

Matan – Great Debates in Jewish History, Philosophy and Halakha

The Barcelona Disputation

Ramban's Version

Hebrew Report of Moses Nahmanides

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.

I then said: "The debate between Christians and Jews concerns many matters of custom which are not essential. In this revered court, I wish to debate only matters that are essential.", They all said: "You have spoken properly." **Thus, we agreed to speak first about the messiah -- whether he has already come as the Christians believe or if he is yet to come as the Jews believe. Subsequently, we shall discuss whether the messiah is divine or fully human, born of man and woman. Afterward we shall discuss whether the Jews observe the true law or whether the Christians do.**

Then Friar Paul began, saying that he would prove from our Talmud that the messiah concerning whom the prophets testify has already come.

I replied: "Before we debate this, I ask that he tell me how this is possible. Indeed while he was in Provence and in many other places, I heard that he said this to many Jews. But I am most surprised. Would he answer me in this regard? **Does he mean to say that the sages of the Talmud believed in Jesus as the messiah and believed that he is both human and divine, as held by the Christians? However, it is well known that the incident of Jesus took place during the period of the Second Temple. He was born and killed prior to the destruction of the Temple, while the sages of the Talmud, like R. Akiba and his associates, followed this destruction. Those who compiled the Mishnah, Rabbi and R. Nathan, lived many years after the destruction. All the more so R. Ashi who compiled the Talmud, who lived about four hundred years after the destruction. If these sages believed that Jesus was the messiah and that his faith and religion were true and if they wrote these things from which Friar Paul intends to prove this, then how did they remain in the Jewish faith and in their former practice?** For they were Jews, remained in the Jewish faith all their lives, and died Jews -- they

Anonymous Latin Report

ON JULY 20, 1263, in the presence of the lord king of Aragon and many other barons, prelates, clerics, and knights, in the palace of the lord king at Barcelona, Moses the Jew, called "rabbi," was summoned from Gerona by the lord king, at the request of the **Dominicans**, and was present there, along with many other Jews who seemed and were reputed among other Jews more learned. Deliberation was undertaken with the lord king and with certain Dominicans and Franciscans who were present, **not that the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ -- which because of its certitude cannot be placed in dispute be put in the center of attention with the Jews as uncertain, but that the truth of that faith be made manifest in order to destroy the Jews' errors and to shake the confidence of many Jews.** Since they could not defend their errors, these Jews indicated that the said rabbi could sufficiently reply to each and every question which would be placed before them. Friar Paul proposed to the said rabbi, that, with the aid of God, he would prove from writings shared and accepted by the Jews the following contentions, in order: that the messiah, who is called Christ, whom the Jews anticipate, has surely come already; also that the messiah, as prophesied, should be divine and human; also that he suffered and was killed for the salvation of mankind; also that the laws and ceremonials ceased and should have ceased after the advent of the said messiah. When

and their children and their students who heard their teachings. Why did they not convert and turn to the faith of Jesus, as Friar Paul did? He understood from their words that the faith of the Christians is the true faith -- Heaven forbid -- and he went and converted as a result. But they and their students who learned Torah from them remained and died Jews, as we are this day. . . If these sages believed in Jesus and in his faith, how is it that they did not do as Friar Paul, who understands their teachings better than they themselves do?"

Friar Paul responded: "These are lengthy observations, intended to cancel the debate. Nonetheless, you shall hear what I have to say." I said to them: **"But this is clear proof that he shall not say anything of substance. However, I shall hear his claims, because our lord the king wishes so."**

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."

Friar Paul replied: "Through all these times, even though the Jews had no kings, they did have authorities. For thus they explained in the Talmud: 'The sceptre shall not pass from Judah' these are the exilarchs in Babylonia who control the people; 'Nor the staff from his descendants' these are the offspring of Hillel who teach the Torah publicly. Today, however, you do not have the ordination known in the Talmud. Thus even that authority has been annulled, for there is no one among you worthy of being designated 'rabbi.' That they call you 'magister' is an error, and you use that title deceitfully. . .

I responded and said: "I shall show you that it was not the intention of the rabbis to explain this verse other than meaning actual kingship. However, you do not understand law and

the said Moses was asked whether he wished to respond to these contentions which have been indicated, he said and affirmed that he would and that, if necessary, he would remain at Barcelona for that purpose not only for a day or a week or a month, but even for a year. When it was proved to him that he should not be called "rabbi," because no Jew should be designated by that title from the time of the Passion of Christ, he conceded at least that this was true for the previous eight hundred years.

Then it was indicated to him, that when Friar Paul had come to Gerona for the purpose of conferring with him on these matters, which pertain to salvation, and had expostulated carefully concerning the Holy Trinity, both about the unity of the divine essence and about the trinity of beings, the beliefs which Christians hold, he had conceded that, if Christians believed in the manner explained to him, he would believe indeed that so it should be held. When this was repeated before the king, he did not contradict. Rather he was silent, and thus by remaining silent he conceded.

Then in the palace of the lord king, the said Jew was asked whether the messiah, who is called Christ has come. He responded with the assertion that he has not come. He added that the messiah and Christ are the same and that, if it could be proved to him that the messiah had come, it could be believed to refer to none other than him, namely Jesus Christ, in whom the Christians believe, since no one else has come who has dared to usurp for himself this title nor has there been anyone

halakhah; you only understand a little aggadah, with which you have made yourself familiar. The matter which the sages mentioned concerns the fact that properly no man should judge a case on his own and be free of liability to pay in case of error, unless he receives permission from the patriarch, who is like a king. They said that during the period of exile, since these are those of royal descent who have some authority from the Gentile kings, such as the exilarchs in Babylonia and the patriarchs in Palestine, they have the right to confer permission and ordination. This, however, took place among the sages of the Talmud, more than four hundred years after the death of Jesus. For it was not the view of the sages of the Talmud that this would constitute the sceptre and the staff which come from the seed of Judah. Rather the prophet promised Judah that kingship over Israel would be his. He promised him actual kingship. Nonetheless this promise was suspended for a long period, as I have mentioned. During the period of exile in Babylonia there was no sceptre or staff whatsoever, neither exilarch nor patriarch, for authority was held by the priests, the judges, the officers, or whoever they chose."

Then Friar Peter of Janua responded: "This is true. The verse only says that kingship shall not cease entirely, but there might be a suspension.

I said to the king: "Behold Friar Peter rules according to my view. " Friar Peter said: "I have not made a ruling. For the seventy years in Babylonia constitutes a short time. There were still many who remembered the First Temple, as is written in the book of Ezra. This might be called a suspension ... However now that you have remained more than a thousand years without kingship, that is complete abolition.

I said: "Now you change your mind. However, the term 'abolition' cannot be used with a recurring phenomenon. Moreover, there is no distinction in the words of the prophet between a long suspension and a short suspension. Moreover, the period that I mentioned was lengthy. Moreover, our forefather Jacob did not promise Judah that he would hold the sceptre and staff over his tribe only. Rather, he accorded Judah kingship over all Israel; as is written: 'Judah, your brothers shall praise you.' It is also written: 'Judah held the leading place among his brothers and fathered their rulers.' However kingship over all Israel was suspended from the time that Solomon died, as is written: 'The tribe of Judah alone followed the house of David.' **Thus it is clear that the prophet said only that kingship would not pass completely,** The truth is that, during the period of exile, it is not to be called annulment or abolition at all, for it does not involve Judah but the entire nation. For the prophet did not promise Judah that the people of Israel would never go into exile, so that he might be king over them at all times."

Friar Paul then claimed that in the Talmud it is said that the messiah has already come. He adduced the story in Midrash Lamentations concerning a man who was ploughing and whose

else who had been believed to be Christ.

It was then proved to him clearly, both through authoritative texts of the law and the prophets as well as through the Talmud, that Christ has truly come, as Christians believe and preach. Since he was unable to respond, vanquished by proper proofs and authoritative texts, he conceded that Christ or the messiah had been born in Bethlehem a thousand years ago and had subsequently appeared in Rome to some. When he was asked where that messiah who he said was born and appeared at Rome might be, he replied that he did not know. Subsequently he said that the messiah lives in a terrestrial paradise with Elijah. He also said that, although the messiah has been born, he has still not come, since the messiah may be said to have come when he achieves dominion over the Jews and liberates them and when the Jews follow him. Against this response was adduced the authority of the Talmud, which clearly says that the messiah would come to them daily, if they would hear his voice and not harden their heart, as is said in Psalms: "Today if you will listen to his voice."

It was added that the messiah was born among men, that he came among men, and that he could not otherwise be or be understood. To this he was unable to respond.

Also among the proofs presented concerning the advent of the messiah was that from Genesis: "The scepter shall not pass from Judah, nor the staff from his descendants." Since therefore he must acknowledge that there is neither scepter nor staff, he acknowledges that the messiah

ox lowed. An Arab passed and said to him: "Jew, Jew, unhitch your ox, unhitch your ploughshare, unhitch your plough for the Temple has been destroyed." He unhitched his ox, unhitched his ploughshare, and unhitched his plough. The ox lowed a second time. The Arab said to him: "Hitch up your ox, hitch up your ploughshare, hitch up your plough, for your messiah has been born."

I responded: "I do not believe in this story at all, but it is a proof for my view."

He then cried out: "Behold he denies their books."

I said: "Truly I do not believe that the messiah was born on the day of the destruction of the Temple. Thus this story is not true or else it has another meaning drawn from the secrets of the sages. However I shall accept it at its simple meaning as you claim, for it is a proof for my case. Behold it says that on the day of destruction, after the Temple was destroyed, the messiah was born. Thus Jesus was not the messiah, as you claim. For he was born and killed prior to the destruction of the Temple. In fact he was born about two hundred years prior to the destruction of the Temple. According to your reckoning, he was born seventy-three years prior to the destruction of the Temple." Then he was silent.

Master William, the royal judge, then said: "**The dispute does not now concern Jesus.** The question is whether the messiah has come or not. You say that he has not come, and this book of yours says that he has come."

I said to him: "You choose, as is your custom, to respond craftily. Nonetheless I shall answer you. **The sages did not say that the messiah has come. Rather they said that he was born. For on the day that our teacher Moses was born, he did not come and redeem us.** However, when he came before Pharaoh at the command of God and said to him: 'these are the words of the Lord -- Send forth My people!' then he may be said to have arrived. Likewise the messiah -- when he shall come before the pope and shall say to him at God's command: 'Send forth My people,' then he may be said to have come. However, to this day he has not yet come and is in no sense the messiah. For King David on the day that he was born was not the anointed one. Only when Samuel anointed him was he the anointed one. On the day that Elijah will anoint the messiah at God's command may he be called the messiah. On the day that he will subsequently come before the pope to redeem us, then he may be said to have arrived."

Friar Paul claimed: "Behold the passage in Isaiah, chapter 53, tells of the death of the messiah and how he was to fall into the hands of his enemies and how he was placed alongside the wicked, as happened to Jesus. Do you believe that this section speaks of the messiah?"

I said to him: "In terms of the true meaning of the section, it speaks only of the people of Israel, which the prophets regularly call 'Israel My

who was to be sent has come. To this he responded that the scepter has not been removed. It is merely temporarily absent, as happened during the time of the Babylonian captivity. It was proved to him that in Babylonia the Jews had exilarchs with jurisdiction, while after the death of Christ they had neither a staff nor a prince nor exilarchs according to the prophecy of Daniel nor a prophet nor any jurisdiction, as is manifestly obvious every day. It is thus certain that the messiah has come.

He then said that he would prove that the Jews had the aforesaid exilarchs after Jesus, but he was able to show nothing in these matters. On the contrary he confessed that they have not had the aforesaid exilarchs for the past 850 years. Therefore it is clear that the messiah has come, since an authoritative text cannot lie.

The said Moses claimed that Jesus Christ should not be called the messiah, since the messiah, he said, should not die, as is said in Psalms: "He asked of thee life and thou didst give it him, length of days for ever and ever." Rather he should live eternally, both he and those whom he would liberate. It was therefore asked of him whether chapter 53 of Isaiah - - "Who could have believed what we have heard" -- which according to the Jews begins at the end of chapter 52, where it is said: "Behold my servant shall prosper," speaks of the messiah.

Although he consistently claimed that this passage in no way speaks of the messiah, it was proved to him through many authoritative texts in the Talmud which speak of the passion and

servant' or 'Jacob My servant.' "

Friar Paul said: "I shall prove from the words of your sages that it speaks of the messiah."

I said to him: "It is true that the rabbis in the aggadah explain it as referring to the messiah. However, they never said that he would be killed ,at the hands of his enemies. For you will find in no book of the Jews, neither in the Talmud nor in the Midrash, that the messiah, the descendant of David, would be killed or would be turned over to his enemies or would be buried among the wicked. Indeed even the messiah whom you made for yourself was not buried. I shall explain for you this section properly and clearly, if you wish. There is no indication that the messiah would be killed, as happened to your messiah. They, however, did not wish to hear.

Friar Paul then said that, in the Talmud, it is indicated that R. Joshua b. Levi asked Elijah when the messiah would come. He answered him: "Ask the messiah himself. " He said "Where is he?" He said: "At the gate of Rome, among the sick." He went there and found him. He asked him ... Thus the messiah has already come, is in Rome, and is in fact Jesus who rules in Rome.

I said to him: "Isn't it clear from this that he has not come? For he asked Elijah when the messiah would come Likewise he asked the messiah himself: 'When will you come? Thus he has not yet come. Rather, according to the simple meaning of these stories, he was born already. But I do not believe this."

Then the king responded: "If he were born on the day of the destruction of the Temple, which was more than a thousand years ago and has not yet arrived, how will he arrive? For it is not human nature to live for a thousand years."

I said to him: "Conditions were set that I not debate with you and that you will not participate in the debate. However, already among early man Adam and Methusaleh lived almost to a thousand years and Elijah and Enoch more than that, Methusaleh lies in the hands of God." He said: "Where is he now?" I said: "This is not a necessary element in the debate, and I shall not respond. **Maybe you can find him at the gates of Toledo, if you send there one of your couriers."** I said it **jokingly**. They then rose, and the king set a time for resuming the debate, on the following Monday.

On that day the king went to the cloister in the city, where all the men of the city gathered, Gentiles and Jews. The bishop, all the clerics, and the sages of the Franciscans and Dominicans were there. Friar Paul rose to speak. I said to our lord the king: "My lord, hear me. " He said to me: "Let him speak first, since he is the interlocutor." I said: "Allow me to clarify my view concerning the messiah. Then he can reply to the clarification."

I rose and said: "Listen all you people. Friar Paul asked me whether the messiah of whom the prophets spoke has come. I said that he has not come. He then cited an 5ggadah which said that, on the very day the Temple was destroyed, the messiah was born. I then said that I do not believe this, although it is a proof for

death of Christ, which they prove through the said chapter, that the aforesaid chapter of Isaiah must be understood as related to Christ, in which the death, passion, burial and resurrection of Christ is obviously contained. Indeed forced by authoritative texts, he confessed that this section must be understood and explained as relating to Christ. From this it is clear that the messiah was to suffer.

Since he did not wish to confess the truth unless forced by authoritative texts, when he was unable to explain these authoritative texts, he said publicly that he did not believe these authoritative texts which were adduced against him -- although found in ancient and authentic books of the Jews -- because they were, he claimed, sermons in which their teachers often lied for the purpose of exhorting the people. As a result he reproved both the teachers and the scriptures of the Jews. Moreover, all these issues, or almost all, which he confessed or which were proved to him, he first negated; then confuted by authoritative texts and confused, he was forced to assent. Moreover, since he was unable to respond and was often publicly confused and since both Jews and Christians insulted him, he persistently claimed before all that he would in no way respond, since the Jews prohibited him and Christians, namely Friar P. de Janua and certain upstanding men of the city, had sent him messages advising that he in no way respond. Concerning this he was publicly refuted by the said Friar P. and by these

my view. Now I shall explain to you why I said that I do not believe this. Know that we Jews have three types of books. The first is the Bible, and we all believe it completely. The second is called Talmud, and it is a commentary on the merits of the Torah. For in the Torah there are 613 commandments and there is not one of them that is not explained in the Talmud. We believe in the Talmud concerning explanation of the commandments. We have yet a third book called Midrash, that is sermons. This is analogous to the bishop standing and giving a sermon, with one of the listeners deciding to write it. In regard to this book, those who believe it well and good, but those who do not believe it do no harm. We have sages who wrote that the messiah will not be born I until close to the time ordained for redeeming us from exile. Therefore I do not believe in this book, where it says that he was born on the day, of the destruction of the Temple. We also call this book 6ggadah, that is, stories, meaning that these are only things which one person tells another. However, I shall accept this 6ggadah literally, as you wish, because it is an explicit proof that Jesus is not the messiah, as I said to you, because he was not born on that day. Rather, by that time, everything related to him had already transpired long before.

"Now you, our lord the king, asked and objected properly that it is not human nature to live a thousand years. Now I shall explain to you the answer to your questions. Behold Adam lived a thousand years minus seventy. Moreover, it says explicitly in Scriptures that he died because of his sin; had he not sinned, he would have lived much more or even forever. Both the Gentiles and the Jews agree that the sin and punishment of Adam will be annulled during messianic times. Thus after the messiah comes, it will be annulled from all of us, but with the messiah himself it will be completely annulled. Thus the messiah is capable of living thousands of years or even forever. Thus Psalms says: 'He asked of Thee life, and Thou didst give it him, length of days for ever and ever.' You further asked, our lord the king, where he is now. It is already indicated in Scriptures. For Adam lived in terrestrial paradise. When he sinned, it is said: 'So the Lord God drove him out of the Garden of Eden.' Thus, one who is free from the punishment of Adam's sin lives there in paradise. Thus said the sages in the book of aggadah which I mentioned. The king said: "Did you not say in the same aggadah that he was in Rome." I said to him "I did not say that he lived in Rome, only that he appeared in Rome on a particular day. For Elijah told the sage that he would find him there on that day . . ."

This is the content of the debates. I have not consciously altered a detail. Subsequently, on that same day, I stood before our lord the king and he said: "Let the dispute be suspended. For I have never seen a man whose case is wrong argue it as well as you have done."

upstanding men. Whence it is clear that he tried to escape the disputation by lies.

Moreover, although he promised before the king and many others that before a few he would answer concerning his faith and his law, when the said lord was outside the city, he secretly fled and departed. Whence it is clear that he did not dare nor was he able to defend his erroneous belief.

We James, by the grace of God, King of Aragon, Majorca and Valencia, count of Barcelona and Urgell, and lord of Montpellier, confirm and acknowledge that each and every statement and action took place in our presence and in the presence of many others, as contained above in the present letter. In testimony of this we have caused our seal to be appended as a perpetual memorial.

בראשית פרק מט

(י) לא יסור שבט מיהודה ומחקק מבין רגליו עד כי יבא <שילה> שילו ולו יקהת עמים:

רמב"ן בראשית פרק מט

(י) לא יסור שבט מיהודה - אין ענינו שלא יסור לעולם, כי כתוב (דברים כח לו) יולך ה' אותך ואת מלכך אשר תקים עליך אל גוי אשר לא ידעת אתה ואבותיך, והנה הם ומלכם בגולה, אין להם עוד מלך ושרים. וימים רבים אין מלך בישראל. והנביא לא יבטיח את ישראל שלא ילכו בשבי בשום ענין בעבור שימלוך עליהם יהודה:

אבל ענינו שלא יסור שבט מיהודה אל אחד מאחיו, כי מלכות ישראל המושל עליהם ממנו יהיה, ולא ימשול אחד מאחיו עליו, וכן לא יסור מחוקק מבין רגליו, שכל מחוקק בישראל אשר בידו טבעת המלך ממנו יהיה, כי הוא ימשול ויצוה בכל ישראל, ולו חותם המלכות, עד כי יבא שילה ולו יקהת כל העמים לעשות בכולם כרצונו, וזהו המשיח, כי השבט ירמוז לדוד שהוא המלך הראשון אשר לו שבט מלכות, ושילה הוא בנו אשר לו יקהת העמים...

וזה היה עונש החשמונאים שמלכו בבית שני, כי היו חסידי עליון, ואלמלא הם נשתכחו התורה והמצות מישראל, ואף על פי כן נענשו עונש גדול, כי ארבעת בני חשמונאי הזקן החסידים המולכים זה אחר זה עם כל גבורתם והצלחתם נפלו ביד אויביהם בחרב. והגיע העונש בסוף למה שאמרו רז"ל (ב"ב ג ב) כל מאן דאמר מבית חשמונאי קאתינא עבדא הוא, שנכרתו כלם בעון הזה. ואף על פי שהיה בזרע שמעון עונש מן הצדוקים, אבל כל זרע מתתיה חשמונאי הצדיק לא עברו אלא בעבור זה שמלכו ולא היו מזרע יהודה ומבית דוד, והסירו השבט והמחוקק לגמרי, והיה עונשם מדה כנגד מדה, שהמשיל הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את עבדיהם והם הכריתום:

הִנֵּה יִשְׁכִּיל עַבְדִּי יָרוּם וְנִשָּׂא וְגָבַהּ מְאֹד:

"Indeed, My servant shall prosper, Be exalted and raised to great heights.

כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמְמוּ עָלָיו רַבִּים כִּן־מִשְׁחַת מְאִישׁ מְרֹאֵהוּ וְתֹארוֹ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם:

Just as the many were appalled at him— So marred was his appearance, unlike that of man, form, beyond human semblance—

כִּן יִזְהוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים עָלָיו יִקְפְּצוּ מְלָכִים פִּיהֶם כִּי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־סֹפֵר לָהֶם רָאוּ וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ הִתְבּוֹנְנוּ:

Just so he shall startle many nations. Kings shall be silenced because of him, For they shall see what has not been told them, Shall behold what they never have heard."

מִי הָאֱמִין לִשְׁמַעְתָּנוּ וְזָרַע יְהוָה עַל־מִי נִגְלָתָה:

"Who can believe what we have heard? Upon whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

וַיַּעַל כִּיזֹנֶק לִפְנָיו וְכִשְׁרָשׁ מֵאֲרָץ צִיָּה לֹא־תֵאָר לוֹ וְלֹא הָדָר וְנִרְאָהוּ וְלֹא־מְרֹאֶה וְנִחְמָדָהוּ:

For he has grown, by His favor, like a tree crown, Like a tree trunk out of arid ground. He had no form or beauty, that we should look at him: No charm, that we should find him pleasing.

נִבְזָה וְחִדָּל אִישִׁים אִישׁ מְכַאֲבוֹת וַיְדוּעַ חָלִי וְכִמְסֻתָּר פָּנִים מִמֶּנּוּ נִבְזָה וְלֹא חֲשַׁבְנָהוּ:

He was despised, shunned by men, A man of suffering, familiar with disease. As one who hid his face from us, He was despised, we held him of no account.

אָכֵן חָלִינוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמְכַאֲבֵינוּ סִבְלָם וְאֶנְחֵנוּ חֲשַׁבְנָהוּ נִגְוָע מִכָּה אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲנָה:

Yet it was our sickness that he was bearing, Our suffering that he endured. We accounted him plagued, Smitten and afflicted by God;

וְהוּא מִחֻלָּל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדְּכָא מַעֲוֹנֵתֵינוּ מִסֵּר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא־לָנוּ:

But he was wounded because of our sins, Crushed because of our iniquities. He bore the chastisement that made us whole, And by his bruises we were healed.

כָּלֵנוּ כָּצָאן תַּעֲלִינוּ אִישׁ לְדַרְכּוֹ פָּגִינוּ יְהוָה הִפְגִּיעַ בּוֹ אֶת עֲוֹן כָּלֵנוּ:

We all went astray like sheep, Each going his own way; And the LORD visited upon him The guilt of all of us.”

נִגְשׁ וְהוּא נַעֲנֶה וְלֹא יִפְתַּח־פִּיו כְּשֶׁה לְטֹבַח יוֹבֵל וְכַרְחָל לִפְנֵי גִזְזִיָּה נֶאֱלָמָה וְלֹא יִפְתַּח פִּיו:

He was maltreated, yet he was submissive, He did not open his mouth; Like a sheep being led to slaughter, Like a ewe, dumb before those who shear her, He did not open his mouth.

מַעֲצָר וּמִמְשָׁפֶט לָקַח וְאֶת־דּוֹרוֹ מִי יִשׁוּחֵם כִּי נִגְזַר מֵאֲרָץ חַיִּים מִפֶּשַׁע עַמִּי נִגְעַת לָמוֹ:

By oppressive judgment he was taken away, Who could describe his abode? For he was cut off from the land of the living Through the sin of my people, who deserved the punishment.

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־רְשָׁעִים קִבְּרוֹ וְאֶת־עֲשִׂיר בְּמַתָּיו עַל לֹא־חֶמֶס עָשָׂה וְלֹא מִרְמָה בִּפְיוֹ:

And his grave was set among the wicked, And with the rich, in his death— Though he had done no injustice And had spoken no falsehood.

וַיִּהְיֶה חֲפֹץ דַּכָּאוֹ הַחֲלִי אִם־תִּשְׁשִׁים אֲשֶׁם נִפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה זֶרַע יֶאֱרִיךְ יָמִים וְחֲפֹץ יְהוָה בִּידּוֹ יִצְלַח:

But the LORD chose to crush him by disease, That, if he made himself an offering for guilt, He might see offspring and have long life, And that through him the LORD's purpose might prosper.

מִמַּעַמַל נִפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׁבַּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ יִצְדִּיק צְדִיק עַבְדִּי לְרַבִּים וְעוֹנֵתָם הוּא יִסְבֹּל:

Out of his anguish he shall see it; He shall enjoy it to the full through his devotion. “My righteous servant makes the many righteous, It is their punishment that he bears;

לָכֵן אֲחַלֵּק־לוֹ רַבִּים וְאֶת־עֲצוּמִים יִחַלֵּק שְׁלָל־תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הָעֵרָה לַמָּוֶת נִפְשׁוֹ וְאֶת־פִּשְׁעִים נִמְנָה וְהוּא חֲטָא־רַבִּים נָשָׂא וּלְפִשְׁעִים יִפְגִּיעַ: (o)

Assuredly, I will give him the many as his portion, He shall receive the multitude as his spoil. For he exposed himself to death And was numbered among the sinners, Whereas he bore the guilt of the many And made intercession for sinners.”

Martin Cohen, Reflections on the Text and Context of the Disputation of Barcelona

This picture idealizes, or more correctly, caricatures the scholar who participated in the debate, and what is worse, disregards a multitude of conflicting details. It is another example of the inevitable result of the attempt to raise partisanship to the level of objectivity. Interestingly, it finds a compensatory obverse in the story of the disputation recorded in a well-known Spanish encyclopedia, where it is related that the Jewish protagonist lost the debate, converted to Christianity and became a successful missionary among his former coreligionists.⁴⁴

In any such problem what is required is a disinterested approach to the text, and an interested quest for a realistic context. The effort to reconstruct the reality of the Disputation of Barcelona from the sparse relics in our possession demands a recognition of the inadequacy of both texts and therefore, *faute de mieux* and no evidence to the contrary withstanding, the utilization of both with caution and without prejudice. With such an approach enough details can be discovered to

Nahmanides immediately sensed the danger in Paul's opening gambit, and on the very first day of the debate, he tried to inveigle his opponent into an identification of Jesus with the Messiah, but Master Giles, the king's justiciary, came to Paul's rescue. "Right now," he warned Nahmanides, "we are not discussing Jesus. The question rather is whether the Messiah has come."⁴² In the succeeding days of the debate, Nahmanides, at every opportunity, insisted desperately that Jesus was not and could not have been the Messiah whom they were discussing, but his words fell on deaf ears. When he later wrote his recollections of the debate, he put the name of Jesus in Paul's mouth in several instances where it would hardly have been prudent for Paul to mention Jesus,⁴³ and in one case he even makes Paul translate by "Jesus" the word "Messiah" which appears in a biblical verse.⁴⁴ That Paul avoided the equation of the Messiah with Jesus, except perhaps in his obiter dicta, is evident from the examples he uses, from the entire course of his argument and even from the Christian account of the proceedings. The Latin document mentions the name of Jesus only twice, both conjoined to the word Christ, both in quotations from Nahmanides, and both representing attempts by the sage from Gerona to discredit the reputed Messianic role of Jesus.

Nor was Paul's decision to rely on rabbinic literature an unstudied move. He knew that the legal writings of the rabbis, the Halakhah, could not support him, for it did not deal with the questions he was eager to discuss. He had to rely on the homilies, the legends and the traditional tales that constitute the 'Aggadah, and he knew that the 'Aggadah did not carry the same weight as the Halakhah, that there was no obligation to believe it and that in many circles it was not believed. However, he recognized one salient fact that scholars have often overlooked, namely, that the 'Aggadah provided the foundation for much of the theology and theosophy of the Jews of Spain and France in the thirteenth century and that among the scholars who treasured and believed and leaned heavily upon the 'Aggadah was none other than Nahmanides himself.

publicize!⁵⁰ While the Maimonideans' troubles stemmed from their excessive reliance upon metaphysics, the problem of the mystics lay in their exaggeration and imaginative extensions of the literal meaning of the 'Aggadah to the point where they were actually measuring the physical attributes of their Maker!⁵¹ The 'Aggadah was the clay with which all Kabbalists worked. "For them," a leading authority on Jewish mysticism tells us, "the 'Aggadah is not just a dead letter. They live in a world historically continuous with it and they are able, therefore, to enhance it, though in the spirit of mysticism. 'Aggadic productivity has been a constant element of Kabbalistic literature, and only when the former disappears will the latter, too, be doomed to extinction."⁵² Again and again we find evidence among the friends and foes of the thirteenth century Kabbalah of the indispensable role which the 'Aggadah, accepted literally, played among them.

Paul knew and exploited all this. His Dominican order had followed the events of the Maimunist-anti-Maimunist controversy with heightened interest and, according to many Jewish historians, had actually participated in the burning of Maimonides' books in the squares of Paris. Furthermore, they had themselves precipitated a similar controversy in Christendom by denouncing the rationalistic lucubrations of the Averroists. In the very year of the disputation at Barcelona Pope Urban IV reiterated the Church's prohibitions against Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics* and other works.⁵³ The Dominicans and Brother Paul knew very well where Nahmanides stood and what he believed.

All these facts suggest that the purpose of the disputation was to dramatize the new alliance between the Dominicans and the king. Such an alliance could not be announced as a political move, but had to be presented in a framework which would appeal to the sentiments that united all strata of the population. In thirteenth century Aragon these sentiments were religious. The people were united by Christianity. The king posed as its defender, and the Jews were regarded as its inveterate enemy. By humbling the Jews with their own literature the Dominicans, already renowned as fighters for their faith, could rise in the popular mind as the unparalleled champions of Christianity, and hope to win mass support away from nobles and local bishops. That the Dominicans did not succeed in doing so completely, as seen by the incident at the beginning of the final day's debate, evidences the power and prestige of the nobility and churchmen to which so many contemporary documents attest.

Naturally, such demonstration of Dominican superiority could have succeeded only with the participation of the Jews; hence the orders given to Nahmanides. But why did Nahmanides not protest against being used in this way? Why did he not remonstrate with the king against the entire project of the disputation? Why did he not seek to discontinue the debate in its earliest stages, after his initial setbacks and embarrassments, particularly when the judges refused him the right to disprove the central Christian contention that Jesus was the Messiah? The fact is that Nahmanides did not protest, indeed, he acquiesced in the king's wishes and thus, to some extent at least, co-operated with the monarch in the staging of the debate. Such co-operation involved no hypocrisy on Nahmanides' part. Within the limitations of the debate, he was given permission to speak forthrightly and to defend his faith vigorously. It merely called for a loyalty to the king to go through with the spectacle, to accept the humiliation of defeat, thereby helping the king achieve his purpose, and to be rewarded thereafter with the king's largesse. Nahmanides effectively demonstrated his loyalty to the monarch during the course of the debate by his ostensibly naive, but actually diplomatic announcement to the king and the Dominicans, at the beginning of the fourth day's discussions, that forces were marshalling against his alliance and were seeking to interrupt the debate, an announcement that stunned a man like Peter of Genoa into a compromising denial. And King James reciprocated by continuing to befriend Nahmanides after the debate,

as we have seen and shall have occasion to observe again. Much more important was the monarch's continued protection of the economic interests of the Jews of Aragon after the disputation. Would it be unreasonable to conjecture that Nahmanides recognized that his submission to the king's will and plan would be rewarded with the safeguarding of the physical well-being of the Jews of Aragon? Would it be out of keeping with the stature of the sage of Gerona, as a community leader and as an exemplary diplomat, to imagine that he was prepared to suffer unfairly the ephemeral pangs of humiliation in order to safeguard the security of his flock?¹¹⁵

Ora Limor, Review of Beyond Barcelona by Robert Chazan

Chazan doubts that Nahmanides was able to speak freely in the disputation and to say some of the things that he claimed to have said. There is no doubt that he was obliged, as Chazan rightly points out, to accept dictates. The disputation was forced on him and the agenda dictated to him, as was even the method of disputation. At the same time, one must remember that “power” can be exercised in different ways, and it has various forms of expression. Nahmanides’ authority was older and more soundly-based than that of Friar Pablo the apostate, who was suspect to both parties because of the very fact of his apostasy. The obstinate Jewish refusal to recognize the truth of Christianity was a great sin in the eyes of the Christians, but it was also a sort of Jewish demonstration of power. Nahmanides’ enormous erudition and his authority as head of the Gerona yeshiva and as one of the leaders of Spanish Jewry were facts known to the Christians. Moreover, Nahmanides was undoubtedly wise enough to criticize Christianity without actually indulging in blasphemy. When employing rhetoric, irony, sarcasm, and other subtle modes of expression at the disposal of the debater, he certainly was cautious but still knew how to make his point. When in his book Nahmanides stressed his own superiority, he no doubt exaggerated, as Chazan says, in order to encourage the Jews and to portray himself in a light that would be in keeping with his own self-image. Yet, his words are revealing in what they tell us about the self-awareness and self-confidence of a Jewish leader and a Jewish minority community at that period.

Bob Chazan, In the Wake of the Barcelona Disputation

The essential point of the treatise and of Nahmanides’ understanding of the Biblical passage is indicated in his brief introductory and concluding comments.

“Indeed, my servant shall prosper.” The correct interpretation of this passage is that it refers to Israel in its entirety, as in the ex-

pression “Fear not, my servant Jacob”¹⁴ or “You are my servant in whom I glory”¹⁵ and many similar passages. However, according to the view of the midrash that refers it [the Isaiah passage] to the messiah, we must explicate it according to those books. This alternative view indicates that the messiah son of David concerning whom Scripture speaks will never be subjugated and will not die at the hands of his enemies. Thus the verses indicate clearly. . . .¹⁶

Behold there is no mention in the passage that he [the messiah] would be delivered into the hands of his enemies, nor that he would be killed, nor that he would be hung on a tree. Rather [it indicates] that he would see offsprings and live a long life, that he would be exalted and that his kingdom would be raised to heights among the nations and that powerful kings would become his booty.¹⁷

Thus Nahmanides’ essential message to his fellow Jews remains that even the Midrashic understanding of the Isaiah passage as a reference to the messiah affords no support for the Christian notion of a messiah who suffered and perished on behalf of humankind. There is, in the Isaiah passage, no reference to the suffering and death of the messiah that is central to Christian teaching. On the contrary, argues Rabbi Moses to his fellow Jews, the portrait sketched by Isaiah involves a messianic figure that, despite humble origins, ends his career with dignity and authority.