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SPINOZA AND THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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I.

The following pages contain a résumé of the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th chapters of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus continens dissertationes aliquot quibus ostenditur libertatem philosophandi non tantum salva pietate et reipublicae pace posse concedi sed eandem nisi cum pace reipublicae ipsaque pietate tolli non posse*. This tractatus was first published anonymously at Hamburg, 1670, with the motto from 1 John 4:13. The edition before us is that by H. E. G. Paulus, Jena, 1802. In the same year in which Spinoza's tractatus was published, Hobbes' Leviathan also came from the press, and fifteen years before Le Peyrere's *Systema theologicum* was issued. Whether Spinoza knew these works, which, as far as the Pentateuch question is concerned, touch more or less on the same questions, we cannot decide, but it must be assumed that he wrote independently, because he had advantages which his precursors had not. Spinoza was a Hebrew scholar and acquainted with the literature of his people, which cannot be said of either Peyrere or Hobbes. Be this as it may, certain it is that Spinoza anticipated many of the critical and hermeneutical views which are now accepted. The language of a scholar, belonging to the conservative school of Germany, Prof. Strack, in his *Einleitung*, (3d ed. Nördlingen, 1888) is this: "It cannot be denied that among Spinoza's opinions are not a few found, acknowledged at present to a wide extent, often also without mentioning him" (p. 8). We may not agree with Spinoza in all points, but we cannot deny to him the honor of having been one of those early pioneers who paved the way for future systematic investigation. "It was not," says Farrar (*History of Interpre-*

tation, p. 384) "till a century later that his influence was felt in exegesis, but when it was felt men remembered his saying, that 'though it was not wholly necessary to know Christ after the flesh, yet it was necessary to know that eternal Son of God, that is, the eternal wisdom of God, which has manifested itself in all things, especially in the mind of man, and by far most of all in Christ Jesus, . . . and because the wisdom was chiefly manifested by Jesus Christ, therefore his disciples preached it, as far as it had been revealed by Him to them.' It may at least be hoped that he who wrote this, and who also lived a life of singular moral nobleness and beauty—whatever may have been his errors—was not far from the kingdom of heaven." With these preparatory remarks we enter upon our subject proper.

The seventh chapter of his theologico-political treatise, which treats of the interpretation of the Scriptures, Spinoza opens thus: "It is in the mouths of all that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God, which teaches men the soul-blessedness or the way of salvation. In order to know what the Holy Scripture teaches it is necessary to explain the same after the same method as nature is interpreted. For as the method of interpreting nature mainly consists in this, that we compose a history of nature, and from it, as from certain facts, deduce the definition of natural things, in the interpretation of the Scriptures it is also necessary to delineate its simple history, and to infer from this as from certain facts and principles, the sense of the authors of the Scripture by legitimate inferences." "All knowledge of the Scripture must only be derived from the same," and on this account "nothing must be ascribed to the Scripture as teaching which cannot be fully derived from its history." This history must contain :

1. The nature and peculiarity of the language in which the Scripture is written, and which its authors used to speak.

2. It must contain the sayings of each book and divide them into chapters, so that one finds everything together which may be said on the same subject ; it must also note everything which is ambiguous or dark, or occurs to contradict other parts.

3. This history must finally contain the fortunes of all prophetic books, whose memory has come down to us, namely,

the life, character and the aims of the author of every book, who he was, on what occasion, at what time, for whom and in what language he wrote. We must also know the fate of every book, namely, how it was first received, into whose hands it had fallen, how many various readings it contained, at whose suggestion it was received among the sacred books, and finally, how all books which are now generally regarded as sacred have been united to one whole. All this the history of the sacred Scripture must contain; all this is most necessary in order that we may not, impelled by a blind impetus, revere everything which is put before us, but only that which is certain. To make such inquiries Spinoza regards as of the utmost importance because the ancients have entirely neglected them, or if they did write on these subjects, their work has been lost for the most part. And since this fact has induced those who came later to pass off as certain truths the most unfounded opinions on these questions, it is necessary to ascertain as much as possible the true state of things. With these words Spinoza begins the eighth chapter in which he seeks to demonstrate by whom the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Books of Samuel and Kings were written, and inquires whether there were many authors or only one, and who he was.

1. *The Pentateuch.* The Pentateuch, Spinoza says, has generally been regarded as written by Moses, and this opinion was defended by the Pharisees with a terrorism, that every one was regarded as a heretic who seemed to think otherwise. On this account also Ibn Ezra,¹ a man of a liberal mind and of great learning, dared not openly to express his opinion on that point, but did it in such a manner that every one who could see, perceived what he meant.

The passage of Ibn Ezra to which Spinoza alludes, is found in the former's commentary on Deut. 1:12, where we read the following references: "On the other side of the Jordan; if thou shall understand the secret of the twelve, also, and Moses wrote this law, and the Canaanite was then in the land, in the mount-

¹ Ibn Ezra was born about 1088, and died 1167 A. D.

ains of Jehovah he appeared, also behold his bed is a bed of iron, thou shalt recognize the truth."

It is questionable whether Ibn Ezra really meant what Spinoza implies. The former, it is true, speaks somewhat ambiguously, but since Spinoza quotes him as the first who uttered his doubts on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, we shall see what truth there is in this assertion. Spinoza observes the order of the passages alluded to by Ibn Ezra, and explains as follows:

1. Deut. 1:5; "beyond Jordan." If Moses had written these words he would have said on this side of Jordan, since he had never crossed it.¹

2. "The secret of the twelve." This Spinoza explains differently. (*a*) According to the rabbis the altar consisted of twelve stones; according to Deut. 27:7 seq., and Joshua 8:37, the whole law was to be written on the altar, from which follows that the law of Moses cannot be the same as the Pentateuch which required a larger space.² (*b*) Perhaps the twelve curses are meant thereby Deut. 27:14-26. (*c*) Perhaps it refers to Deut. 34, which speaks in twelve verses of Moses' death. The latter exposition seems to be the most simple and probable, for Ibn Ezra remarks on Deut. 34:1, "according to my view Joshua wrote from this verse on, for after Moses had gone up into the mountain, he certainly did write nothing. Joshua wrote this chapter in the spirit of prophecy. The proof is: God showed him (Moses) the land (v. 1); God said unto him (v. 4), and he buried him (v. 5) All this Joshua could only have known as prophet."³

3. Deut. 31:9, "And Moses wrote this law," which supposes another author, who speaks of Moses.

4. Gen. 12:6, "And the Canaanite was then in the land," which points to a post-Mosaic time in which the Canaanites were already driven away. Ibn Ezra does not commit himself. He

¹ Before Spinoza, John Peyrere—born 1594, died 1676, A. D.—in his book "Præ-Adamitæ," makes this also a point for the non-Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

² That this was not Ibn Ezra's opinion we see from an expression on Deut. 27:1, where he agrees with Saadia, that here only an epitome of the law is meant. On Saadia, comp. my article s. v. in McClintock & Strong's Cyclopaedia.

³ What Ibn Ezra here states, that Joshua wrote this last chapter, or in other words that Moses did not write that part, had been already hinted at a very early time. Thus

says: Whether we translate the word 'az already, or still, in either case it is a mystery of which one should keep silent.¹

5. Gen. 22:14. Moriah is called the Mount of the Lord, a name which it could only have received after the building of the Temple.

6. In Deut. 3:2, is recorded Og's bed of iron as of some antiquity. Spinoza, with reference to 2 Sam. 12:30, thinks that this bed was found only in the time of David.²

Thus far Ibn Ezra's passages to which Spinoza refers. And it cannot be said that Ibn Ezra denies the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, though it must be admitted that he believed in interpolations, covering this his view with phrases like "there is a

the Talmud *Baba Bathra*, 14a, says that Joshua wrote the last verses of Deuteronomy. In the Clementine Homilies (III. ch. 47) we read: the law was given by Moses, without writing, to seventy wise men to be handed down, . . . but [it was not written] by Moses; for in the law itself it is written, "and Moses died, and they buried him near the house of Phogar, and no one knows his sepulcher till this day." But how could Moses write that Moses died? Abelard (b. 1079, d. 1142 A. D.) raises the question as to who added Deut. 33 and 34, whether Moses in a prophetic spirit or some one else. Le Peyrere sees in the fact that the death of Moses is narrated in the Pentateuch the proof that these five books of Moses are not "Moses' Archetypi," but "Scripti ab alio."

¹ Hobbes (b. 1588, d. 1679 A. D.) in his *Leviathan*, quotes this passage also as a proof of non-Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Prideaux (*The Old and New Testament*, part I., bk. 5, p. 343, ed. 1719) regards this passage as an interpolation made when the Canaanites, having been extirpated by Joshua, were no longer in the land. Huetius (*Demonstratio evangel*, p. 181) says very naïvely that Spinoza prefers to translate 'az by still because it favors his impiety "quod impietati suae favet." Kalisch (Genesis, l. c.) says *in loco* "the words 'and the Canaanite was then in the land,' are not nearly so difficult as either hypercriticism or timidity has represented them. For, on the one hand, the translation, 'The Canaanite was still in the land,' is uncalled for, and leads to an erroneous inference. . . . But on the other hand, it requires scarcely a proof, that we have to render these words, 'the Canaanites were already in the land.' . . . It is, hence, obvious how groundlessly even Rabbinical expositors found offence in those words, and modern writers declare them either as a spurious interpolation, or as a certain proof of a very late origin of the Pentateuch."

² Peyrere, l. c., remarks that there would be no object in calling the attention of the people to the bed of the giant whom they had already seen. He says it is far more probable that the historian, in order to secure credence for his narrative, mentions the iron bed as a most certain proof. Hengstenberg and Hävernick think that the bed of iron means a "basaltic sarcophagus."

secret," or "by considering this or that thou shall find the truth."¹ In further proof of non-Mosaic authorship Spinoza adduces also the following passages: Deut. 3: 14, the expression "region of Argob" mentioned in v. 13, is explained by the better known one "Jair's tent-villages" or, as the passage reads: "Jair, the son of Manasseh, took all the region of Argob, unto the coasts of Geshuri and Mathathi, and called them after his own name, even Bashan, the tent-villages of Jair unto this day." Peyrere already was offended at the expression "unto this day," for Jair himself scarcely possessed any possession in Moses' time. Hence it is evident that the author of this Deuteronomic passage wishes to show from the farthest and most primitive origin how the village of Jair received its name, deriving it from the time of Moses, which was long before his own. Huetius, l. c. p. 183, admits that we must here suppose an interpolation of Ezra, or a gloss which crept into the text. As post-Mosaic Spinoza also regards the name of the place "Dan" mentioned in Gen. 14: 14, which, according to Judges 18: 29, became only known after Joshua. Huetius, l. c. p. 84, thinks that Ezra may possibly have changed "Laish" into "Dan." Modern apologetes, like Jahn and Hävernicks, think that there were two places of the name Dan, one of which is meant in Genesis and Deuteronomy, the other in Joshua and Deuteronomy. The same is also the opinion of Keil (*Introduction*, vol. 1, p. 192, Edinburgh, 1869). Strack, the latest commentator on Genesis (*Kurzgefasster Kommentar*, 1892), remarks that Dan stands by prolepsis for Laish (Judges 18: 29), or Leshem (Josh. 19: 47).

¹That Ibn Ezra did not deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, but believed in interpolations, is the opinion of Maier in his article "Aben-Ezra's Meinung über den Verfasser des Pentateuchs," in *Studien und Kritiken*, 1832, p. 634 seq.; also cf. Riehm, *Einleitung in das alte Testament*, I., p. 146; Siegfried, *Spinoza*, 1867, p. 10 seq. Different, however, Curtiss in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1884, p. 8, who says: "When we remember that Graetz affirms that he (Ibn Ezra) had pantheistic tendencies and, along with an almost fanatical orthodoxy, maintained a half-concealed scepticism, ridiculed the mystical interpretation of Solomon's Song, doubted the authenticity of the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah, and could not take the supernatural accounts of the Bible literally, but had to give them a rationalistic interpretation, we can conclude that Spinoza may not be so far from the truth when he recognizes in Ibn Ezra his forerunner in the denial of the Mosaic authorship."

Spinoza refers to passages in which Moses is not only mentioned in the third person, but which contain things respecting him, as Moses was the meekest of all men (Num. 12: 3); Moses was wroth with the officers of the host (Num. 31: 14); Moses, the man of God, (Deut. 33: 1); Moses, the servant of the Lord, died, and there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses. Spinoza comes to the conclusion that "all this, namely, the manner of speaking, and even the entire connection of the history, make us thoroughly believe that these books were written by another, and not by Moses himself." Spinoza also observes that not only is it related how Moses died, was buried, and that the Hebrews mourned for him thirty days, but also besides this a comparison is made between him, and all the other prophets that arose after him. Such a testimony Moses could neither give to himself, nor could one who immediately followed him, but one who lived many centuries after Moses.

Another point adduced by Spinoza is, that some of the narratives extend beyond the lifetime of Moses. Thus we read (Ex. 16: 35) that the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to the land that they were to inhabit, concerning which we find the narrative in Josh. 5: 12. Besides we read, Gen. 36: 31, "these are the kings who reigned in Edom, before a king reigned over the children of Israel." Without doubt the historian here names the kings which the Idumeans had before David conquered them and placed governors there. From all this Spinoza concludes that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by some one who lived many centuries after Moses.

As to the passage, Gen. 36: 31, Spinoza is not the first to call attention to it. In his commentary *in loco* Ibn Ezra remarks: "There are those who say that this section was written prophetically, but Isaac says that this section was written in the days of Jehoshaphat." He asserts that Hadar (v. 39), whose wife was Mehetabel, is the same as Hadad (1 Chr. 1: 50), the Edomite who is mentioned in 1 Kings 11: 14-20, and that Mehetabel is the same as the unnamed sister of Tahpenes, the queen of Egypt, whom Pharaoh gave to Hadad, the contemporary of Solomon,

to wife.¹ Ibn Ezra thinks that Isaac's book ought to be burned. Whoever this Isaac was, whether Isaac ben Jasos of the eleventh century, or Isaac ben Suleiman (d. 940 A. D.), is of no consequence, but Ibn Ezra solves not the difficulty by ridiculing this Isaac when he says, "that the author is rightly called Isaac (laughter), because every one who hears him will laugh at him." Spanheim regards our passage as an interpolation, and Strack l. c. writes: It is certain that the author of the catalogue (*i. e.*, of the kings of Edom, v. 31-39) only wrote after the establishment of the kingship in Israel. Kalisch l. c. remarks: "Certain it is that from very early times those words, 'before a king yet reigned over the children of Israel' have given serious offence to many pious interpreters; they have been regarded by some as a later addition; induced others to reject the whole of this portion (vv. 31-39), and have by others, who supposed they were written in the time of Moses, been given up as hopelessly lost to intelligible explanation. But those who start from the principle of prophetic inspiration will have no difficulty in explaining that phrase." The theory of prophecy is defended by Hengstenberg (*Beitraege* III., p. 202 seq.), Hävernick (*Specielle Einleitung*, p. 306) and Keil (*Introduction* I., p. 191).

Spinoza proceeds to examine the books which Moses wrote, and which are cited in the Pentateuch, but which are different from the Pentateuch. From Ex. 17:14, it appears that Moses, at the command of God, wrote a description of the war against Amalek, but in what book does not appear from this chapter. But in Num. 21:4, a certain book is cited, which is called "*Wars of God*," and in this book doubtless the war against Amalek, besides all the encampments which are attested by the authors of the Pentateuch as having been written by Moses (Num. 33:2) are described. Whilst Spinoza leaves the question open, Peyrere holds that that book (*i. e.*, the Book of the Wars of Jehovah) was neither written by Moses, nor could have been written by him. He believes that Moses wrote commentaries on all the remarkable occurrences, from which, long after Moses' death, this book of the wars of Jehovah was composed, from which finally the book

¹ Comp. Maier in *Studien und Kritiken*, 1832, p. 639 seq.

of Numbers was taken. Hence the book of Numbers is an apograph from an apograph. What Huetius, l.c. pp. 185-6, opposes to Spinoza that such a suspicious and cautious man who would admit nothing, *nisi id quod ex scripture constat* (Tract. theol.-pol. i. 8) should utter such entirely uncertain things may also be opposed to Davidson (*Introd.* I. p. 113) where he says of the account of Amalek's defeat, that it was transferred to a book, perhaps the book of the Wars of the Lord, mentioned in Num. 21:14, and an itinerary of the Israelites (Num. 33:2).

As a second book, Spinoza mentions *The Book of the Covenant*. This book Moses first read when Israel made the covenant with God. But this book contained but little, namely: The Laws or Commands of God, which are narrated in Ex. 20:22-ch. 24. Spinoza perceived that ch. 20:22 is the beginning of another document, but the supposition that it was the *Book of the Covenant* rests on nothing.

The third book which Spinoza mentions is the *Book of the Law of God*. In the fortieth year after the Exodus Moses explained all the laws which he had given (Deut. 1:5) and pledged the people anew (Deut. 29:14) and finally wrote the book which contained these laws as explained and the new covenant (Deut. 31:9). This is called the "Book of the Law of God," which is afterwards increased by Joshua through the narration of the covenant into which the people entered with God the third time (Josh. 24:25, 26). But since we have no book which contains this covenant of Moses, and at the same time the covenant of Joshua, it must necessarily be conceded that this book has perished. He concludes that this book of the Law of God which Moses wrote was not the Pentateuch, but another work of smaller compass. Finally Spinoza asks: Should Moses not have written some of the laws which he had given during the forty years? To this he replies that the Scripture says nothing of the kind. But he thinks it possible that what he calls the senate (probably the seventy elders) may have communicated the commands of Moses in writing to the people, which a compiler afterwards collected and inserted in order into the life of Moses.

2. *Joshua*. That Joshua did not write this book Spinoza infers from the following: (1) Another writer wrote of Joshua's fame (ch. 6:27); narrates how Joshua left nothing undone of all that Moses had commanded (8:35; 11:15); how he (Joshua) became old, assembled the whole people, and died.

(2) Events are narrated which took place after his death; thus, ch. 24:31, we read: And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders, that overlived Joshua; also ch. 22:10, seq., seems to point at events after Joshua's death, since he is not mentioned at all in the entire narrative.

(3) The formula recurring so often, "unto this day," (ch. 14:14; 15:63; 16:10) shows that a later writer speaks of older times.

(4) From ch. 10:14, "and there was no day like that before it or after it," proves very plainly that the book was written many centuries after Joshua.

If Joshua has written any book at all it can only be the book of Jasher (ch. 10:13).

3. *Judges*. That the book of Judges was written by the judges, no sane man, as Spinoza says, will assert, for the epilogue in ch. 21 shows that it was written by only one author. Besides, the formula "in those days there was no king in Israel," points to a time in which there were kings already. Hobbes thinks that our book was written after the captivity of the ten tribes, and this he infers from ch. 18:30.

4. *Samuel*. The Books of Samuel extend history beyond Samuel's death. Especially 1 Sam. 9:9 points to a very late time of composition: "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer, for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer."

5. *Kings*. The Books of Kings point themselves to other sources; 1 Kings 9:29: "Chronicles of the Kings of Judah;" 1 Kings 14:19: "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel;" 1 Kings 11:41: "Book of the Acts of Solomon."

[To be continued.]