

Giants of Sephardic Jewry, Week 2: Nachmanides

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From last time: The Scholarship of Shemuel haNagid

1. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th century Spain), Extended Commentary to Exodus 32:31

The Naggid said that *ana* has a 'swallowed' *lamed*, like *a/na*, and *a/* is from the root *ho'il* (an oath). This is unlikely...

2. Rabbeinu Asher (13th-14th century Germany/Spain), Commentary to Ketuvot 1:12

Rav Achai wrote that ten are required for the blessing of *kiddushin*. And Rabbeinu Shemuel HaNagid disagreed...

3. Eliyahu Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, Vol. 2, pp. 121-122

Yet his most amazing achievement surely was the writing of a treatise against the Koran... Most of the writings about Islam by Jewish scholars were comprehensive theological essays or polemics defending Judaism against the arguments of the Moslems, who sought to demonstrate from the Bible that Mohammed was a real prophet, and so on. But the Jews were careful not to denigrate the sacred book of the Moslems. And then along came Samuel to point out the Koran's contradictions and errors. He called attention to Sura 41:8-11, where it is stated that the world was created in eight days, while according to Sura 32:3 it was created in six days...

Introducing: Nachmanides! (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Bonastrug de Porta, 1194 – c.1270)

4. The Letter of Nachmanides (excerpt), <http://www.pirchei.co.il/specials/ramban/ramban.htm>

Therefore, I will now explain to you how to always behave humbly. Speak gently at all times, with your head bowed, your eyes looking down to the ground and your heart focusing on Gd. Don't look at the face of the person to whom you are speaking. Consider everyone as greater than yourself. If he is wise or rich, you should give him respect. If he is poor and you are richer – or wiser – than he, consider yourself to be more sinful than he, and him to be more worthy than you, since when he sins it is through error, while yours is deliberate and you ought to know better!

5. Reconquista <https://www.deviantart.com/undevicesimus/art/The-Reconquista-AD-722-1492-367868851>

6. A recently discovered prayer <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/lbh-rambans-prayer/>

A Zionist

7. Commentary of Nachmanides to Numbers 33:53

In my opinion this is a commandment. It instructs them to live in the land and settle it, for Gd has given it to them, and they should not reject Gd's lot. If they should decide to go conquer Babylon or Assyria or some other land and live there, they would be in violation of Gd's command.

8. Commentary of Nachmanides to Leviticus 18:25

A midrash records (Sifri Ekev 43): Deuteronomy 11:17 says, 'You will be lost, quickly' – Even though I exile you from this land to live outside the land, be marked by the commandments so that they will not be new when you return.

A community leader

9. Commentary of Nachmanides to Genesis 34:13

In my view, the mitzvah of establishing laws, part of the seven Noachide laws, is not only a mandate to establish judges in every region. Gd instructed them in the laws of theft, fraud, cheating, employee wages and guardians...

10. Maimonides, Introduction to 10th chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin

Spiritual entities do not have physical pleasure and do not comprehend it, for they lack our senses, with which to experience what we experience. One of us who would be purified and would reach that status posthumously would also cease to experience physical pleasure and would not desire it; this would be like a great emperor wishing to lose his throne and return to playing with a ball in the street. At some point he certainly did prefer the ballgame over an empire, when he was young and foolish, just as we prefer physical pleasure over the spiritual.

11. Dr. Saadia Eisenberg, *Reading Medieval Religious Disputation*, pp. 98-102

In 1232 or 1233, anti-Maimonists in Montpellier handed the more philosophical books of Maimonides over to local friars present to eradicate heresy; the mendicants then burned these texts... However, the connection between the Maimonidean controversy and the 1240 Debate is far from clear. In all the papal literature surrounding the 1240 Debate and the subsequent burning of the talmuds, the earlier burning of Maimonidian books goes unmentioned. Association between the two Jewish book-burnings is largely absent in contemporary Jewish literature as well. Three separate works, all written in response to the Debate and the subsequent burning of rabbinic texts, failed to mention the Maimonidean controversy or to connect it with the burning of the Talmuds...

12. Nachmanides, Account of the 1263 Disputation

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060907082559/http://medspains.stanford.edu/demo/barcelona/disputation.html>

Our Lord the King commanded me to dispute with Friar Paul in his palace before him and his advisors in Barcelona. I replied: "I will do as the king commands, if you permit me to speak freely. I hereby request the permission of the king and the permission of Friar Raymond of Penaforte and his associates who are here." Friar Raymond of Penaforte replied: "So long as you do not utter blasphemies." I said to them: "I wish to observe your law in this regard. But I also wish to speak freely in debate, as you speak freely. I have the wisdom to speak properly in debate as you indicate, but it must be according to my will." They all gave me permission to speak freely...

He began: "Behold Scriptures say, 'the sceptre shall not pass from Judah, nor the staff from his descendants, until Shiloh comes,' meaning the messiah. Thus the prophet says that Judah shall have power forever, until the coming of the messiah who will descend from Judah. Thus today, when you Jews have neither sceptre nor staff, the messiah has already come, and he is of the seed of Judah, and his is the power."

I responded and said: "It was not the prophet's intention to say that the rule of Judah would never be suspended. Rather, he said that it would not pass away and be annulled completely. This means that, so long as there be a monarchy in Israel, it should belong to Judah. If because of their sins it should be suspended, it would ultimately return to Judah. This is proved by the fact that, prior to Jesus, there was a long period during which ruling authority was suspended from Judah but not from Israel and a long period during which rule was suspended both from Israel and Judah. For during the seventy years of exile in Babylonia, neither Judah nor Israel enjoyed ruling authority. During the period of the Second Temple, only Zerubabel and his sons ruled briefly from Judah. There remained, however, 380 years to the destruction, during which priests of the Hasmonean family reigned."...

A Philosopher

13. Nachmanides, Introduction to Commentary on the Torah

I will place as illumination before me the lights of the pure candelabra, the commentary of Rabbeinu Shlomo, the desirable crown and splendid diadem, crowned in the logic of Scripture, *mishnah* and *gemara*. His is the lot of the firstborn, and in his words I will speak and in their love I will be foolish and with them we will engage in give and take, analysis and examination, in his simple explanations and analysis and in every story in its form as mentioned in his commentary. With Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra we will have open rebuke and hidden love.

14. Nachmanides to Genesis 9:12

We must believe the words of the Greeks, that the rainbow is created by the shining of sunlight through moist air, for in a vessel of water set out in the sun one may observe a sort of rainbow. When we look at the verse's text further, we understand this same message as well...

15. Nachmanides to Exodus 13:16

Gd will not perform signs and wonders in every generation before the eyes of every wicked person and denier, and so He instructed us to make a perpetual memorial and a sign for that which we saw, and to convey it to our children, and their children to their children, and their children to the final generation.

16. Nachmanides, Reward and Punishment <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/mahshevt/hagmul/shaar-4.htm>