

This attempt to adapt Runciman to Old Testament purposes has done scant justice to the analytical power of his book. Some of you may think that Runciman is too demanding, and that life is too short to accept the rigour of his demands. Again, the whole approach is very British, owing much to the analytical tradition of British philosophy. However, Runciman advocates what seems to me to be essential at the present stage of Old Testament study—a readiness to be open to a variety of sociological methods, but a readiness tempered by intellectual and conceptual discipline.

IBN EZRA BETWEEN MEDIEVALISM AND MODERNISM: THE CASE OF ISAIAH XL-LXVI¹

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I. MEDIEVALISM VERSUS MODERNISM IN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

As far as we know, Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) was the first to attribute the second part of the book of Isaiah to an anonymous prophet who began to prophesy in Babylon on the eve of the Persian conquest. The veiled, enigmatic language in which Ibn Ezra hints at this is evidence of the magnitude of the innovation which this position represented and of the force of the contrast between it and the beliefs and opinions held by his readers. But while Ibn Ezra trusted that "the wise would understand" (Commentary on Isa. xl 1) these hints, his modern readers find it very difficult to decipher them and even more difficult to evaluate them. Ibn Ezra's esoteric statements readily admit of both archaization (obscuration of the daring, innovative dimension for apologetical purposes),² and modernization (exaggeration of their critical character out of the common tendency to attribute our own views to our predecessors).³ We can avoid these opposing pitfalls only if we refuse to content ourselves with the correct understanding of his views, but endeavour also to discover his true motives. Only when we understand why Ibn Ezra felt obliged to deny Isaiah's authorship of chapters xl-lxvi of the book which bears his name, shall we be able to evaluate the commentator's place between medievalism and modernism.

For medieval man, the Bible was the immortal word of God addressed directly to his own generation, just as to any other generation. Even when a prophecy clearly refers to the affairs and needs of the prophet's contemporaries, it was included in Sacred Scripture because of its message to every generation. Despite the general awareness of the great

¹ This article was written while its author was a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

² Cf. M. Friedlaender, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham ibn Ezra* (London, 1877), pp. 60-9, 226, 229, 235.

³ Cf. B. Spinoza, *The Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670), Chapter viii. Nachman Krochmal, *Works* (1831), edited by S. Rawidowicz (Berlin, 1924²), pp. 114-18 (Hebrew).

differences in style and theme among the writings of the prophets, their common divine origin requires that they be included not only in a unitary theological system, but also in a common prognosis of our future. The absolute veracity of the prophecy enables us, though it does not always require us, to assume that it was actually fulfilled even when the Bible contains no independent historical evidence of its fulfilment. The glory of prophecy lies in the prophet's ability to foresee the distant future, and the fulfilment of short-range prophecies is documented as a guarantee of the utter truth of the vision of the end of days.⁴ The medieval commentator never stands alone *vis-à-vis* the text, and, even when he is fully committed to the plain, literal meaning, he views himself as the builder of a bridge between Sacred Scripture and the community of faith.

The primary innovation in the modern approach to the Bible is its keen historical awareness. The changes wrought by time are so great that the discovery of the meaning of Scripture to its original audience must always precede any investigation of its message to later generations. While medieval philological exegesis was guided by the principle that "The Tora speaks the language of men", modern philological-historical interpretation is guided by the fundamental assumption that Sacred Scripture speaks in the language and ideas of men of a specific time. Even the eternal must be garbed in the temporal, for as purposeful speech every biblical text must have been intelligible to its audience and tuned to its needs, problems, and longings. It is thus inconceivable that prophecy should have been either incomprehensible to its original audience or meaningless for it.

In view of this conception of prophecy, the tidings of Cyrus' restoration of the Babylonian exiles is meaningless to the Judeans still living in their own land and battling the Assyrian king Sennacherib, just as the consolations of the imminent rebuilding of the Temple would be meaningless to a generation which knew nothing of the impending destruction of the First Temple. In addition to this common literary-historical outlook, modern biblical scholars feel their primary obligation to scientific truth. The religious scholar shares this sense of obligation since the essentially rationalistic faith in the validity of the scientific method requires him to use it as a reliable tool for gaining true knowledge of the word of God, and because he sees intellectual integrity as a basic religious duty.

In the late eighteenth century, J. G. Eichhorn concluded that the second part of the book of Isaiah was not written by Isaiah the son of Amoz,

⁴ Cf. The book of ben Sira xlviii 24-25; Josephus Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book xi, 1,2.

but by an anonymous prophet who prophesied in Babylon.⁵ He was not aware that in this he had been anticipated in the mid-twelfth century by Ibn Ezra whose hints to this effect aroused no response or comment for over six centuries.⁶ Eichhorn's explicit and detailed argument is obviously a logical outcome of the modern approach to the Bible, whereas Ibn Ezra's arguments can be discovered only by a meticulous examination of his method in interpreting the book of Isaiah as a whole. However, we must first discuss the method of his great predecessor, Ibn Chiquitilla in his commentary on Isaiah, for Ibn Ezra frequently contended with him in his own commentary.

II. IBN CHIQUITILLA'S HISTORICAL APPROACH: THE FIRST BREACH IN THE MEDIEVAL ATTITUDE

R. Moses Hakkohen Ibn Chiquitilla, biblical commentator, linguist, poet, and translator, was born in Cordoba early in the eleventh century and was active in Saragossa and southern France. His commentaries on the Prophets, like most Jewish biblical commentaries written in Arabic in Spain, have not survived. But in Ibn Ezra's commentaries on Isaiah and the Minor Prophets, it is cited close to eighty times, and some twenty more quotations have been preserved in the works of other authors.⁷ Ibn Chiquitilla's modernism finds expression in his great sensitivity to literary form and historical setting. The obvious fact that the psalms have the literary form of prayers and the clearly poetic terminology of their headings prevented his regarding them as prophecies, and therefore he assigned a post-exilic date to the psalms with a Babylonian setting.⁸ Also in his interpretation of the words of the prophets he gave maximum consideration to their literary and historical contexts. In the literary field, he strenuously avoided breaking prophecies up into excessively small units; moreover, he sought to discover the common thematic and chronological basis of consecutive passages.⁹ In the historical field, his goal was to discover the political events because of which or about which the prophet prophesied by giving clear preference to short-range fulfilment. Thus, for example, he applies both Obadiah's prophecy and Isa. xxxiv to the imminent destruction of Edom by Assyria, which occurred, according to his

⁵ *Einleitung ins A. T.* iii (Leipzig, 1783), pp. 84-109.

⁶ As far as I can see, Kimhi, Nachmanides, Ibn Caspi and Abrabanel simply avoided the entire issue, preferring to ignore rather than refute Ibn Ezra's dangerous views.

⁷ S. Poznanski, *Mose B. Samuel Hakkohen Ibn Chiquitilla nebst den Fragmenten seiner Schriften* (Leipzig, 1895), pp. 98-102, 135-49.

⁸ Cf. U. Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms - From Saadya Gaon to Abraham ibn Ezra* (Ramat-Gan, 1982), pp. 110-19 (Hebrew).

⁹ See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Isa. xi 1, xxx 26, xxxiv 2.

conjecture, while Sennacherib marched on Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. Only those prophecies which explicitly mention that they refer to "the latter days" he felt compelled to interpret messianically,¹⁰ just as he refrained from postdating those Psalms specifically attributed to David. Thus, he interprets the prophecy "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isa. xi 1) as referring to Hezekiah, king of Judah, relying *inter alia* upon the similarity between "him shall the nations seek [*yidrōšū*]" (xi 10), and the story of the visit to Jerusalem of the envoys of Babylon after Hezekiah's recovery "to inquire [*lidrōš*] about the sign that had been done in the land" (2 Chr. xxxii 31).

Ibn Chiquitilla's persistent endeavours to see the prophecies as short-range predictions constrained him to make excessive use of two methods: a. making wild assumptions about supposed historical events for which there is no evidence outside the prophecy itself, a kind of *eventus ex vaticinio*, as, for example, his supposition that there was a restoration to Zion in the reign of Hezekiah, based on Isa. xi 11-12, xxx 3-10;¹¹ and b. the interpretation of supernatural eschatological promises as mere metaphors in order to adjust them to the natural conditions of the near future; for example, the application of Zechariah's promises to the time of Nehemiah required him to explain the prophesied changes in the natural order metaphorically.¹² Nonetheless, Ibn Chiquitilla did not try to bridge the time span between the eighth-century prophets Isaiah and Micah and their prophecies of consolation which he quite naturally applied to the restoration to Zion in the sixth century. Thus he interprets Micah iv 11 as a prophecy regarding the Second Temple period on the basis of the linguistic similarity between "to be ruler [*mōšāl*] in Israel" (Micah v 1) and "shall sit and rule [*ūmāšāl*] upon his throne" (Zech. vi 13) which obviously refers to Zerubbabel, and on the basis of the similarity between the metaphor which follows in Micah iv 13, "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion", and the one following in Zechariah, "What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain" (Zech. iv 7).¹³ And as he sees no objection to the fact that Micah is comforting his contemporaries with the prophecy of the restoration to Zion from Babylon, he makes the same assumption regarding Isaiah. Apparently, he was not at all bothered by the fundamental requirement that prophecy be intelligible and meaningful to its original audience. Indeed,

¹⁰ See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Joel iii 1. This was also his opinion regarding Mal. iii 23, as quoted by Ibn Bal'am, ad loc. (edited by S. Poznanski, *JQR*, N.S. 15 [1924/5], p. 53).

¹¹ See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Isa. xi 11, xxxv 3.

¹² See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Zech. ix 9, xiii 1.

¹³ See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Micah iv 11.

not only is there not a single expression of this "modern" criterion in the citations from his commentaries, but his identification of the Servant of the Lord in Is. lii 13-liii 12 with Hezekiah¹⁴ is clear evidence that the idea of attributing the chapters of consolation in Isaiah to a late prophet never occurred to him.

The scope of Ibn Chiquitilla's innovational approach is clearly reflected in the accusations levelled against him by his younger contemporary, Ibn Bal'am. On the one hand, he censures "his misleading, perverse views" expressed in his rationalistic tendency to play down the degree to which miracles violate the laws of nature. On the other hand, he attributes to Ibn Chiquitilla the intent to undermine the belief in the coming redemption expressed in his method of applying nearly every prophecy to historical events which had since occurred rather than to the messianic era.¹⁵ However, from our modern vantage point, Ibn Chiquitilla's historical approach is still anchored in an obviously medieval attitude. He assiduously makes quasi-historical identifications based on stylistic analogy and the uncritical reconstruction of the events from the expounded prophecy itself. And he does not at all take seriously the question of the meaning of the prophecy for its original audience. Indeed, his motives are rationalistic, but, even more than he seeks to understand the prophecy in relation to the needs of the period, he tries to present it in as natural and realistic a way as possible in order to make it more reasonable.

III. IBN EZRA'S CRITIQUE OF IBN CHIQUITILLA

In quite a few of Ibn Ezra's references to his predecessor's interpretations, we detect his admiration for their interpretative virtuosity and innovative qualities. At the same time, he has his reservations about Ibn Chiquitilla's excessive conclusions, although he never rejects his critical suggestions for dogmatic reasons. Ibn Ezra has two main complaints against the drastic reduction in the number of messianic prophecies. First, prophecies which have obviously not yet been fulfilled (such as the splitting of the Mount of Olives in two [Zech. xiv 4]) must refer to the future. Second, although many promises were not fulfilled because they were conditional from the very beginning upon Israel's total responsiveness to the prophetic call (see his Commentary on Joel iv 17, 20; Hagg. ii 9), promises accompanied by the oath of the Lord were not sub-

¹⁴ Quoted by Ibn Bal'am in his Arabic commentary on Isa. lii 13 (*REJ* xxiii [1892], p. 209); Poznanski, pp. 101, 146.

¹⁵ See Ibn Bal'am's commentary on Josh. x 12-13 (published by S. Poznanski in *A. Berliner's Festschrift* [Frankfurt A.M., 1903], p. 103 (Hebrew section), and his commentary on Zech. ix 9 (quoted by Poznanski, pp. 157-8).

ject to such conditioning. The prophecy acquires absolute validity on the strength of that oath and for this reason we may expect its complete fulfilment with the coming of the messiah (see his Commentary on Isa. lii 1). These arguments were not innovated by Ibn Ezra, since they had already been presented systematically by Saadia in the tenth century (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, VIII 7-8). We may suppose that Ibn Chiquitilla could have ignored them by resorting to his favourite method—radical interpretation in terms of metaphor, which reduces eschatological promises to natural dimensions and makes it possible to view the oath of the Lord as nothing more than rhetorical emphasis. By contrast, Ibn Ezra took these arguments very seriously, and was guided by them also in his commentary on the prophecies of consolation in the book of Isaiah.

In his elucidation of the heading of the book of Isaiah (i 1), Ibn Ezra says that the first part of the book consists “mostly of his prophecies about the cities of Judah which the king of Assyria had captured, and about Jerusalem which had escaped him”. Indeed, in the body of the commentary, he applies most of the prophecies in Isa. i-xxxix to Sennacherib’s campaign and his defeat before the walls of Jerusalem.¹⁶ It is obvious that he adopts Ibn Chiquitilla’s method of contemporary application, although he considers it unnecessary to note this. On the other hand, Ibn Ezra informs us of an exegetical controversy raging over four prophecies (or sections of prophecies) of salvation: 1. Isa. xi-xii; 2. xxiv-xxvii 6; 3. xxx 19-26 (presumably); 4. xxxiv-xxxv. Ibn Chiquitilla applied all these to the rescue from Sennacherib; “most of the commentators” applied them to the messianic era; while Ibn Ezra does not decide the issue, preferring to offer two parallel interpretations of each prophecy based on these two methods.

In addition to the short-range prophecies (which represent the majority), and the long-range prophecies (only one of which, he says, refers with certainty to the messianic era), Isa. i-xxxix contains three medium-range prophecies which, Ibn Ezra tells us, are also controversial: the destruction of Jerusalem and Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (xxii-xxiii), the overthrow of Belshazzar by the Persians and Medes and the restoration of the Babylonian exiles to Zion (xiii 1-xiv 27, xxx 1-10). Not only does Ibn Ezra (and probably Ibn Chiquitilla as well) not see any objection to the fact that Isaiah, who announces the rescue of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, also prophesies, without any attempt at a transition or explanation, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, but he even finds obviously prognostic allusions in his prophecies: “and though

¹⁶ See e.g. Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Isa. i 8, vii 17, 20, viii 8, ix 4-5, x 11, 24, xi 1, xvii 3, 5, 12, xviii 3-6, xx 1, xxiv 14, xix 4-7, xxx 18, xxxi 3-4, xxxii 15, xxxiii 14.

a tenth remains in it” (vi 13) shows that “ten kings will yet reign over Judah before the exile”, and “an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together” (xiii 4) shows “that the king of Persia who is Cyrus, and the king of Media who is Darius, both joined together against Babylon, as is stated explicitly in Daniel (v 28)”. It thus seems that the application of the majority of the prophecies to the immediate future can, in the mind of medieval commentators, be reconciled quite naturally with the foretelling of quite specific information, which in our view can have no real meaning for the prophet’s audience.

The remarkable similarity of Ibn Ezra’s and Ibn Chiquitilla’s opinions on the first part of Isaiah by no means prevails when we come to the second part, as Ibn Ezra states in his elucidation of xl 1:

Comfort, Comfort my People: This chapter has been attached to the preceding one because above it was mentioned that all the treasures of the king, and even his sons, will be exiled to Babylon. Thus, after this prediction should follow the consolations. The first consolations with which the second part of the book begins refer, in the opinion of R. Moses Hakkohen, to the rebuilding of the Second Temple, but, in my opinion, everything refers to the coming redemption from our present exile. There are, it is true, also prophecies concerning the Babylonian exile; they have been included only in order to state that Cyrus released the exiles.¹⁷ In the last section of the book all the prophecies surely refer to a period yet to come, as I shall explain.

This passage is rather obscure, though not intentionally so, for in the widespread controversy over whether the prophesied promises applied to the restoration from Babylon or from the present exile there is nothing that need be concealed. At any rate, Ibn Ezra and his predecessor agree that, as a counterbalance to the bleak end of the first part of the book, the second part begins with consolations. But while Ibn Chiquitilla stresses the close connection between Isaiah’s prediction of the exile of the treasures of the king of Judah and his sons to *Babylon* and the consolations of the restoration of the exiles from *Babylon*, Ibn Ezra thinks that the consolation is even greater since the consolations bring tidings primarily of the last and final redemption. However, does Ibn Chiquitilla really apply only “the first consolations from the second part of the book” to the Second Temple period? It would seem so, since Ibn Bal’am informs us in his Commentary on Isa. lii 13 that Ibn Chiquitilla identified the Servant of the Lord in the prophecy “Behold, my servant shall prosper” (lii 13-liii

¹⁷ The obviously faulty text has to be emended through conjecture, as the seven extant MSS and the *editio princeps* (Venice, 1525) offer no better reading. The minimal emendation would be the erasure of the dittographical *š* in *šššālah* since it creates a meaningless incomplete subordinate clause.

12) with King Hezekiah, that is, he applies this prophecy to the time of the First Temple. Presumably, he did likewise with the chastisements in chapters lvi 10-lix 21, because of their obvious setting in the Land of Israel. On the other hand, we see from Ibn Ezra's controversy with him (which is explicit in his elucidation of lv 2 and covert in his commentary on lxii 8), that Ibn Chiquitilla did interpret the consolations in lv and lxii as applying to the Second Temple period. Presumably, he did likewise with the entire collection of consolations in lx-lxvi. In other words, the expression "first consolations" is not meant to exclude "last consolations", but to say that Ibn Chiquitilla thinks that all the consolations which immediately follow chapter xl apply without exception to the time of the Second Temple, while after lii 12ff. there is no such uniformity. There are some prophecies concerning the First Temple, some concerning the Second Temple, but none concerning the latter days.

Whereas, on the one hand, Ibn Ezra determines that, in his opinion, "everything refers to our present exile", he admits, on the other, that there are prophecies concerning the Babylonian exile. He reconciles this seeming contradiction by explaining that the Babylonian consolations were included in this messianic collection not for their own sake, but "in order to state that Cyrus released the exiles". In order to understand this statement, we must examine how in his commentary on chapters xl-lxvi Ibn Ezra actually solved the problem of the times to which the various prophecies refer.

Ibn Ezra explains all the prophecies in chapters xl-li as consolations addressed to the Babylonian exiles on the eve of the downfall of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, at the hands of the Medes and Persians. The early news of Cyrus' victory, including the mention of his name in both xlv 28 and xlv 1 is meant to serve as decisive proof of the divinity of the God of Israel, who makes Cyrus his messiah without the emperor's being aware of his role as redeemer, and whose prophet proclaims future events before they happen.¹⁸ li 1-11 is the first prophecy which Ibn Ezra, in open disagreement with Ibn Chiquitilla (in his com. on lii 1, 11), applies to the messianic era because of the unconditional promise to Zion, which clearly had not been fulfilled in the time of the Second Temple: "for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean" (lii 1). From here till the end of the book he regards all the prophecies as messianic, except those of the section lv 6-lix 21, which he interprets as prophecies of rebuke addressed to the prophet's "contemporaries", of whom he demands that they repent so that their iniquities may not delay both the imminent deliverance and final redemption: "Once you know

¹⁸ See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Isa. xli 4, 23, xlii 1, 8.

that you will be delivered from Babylon, and from all the nations a second time, seek the Lord" (his com. on lv 1 and lvi 1). From this and many other statements, it is obvious that the prophecies on the latter days (continued in lx-lxvi) were addressed to the Babylonian exiles *before* they were released by Cyrus. Just as the prophecy about the latter days in chapter ii was intended for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had not yet been rescued from Sennacherib, as he says about ii 1: "for Zion will now be saved from the hands of Sennacherib, and she will besides be highly distinguished in the future", so also in the second part of the book are the messianic promises interwoven with the immediate promises.

In other words, when Ibn Ezra writes in his explanation of xl 1 that henceforth "everything refers to our present exile", he presumably means to say that for the exiles in Babylon, too, the messianic promises were the heart of the prophet's message. And when he adds that "There are, it is true, also prophecies concerning the Babylonian exile; they have been included only in order to state that Cyrus released the exiles", he presumably means to say that the consolations for the time of the Second Temple are subordinate to the messianic promises, since they are cited only for the sake of analogy. As these were fulfilled not long afterwards when Cyrus released the exiles, so, too, will the prophecies regarding "our present exile" be fulfilled. As, when the Jews were still in Babylon, the messianic prophecy was meant to impart an added dimension to the topical prophecy, so in the "present exile" the prophecy of the deliverance from Babylon, which has meanwhile been fulfilled, is intended to lend additional strength and credibility to the prophecy of the latter days.¹⁹

To sum up, we found significant differences between the commentaries of Ibn Chiquitilla and Ibn Ezra on the second half of Isaiah, but their disagreements are not fundamental. For both of them, it was enough that the prophecy should have had a loose, general relevancy for the prophet's contemporaries. And as Ibn Chiquitilla sees nothing problematical in Isaiah's consolations regarding the restoration of the exiles from Babylon serving to counter-balance his evil tidings of the exile of Hezekiah's sons and treasures to Babylon, so Ibn Ezra sees nothing strange in assuming that the burden of the message to the exiles in Babylon is not their own restoration to Zion, but the future, final revival of Jerusalem after a future destruction which they cannot even imagine.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibn Ezra's commentary on Isa. xliii 9, xlvi 13, xlix 6, l 8, lii 15.

IV. WHY DID IBN EZRA ATTRIBUTE CHAPTERS XL-LXVI TO ANOTHER PROPHET?

As is well-known, Ibn Ezra was not deterred from concluding that several anachronistic statements in the Pentateuch must be regarded as late interpolations. In his comment on Dt. i 2 he reveals to the wise reader, in carefully veiled, allusive language, that Moses could not have written in the past tense "*at that time the Canaanites were in the land*" (Gen. xii 6) or in the present tense "*as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided'*" (Gen. xxii 14). It is equally unreasonable that, in the body of the Pentateuch, Moses should refer to the Law as completed: "*And Moses wrote this law, and gave it to the priests*" (Dt. xxxi 9). Because of this sensitivity to anachronisms,²⁰ Ibn Ezra in his comment on Isa. xxxiv 6 rejects the identification of Bozrah with Constantinople: "*This is impossible, because, since the foundation of that town, there have not yet elapsed a thousand years; (Bozrah) is a town in Edom.*" If in Ibn Ezra's opinion it is impossible that Isaiah should have referred to the city of Constantinople by name centuries before its founding, would he not have found it equally absurd that this prophet should have mentioned by name Cyrus, the king of Persia, over a century before his birth? Though this seems a reasonable conclusion, it cannot be accepted for two reasons. First, nowhere does Ibn Ezra indicate that he (nor Ibn Chiquitilla) finds the two references to Cyrus, in Isa. xlv 1 and xlv 1 problematic. Second, as we have seen, Ibn Ezra quite naturally assumes that the words of the prophets also contain detailed prognostic prophecies. Not only does he not see any problem in the fact that the man of God from Judah should prophesy in the reign of Jeroboam the son of Nebat about the future ruler of Judah some three hundred years later ("*Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name*" [1 Kings xiii 2]), but in his introduction to his Commentary on Zechariah, he even cites this prophecy as evidence for his assertion that the power of prophecy had declined in Israel (at the time of the First Temple, the man of God saw far with great clarity, while in the time of the Second Temple Zechariah needed an angel to explain the obscure night visions to him). Ibn Ezra's objection to anachronisms does not arise, therefore, from the absurdity inherent in premature information about the future. Rather, only the fact that it is presented as already known and familiar undermines the reasonableness of its style and the clarity of its content. On the other hand, the reference to Cyrus within the framework of a prophecy of consolation describing the future redemp-

²⁰ Cf. Ibn Ezra's commentary on Ex. iii 1,2; Lev. xxii 27; Dt. xxii 8.

tion of Israel from Babylon is no less reasonable than the Man of God's foretelling the name of King Josiah.

Just as their audience could not have comprehended the meaning of the long-range prophecies, so the prophets themselves did not understand everything they uttered. Ibn Ezra's strong objection to computing the date of the final redemption from hints in the Scriptures led him to stress the idea that prognostic prophecy could be fully understood only upon its fulfilment—"...Daniel too did not know the end, for, as he said, 'I heard but I did not understand' (Dan. xii 8), and he also said at last, 'seal the book, until the time of the end' (xii 4). 'But those who are wise shall understand' (xii 10) when the end would come from the words of the angel" (The Long Commentary on Dan. viii 25).

Hence, neither his objection to anachronisms nor any adherence to the principle of meaningfulness led Ibn Ezra to conclude that Isa. xl-lxvi was uttered by another prophet, but purely exegetical considerations. The denial of Isaiah's authorship of the second part of the book required camouflage (lest it shock the naive faith of most of his readers), as well as justification (so that the wise reader should acknowledge its legitimacy). Thus he writes in his comment on Isa. xl 1 (in direct continuation of the paragraph cited above):

Take note that the statement of the transmitters of the Oral Law, of blessed memory, to the effect that the book of Samuel was written by Samuel, is indeed correct, but only as regards the first part, up to the words "*And Samuel died*" (1 Sam. xxv 1). This is confirmed by the fact that the book of Chronicles contains the genealogy of the descendants of Zerubbabel for many generations. The evidence (for what I wish to demonstrate) consists in the words "*Kings shall see and arise; princes shall prostrate themselves*" (Isa. xlix 7). Of course, one may argue that this verse means that they will arise and prostrate themselves when they hear the name of the prophet, even after his death. The wise shall understand.

Despite the fact that the whole book is named after the prophet Samuel, the events following his death were obviously recorded by a later prophet since the historiography of the future is clearly beyond the bounds of biblical prophecy and is inconceivable. In keeping with this approach, Ibn Ezra (in his commentary on Dt. xxxiv 1) attributes the last twelve verses of the law of Moses to Joshua, for it is far more reasonable to assume that the sequence of events narrated here became known to Joshua "through a prophecy" than that Moses wrote in advance about his own death and burial. As there are biblical books which were completed by another prophet, so there are also comprehensive interpolations containing information which is obviously beyond the scope of the rest of the book. Evidence of this is found in the fact that to the books of

Chronicles, which end with Cyrus' proclamation, thereby bringing the chronicles up to Zerubbabel, is added a genealogy of Zerubbabel's descendants for many generations (1 Chr. iii 19-24). The wise reader who thus understands that the content of the biblical books does not always verify the traditional authorship, and that this fact does not detract from their sacredness, will realize that in the second part of the book of Isaiah the Lord promises the prophet (in the present tense) that one of the marvellous expressions of the imminent redemption will be the reversal of the prophet's personal fortunes, from humiliation and persecution to the recognition and respect of kings: "Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the servant of rulers: 'Kings shall see and arise; princes shall prostrate themselves; because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you'" (xlix 7).

In his commentary on this verse, Ibn Ezra answers the reader who may be troubled by the question how the sixth-century kings and princes of Persia would arise before the eighth-century Isaiah, with these words: "I have already hinted to you this secret in the middle of the book." At the same time he reassures those readers who could not accept his assumption that there was a later prophet, by repeating the answer which he had already offered in his commentary on xl 1, which was intended to reconcile his interpretation with the accepted view. Cyrus and his princes will not arise before the prophet himself, but will honour his memory by arising and prostrating themselves when the prophecies which Isaiah uttered so long before have been fulfilled before their very eyes. After this he once again addresses the wise reader, who refuses to ignore linguistic and stylistic data for the sake of theological convenience, and remarks that the second person singular in "who has chosen you" is "evidence of the correctness of that interpretation". That is to say, it clearly proves that here the Lord is speaking directly to the prophet and not about him.

Ibn Ezra's alertness to changes of speaker in prophetic texts and his literary sensitivity to the continuity of theme between prophecies (or as he calls it, "the cohesiveness of sections") led him to identify the Servant of the Lord with the prophet, and to discover the autobiographical character of the Servant of the Lord prophecies. Moreover, this twofold sensitivity enabled him to see the great affinity between these prophecies and to offer a unitary interpretation of them as reflecting the personal fate of the Servant within the concrete circumstances of the Babylonian exile.²¹ To be

²¹ Among modern scholars it was B. Duhm (*Das Buch Jesaja* [Göttingen, 1892]) who first pointed out the distinctive character of the "Servant of the Lord Songs"; and S. Mowinckel (*Der Knecht Jahwäs* [Giessen, 1921]) who first identified the Suffering Servant with the prophet himself. Neither of them realized that Ibn Ezra had anticipated them.

sure, Ibn Ezra mentions that "most of the commentators" viewed the Servant as the personification of the righteous ones of Israel (Commentary on Isa. xlii 1, li 12), and he, too, is forced to interpret single verses in this way (xli 8, xlv 1, 21). But, whenever possible, he proposes an individual identity for the Servant, even when it entails a rather forced interpretation (see especially his commentary on xliii 10, xlix 3). In four prophecies (xlii 1-25, xlix 1-13, l 4-11, li 12-16) the Servant-prophet is obviously speaking about himself in his role as the herald to Israel and the nations of the imminent release of the exiles, his persecution by the wicked ones of Israel and the Babylonians, and the honour that he will enjoy when his prophecy is fulfilled. Ibn Ezra consistently and systematically emphasizes the Babylonian setting of these prophecies on the one hand, and their autobiographical form on the other. But, aside from hints in his elucidation of xlix 7-8 (quoted above), he leaves it to the reader to draw the necessary conclusion about the identity of the prophet and his time from the combination of these two features. But when he comes to the Suffering Servant prophecy *par excellence* (lii 13-liii 12), he surprises the reader by resuming the discussion of the identity of the Servant. In his elucidation of lii 13 he rejects out of hand the christological interpretation, both because the description does not fit the fate of Jesus and because the context of the prophecy requires that it be applied to Israel.²² He refrains from adopting the messianic interpretation, since it leaves many verses without any concrete meaning. He praises Saadia's attempt to identify the Servant-prophet with Jeremiah, but rejects it contending that the sufferings of Jeremiah do not relate in any way to the consolations to the exiles in Babylon. Finally, he comes to the conclusion that the Servant personifies all the servants of the Lord in exile, or the entire Jewish people as a collective servant. In his view, the latter possibility is the most reasonable, and on the basis of it he expounds the entire prophecy in great detail as a most impressive and vivid description of the suffering of Israel in the present exile for the sake of all mankind, and of the reward which awaits the God-fearing at the time of the last redemption.

Especially moving is Ibn Ezra's reliance upon the fact that the personal experience of his readers in the Exile renders commentary superfluous. About the verse "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (liii 7) he writes, "There is no need to interpret this, for every Jew in exile is in this situation, for when he is afflicted he will not open his mouth to speak ... nor

²² The fact that Ibn Ezra argues from the context proves that he did not regard the Servant of the Lord prophecies as interpolations.

does he know any prince or great man who will protect him when he is attacked by people." Ibn Ezra's comment on the verse "...So marred was his appearance, unlike that of man, his form, beyond human semblance" (lii 14) is shockingly forceful: "It is a well-known fact that there are many gentiles who think that the form of the Jew is different from that of all others, and ask, 'Does the Jew have a mouth or eyes?' This is the case in the land of Ishmael and as well as in the land of Edom."

Ibn Ezra wrote his Commentary on the book of Isaiah in 1145 in the town of Lucca in northern Italy. Only five years previously he had been forced to flee from Spain because of "the rage of the oppressors",²³ and in his commentary and in his poetry he attests the fact that both in Muslim Spain and in Christian Italy he personally suffers the bitter fate of the despised Jew, humiliated and persecuted. A strikingly similar expression of the dehumanization of the Jew, which is the essence of anti-semitism, was written four and a half centuries later by William Shakespeare. As Shylock says in *The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Scene I:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? ... If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

It is indeed a great consolation for Israel in its exile to know that not only are its present sufferings prophesied with amazing accuracy in the Sacred Scriptures, but these sufferings have a noble purpose and glorious end. However, the power of this prophecy as a source of comfort and faith derives both from the collective interpretation of the Servant's identity and from the application of his fate to the condition of Israel in the present and its hope for the future still ahead of us. Yet, surprisingly enough, Ibn Ezra is willing to forfeit all this. At the end of his elucidation he reverts to his individual-historical interpretation, albeit in a very abbreviated form and without any attempt at developing it. According to this interpretation, the Servant was none other than the prophet who lived and prophesied, suffered and was saved in far-away Babylon in the distant past. As Ibn Ezra writes at the end of his elucidation of liii 12:

I have thus expounded for you the whole passage, but, in my own opinion, "my servant" mentioned here (lii 13) is the very same about whom the prophet has said, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold" (xlii 1), as well as "And He said to me, 'You are my servant'" (xlix 3). It is also stated here, "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make righteous" (liii 11), as it is written above, "I gave my back to the smiters" (I 6). The secret is, as I hinted to you, in the middle of the book (xl 1), and thus all these passages are connected with each other.

²³ See the introduction to his commentary on Lamentations (written in Rome, 1142).

Despite his profound identification with the collective-topical interpretation, Ibn Ezra is not seeking to evade the exegetical decision by maintaining that this prophecy has two different meanings which find expression in two different layers. To be sure, he does not raise any objection to the collective interpretation, but he does offer his own opinion as a definitive alternative. Any reader who can comprehend the secret which he hints at in his elucidation of xl 1 and is willing to accept the assumption that the prophet of these chapters is post-exilic and the same person as the Servant will admit the obvious exegetical advantage of the individual interpretation which affords a unitary conception of all the Servant prophecies and takes into account the many linkages between them. Ibn Ezra confines himself to mentioning two such linkages and offers only meagre documentation for them. One is linguistic, the title "my servant" which is set in this prophecy (lii 13) and in two earlier Servant prophecies (xlii 1, xlix 3); and the second is thematic. Here the suffering of the Servant in the service of prophecy is described (liii 11), and in Isa. I 6 the prophet says about himself, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who tore out my beard; I hid not my face from shame and spittle."

In his Commentary on the book of Isaiah, Ibn Ezra thus makes two great sacrifices: he forfeits both the traditional unity of the book and the identification of the Suffering Servant with the people of Israel in exile. With due caution, he is willing to take upon himself the twofold responsibility for undermining the integrity of the accepted tradition on the one hand, and the potential weakening of the unmediated effect of the words of the prophet on the community of believers on the other. In the final analysis, he does this solely because of his conviction that this is the correct interpretation of Scripture. We may assume that for him it was important, if not essential, that the consolations of the prophets be truly and reliably understood by us, and that, instead of being swept away by our wishful thinking, we should ground our hopes and expectations firmly on irrefutable exegesis. It is also possible that the story of the suffering and the salvation of the Servant of the Lord seemed to Ibn Ezra a powerful enough source of encouragement even if it refers to a prophet who lived and was active in the Babylonian exile. At any rate, it is clear that his prime loyalty to his obligation as a commentator and his devotion to the truth of the Bible render his approach very close to our modern one. Indeed, though his exegetical considerations are essentially medieval, the decisive weight which he gives them is one of the fundamentals of modernism.