that he feels both are wrong. He dismisses the interpretation that the verse speaks about God's primary intention of eliminating idolatry and establishing His unity its place. Abravanel says that the

verses say nothing at all about intention.

Abravanel says that Maimonides' second suggestion (which was also the opinion of Kimchi) that Jeremiah is referring to the statutes and ordinances given at Marah is also incorrect. Abravanel makes the point that it does not matter whether the commandment about sacrificing was the first, second, or fifth commandment given. It is part of the 613 commandments given to Israel. Abravanel suggests that the right interpretation of this verse is that when God gave the ten commandments at Sinai He issued no commandments with respect to sacrifices. It was not until after the people had sinned with the golden calf that sacrifices had to be commanded, and then as a means of atonement for the people.

What I find unusual about these comments by Abravanel, and his last comment in particular, is that he takes a much more orthodox position on these verse than did Maimonides. In secondary literature which I consulted (Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume X, page 627 and the Soncino Pentateuch, page 562.) Abravanel is described as having supported Maimonides' position. I would have to assume that the position maintained by the secondary literature is based on Abravanel's writings as a whole, and as such presents a more accurate picture as to Abravanel's feelings on the general matter of sacrifice. The reader should be reminded that this thesis does not focus on the attitude of the prophets to sacrifice, but on the problem of contradiction within the Bible on the issue of sacrifices.

Conclusion

Because the three philosophers whom we have considered differ so greatly, it is not really possible to give any sort of summary without recapping what each individual man said. While we can describe Maimonides' position as that of a rationalist, it is harder to categorize the positions of the other two men. What we are left with, is the realization that there is no one philosophic position on the problem of contradiction.

Summary and Conclusion

Up until now we have been concerned with how others viewed those verses which seem to contradict the Torah about the place of sacrifice in Israel's religion. On many occasions these verses have been "stood on their heads" to give an interpretation that suggests they are in favour of sacrifices. Generally, it seems that the Rabbis who wrote the Talmud and Midrash did this most frequently. They could take part of a verse totally out of context, and argue a point diametrically opposed to the intent of the verse. The Rabbis were not alone in this approach however. The commentators occasionally did the same thing. More often however, they reconciled the verse with the Torah, not by ignoring the traditional understanding of the verse, but by suggesting a very restricted meaning. We also that among the philosophers, Jehuda Halevi totally departed from the context of the verse to argue that sacrifices were fundamental to the Israelite religion.

These verses were not always reconciled with the Torah however. There are a number of examples in the Talmud and Midrash where the Rabbis did place ethical or social laws on a different plane than sacrifices. In the commentaries this approach became slightly more obvious. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found in the commentaries to Jeremiah 7:22. There, the reader will recall, we read suggestions such as Rashi's that sacrifices are secondary to obeying, and Kimchi's suggestion that sacrifices are only optional for the

individual, not obligatory.

The most extreme understanding given to these verses is the one put forward by Maimonides. He suggested that sacrifices were given to man because man had a basic need to make offerings. In this sense the sacrificial laws represent God giving in to man in order to achieve the higher intention of overcoming idolatry. God, Maimonides says, does not need or truly want sacrifices. But Maimonides's is not the only view of the philosophers we examined. He is balanced by the approach of Jehuda Halevi.

What do we conclude was the meaning of these verses, and do the insights of the Rabbis, commentators, and philosophers help us in formulating our position? In answering the question as to what we think these passages really meant I will be referring to several modern commentaries, although I do not hold them up as authoritative. Let us examine each passage separately.

G. W. Wade in the Westminster Commentaries series suggests that the Isaiah passage does not teach God does not desire sacrifices, but that "what He requires is the practice of social justice and mercy, for which sacrifices can be no substitute."² A similar thought is expressed by G. B. Gray in the International Critical Commentary. He says that "the utterances of the prophets need not be taken as a prohibition absolute of sacrifice."³ I would agree with these suggestions that Isaiah is not absolutely condemning sacrifices. We must consider the medium of the message, and the environment

² G. W. Wade, The Book of the Prophet Isaiah (London, 1911), p. 5.

³ George B. Gray, Isaiah I (New York, 1912), p. 17.

in which it was given. Isaiah was speaking to a crowd of people who were fixed in their ways. He had this message to deliver, one he knew the people would not likely take to heart. He probably used the rhetoric of exaggeration to try to make his point as dramatically as he could.

Interesting comments are made by A. W. Streane in the Cambridge Bible series and by L. E. Binns in the Westminster Commentaries and are of such value that I will quote them at length. Streane writes on Jeremiah 7:22:

"Some have seen a difficulty in reconciling this verse with the institution of sacrifices through Moses. They accordingly consider that such passages of the Pentateuch as enjoin them did not exist in its original form, that the book of Deuteronomy as a whole is the composition of Jeremiah, and that the entire notion of laws concerning sacrifice, came in the time of Ezra."

Streane then gives four reasons why this cannot be correct. He suggests that (i) Jeremiah himself refers to regularly instituted sacrifices; (ii) Hosea and Amos testified to the institution of sacrifices prior to Jeremiah; (iii) the very fact the people prophets rebuked the institution indicates the great faith the people must have had in it; and (iv) the fact that the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) was discovered in Josiah's reign, prior to this prophecy, excludes the interpretation given above.

Streane suggests that Jeremiah clearly has the ten commandments in mind when he makes his comment, "For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings

or sacrifices." Streane says that the next verse, twenty-three ("But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice and I will be your God.") in language is remindful of Exodus 19:15, a verse which comes just prior to the ten commandments.⁴ It is interesting that this is almost the same suggestion Kimchi gave to this verse, although he did not link Exodus 19:15 in language, to Jeremiah 7:23.

Binns also says that Jeremiah did not really mean that the people did not give sacrifices to God in the wilderness. Binns does not think that Jeremiah has the ten commandments in mind when he says this however. He feels that we should translate 7:22 as "For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt on account of the burnt offerings or sacrifices." This translation, Binns suggests, indicates that "God did not reveal Himself to the people in order to obtain sacrifices."⁵

My interpretation of Jeremiah's words is slightly different than either of the above two positions. I feel that Jeremiah knew about a wilderness experience that included sacrifices, but that the sacrificial/cultic system was becoming more elaborate and institutionalized. I base this interpretation on an analysis that Ellis Rivkin suggests concerning the purpose of the book of Deuteronomy and of prophetic opposition to that book.⁶ I feel Jeremiah was not attacking sacrifices

⁴ Annesley William Streane, Jeremiah (London, 1903), pp. 66-7.
⁵ Leonard Elliot Binns, The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah (London, 1919), p. 76.

⁶ Ellis Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History (New York, 1971), pp. 17-20.

so much as the exalted position they were being given in the Israelite religion. In my opinion, Jeremiah viewed the social laws as being very much more primary than sacrifices, but I do not believe that he would think of stopping all sacrifices.

In discussing the meaning of Hosea 6:6 S.L. Brown gives a lengthy note on sacrifice in pre-exilic prophecy. He suggests that "none of the prophets saw in the sacrifices as they knew them a worthy expression of religious worship, and each of them would have said that sacrifices were not in the last resort essential to true religion."⁷ It is interesting that this interpretation coincides to a great extent with the comments that Maimonides made. William R. Harper, in the International Critical Commentary to Hosea says that Hosea is pointing out the peoples mistaken notion that "sacrifices were sufficient to gain Yahweh's favour. What Yahweh delights in, i.e. that which will gain His favour, is love."⁸ This comment strikes me as hedging slightly. Harper could mean that sacrifices would be acceptable if accompanied with love, or he could mean that sacrifices are pointless. It would seem that Brown suggested the latter interpretation, and that Harper leaves the question open, but if we read further in Brown's essay we find that he is contradicting himself. Shortly after Brown says that the prophets did not see sacrifices as essential to true religion

⁷ Sydney Lawrence Brown, The Book of Hosea (London, 1932), pp.58-61.
⁸ William Rainey Harper, Amos and Hosea (New York, 1910), p.286.

he says, "it is difficult to believe that Amos or any other pre-exilic prophet could have dreamed of a period in the history of Israel when no sacrifices were offered." ⁹

I do not understand how Brown can suggest that sacrifices were both unessential and yet at the same time, something which could not be done away with.

The fact that Brown seems to contradict himself on this subject and that Harper does not totally commit himself to one interpretation or the other, points out in my mind the difficulty the present day reader has in trying to understand the message of these passages. I find it very tempting to argue that the prophets whom we are considering all saw impending disaster for their country. They may have realized that if the religion of Israel was to survive it would have to advance beyond a cult which was tied to the land. To argue this way is to suggest motivation for the prophet's words, when none is alluded to in the text.

In his essay Brown also discusses the meaning of the Amos passage which we have been studying. He says, "those who maintain that the eighth-century prophets reject sacrifice as an institution, and not merely sacrifice as offered by a people that had lost the true knowledge of God, rely mainly on Amos 5:24ff."¹⁰ He dismisses this interpretation and suggests a different translation given by Harper, which overcomes this problem. He would translate verse 25 as, "Have you offered unto Me only sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness?"

⁹ Brown, (see above, note 7), p.60.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.59.

He says that "this translation places the emphasis in the proper place and does not compel Amos to say that there were no sacrifices or offerings in the wilderness."¹¹

It strikes me that Amos is attacking the institution of sacrifices extremely hard, the way Isaiah did in his attack in Isaiah one. I would assume, as Brown does, that Amos must have known about sacrifices in the wilderness. I am not sure whether I would support Harper's translation, or whether I would assume Amos makes his statement in exaggerated form for the sake of emphasis. In either case, I do not see Amos as truly doubting the offering of some form of sacrifices during the wilderness experience.

Comments made in the International Critical Commentary by Briggs, suggest that the Psalms we studied indicate that the sacrifices offered to God were found by Him to be unacceptable. Those sacrifices are referred to as external, and Briggs suggests that Psalm 51 in particular, places the emphasis on the internal sacrifices. Brown suggests that God does not require sacrifices at all. God wanted the hearts of His people, not their offerings. This interpretation is suggested for Psalm 50:18.¹² It strikes me that Psalm 51 allows really no other interpretation.

The reader is certainly free to disagree with my interpretations. If a reader disagrees with my opinions about the meaning of the various passages this would just support my contention that the verses are problematic in

¹¹ Ibid., p.61.

¹² Charles Augustus Briggs, The Book of Psalms (New York, 1909), II, 60.

nature.

The Rabbis, traditional commentators and philosophers should not be blamed for avoiding the issue of contradiction. Such contradiction is not universally found in the texts by modern commentators who are not dogmatically committed, nor unaware of historical development. Modern writers who recognize the problem of contradiction arrive at their understanding of these verses circumspectly, often with hesitation. Such hesitation is almost totally absent in the traditional texts. Where, then, there is only a gradual difference between modern critical and traditional commentators and essayists, the ancient and medieval authors should not be blamed for being a few degrees away from their successors.