



Title: Ramban - Nachmanides

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ולזה העיקר הגדול נטה אחד מן החכמים וגדול מגדוליהם והוא רבי חייא הגדול, בלשון התורה, וירא אליו ד' באלוני ממרא וגו', כי כאשר הקדים כלל והוא שהשם נראה אליו, התחיל לבאר איך היתה צורת ההראות ההוא, ואמר שתחלה ראה שלשה אנשים ורץ ואמר מאמר אליהם, ואמר זה אשר פירש זה הפירוש שמאמר אברהם ויאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך, שהוא ג"כ ספור מה שאמר במראה הנבואה לאחד מהם, ואמר לגדול שבהם אמר, והבן הענין הזה עוד בסוד מן הסודות, וכן אמר עוד בענין יעקב, אמרו ויאבק איש עמו, שהוא בצורת הנבואה, אחר שהתבאר באחרונה שהוא מלאך, והוא כענין אברהם בשוה אשר הקדים ספור כללי, וירא אליו ה' וגו', אחרי כן התחיל לבאר איך היה זה, וכן ביעקב אמר ויפגעו בו מלאכי אלהים, ואחר כן התחיל לבאר איך קרה עד שפגעו בו, ואמר שהוא שלח שלוחים ופעל ועשה, ויותר יעקב לבדו וגו', וזהו מלאכי אלהים הנאמר עליהם תחלה ויפגעו בו מלאכי אלהים, וזה ההתאבקות והדבור כלו במראה הנבואה. וכן ענין בלעם כלו בדרך ודברי האתון הכל במראה הנבואה

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This important principle was adopted by one of our Sages, one of the most distinguished among them, R. Ḥiya the Great (Bereshit Rabba, xlviii.), in the exposition of the Scriptural passage commencing, "And the Lord appeared unto him in the plain of Mamre" (Gen. xviii.). The general statement that the Lord appeared to Abraham is followed by the description in what manner that appearance of the Lord took place; namely, Abraham saw first three men; he ran and spoke to them. R. Hiya, the author of the explanation, holds that the words of Abraham, "My Lord, if now I have found grace in thy sight, do not, I pray thee, pass from thy servant," were spoken by him in a prophetic vision to one of the men; for he says that Abraham addressed these words to the chief of these men. Note this well, for it is one of the great mysteries [of the Law]. The same, I hold, is the case when it is said in reference to Jacob, "And a man wrestled with him" (Gen. 32:25); this took place in a prophetic vision, since it is expressly stated in the end (ver. 31) that it was an angel. The circumstances are here exactly the same as those in the vision of Abraham, where the general statement, "And the Lord appeared to him," etc., is followed by a detailed description. Similarly the account of the vision of Jacob begins, "And the angels of God met him" (Gen. 32:2); then follows a detailed description how it came to pass that they met him; namely, Jacob sent messengers, and after having prepared and done certain things, "he was left alone," etc., "and a man wrestled with him" (ibid. ver. 24). By this term "man" [one of] the angels of God is meant, mentioned in the phrase, "And angels of God met him"; the

wrestling and speaking was entirely a prophetic vision. That which happened to Balaam on the way, and the speaking of the ass, took place in a prophetic vision, since further on, in the same account, an angel of God is introduced as speaking to Balaam.

רמב"ן בראשית פרק יח פסוק א

2 ואלה דברים סותרים הכתוב, אסור לשומעם אף כי להאמין בהם

רמב"ן בראשית פרק יב

3 ודע כי אברהם אבינו חטא גדול בשגגה שהביא אשתו הצדקת במכשול עון מפני פחדו פן יהרגוהו, והיה לו לבטוח בשם שיציל אותו ואת אשתו ואת כל אשר לו, כי יש באלהים כח לעזור ולהציל. גם יציאתו מן הארץ, שנצטווה עליה בתחילה, מפני הרעב, עון אשר חטא, כי האלהים ברעב יפדנו ממות. ועל המעשה הזה נגזר על זרעו הגלות בארץ מצרים ביד פרעה. במקום המשפט שמה הרשע והחטא

Know that Abraham our father unintentionally committed a great sin by bringing his righteous wife to a stumbling-block of sin on account of his fear for his life. He should have trusted that God would save him and his wife and all his belongings, for God surely has the power to help and to save. His leaving the Land concerning which he had been commanded from the beginning, on account of the famine, was also a sin he committed, for in famine God would redeem him from death. It was because of this deed that the exile in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh was decreed for his children.

4 רמב"ן בראשית פרק טז

(ו) ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה - חטאה אמנו בענוי הזה, וגם אברהם בהניחו לעשות כן, ושמע ה' אל עניה ונתן לה בן שיהא פרא אדם לענות זרע אברהם ושרה בכל מיני הענוי

Our mother [Sarah] transgressed by this affliction, as did Abraham by allowing her to do so. So God heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be *a wild ass of a man* to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction.

5 חידושי הרמב"ן מסכת שבת דף קל עמוד ב

ואף על גב דאמירה לגוי שבות הכא משום יישוב א"י לא גזרו ביה רבנן, אלמא אמירה לגוי אפי' לעשות מלאכה גמורה במקום מצוה לא גזרו רבנן, ולדידן לא קשיא ולא מידי דהתם מצוה ותועלת לכל ישראל הוא שלא תחרב ארץ קדושה

6 רמב"ן ויקרא פרק יח פסוק כה

ונתן על כל עם ועם בארצותם לגוייהם כוכב ומזל ידוע כאשר נודע באצטגנינות. וזהו שנאמר (דברים ד יט) אשר חלק ה' אלהיך אותם לכל העמים, כי חלק לכולם מזלות בשמים, וגבוהים עליהם מלאכי עליון נתנם להיותם שרים עליהם, כענין שכתוב (דניאל י יג) ושר מלכות פרס עומד לנגדי, וכתוב (שם פסוק כ) והנה שר יון בא, ונקראים מלכים כדכתיב (שם פסוק יג) ואני נותרתי שם אצל מלכי פרס:

והנה השם הנכבד הוא אלהי האלהים ואדוני האדונים לכל העולם, אבל ארץ ישראל אמצעות הישוב היא נחלת ה' מיוחדת לשמו, לא נתן עליה מן המלאכים קצין שוטר ומושל בהנחילו אותה לעמו המיוחד שמו זרע אוהביו

And He placed over each and every people in their lands according to their nations a star and a specific constellation, as is known in astrology. And behold the honored God is the God (Power) of powers and the Master of masters of the whole universe, but upon the land of Israel—the center of the [world's] habitation, the inheritance of God [that is] unique to His name—He did not place a captain, officer or ruler from the angels, in His giving it as an inheritance to his nation that unifies His name—the seed of His beloved one.

22.

7 1. והאלהים נסה את אברהם. - GOD TESTED ABRAHAM.

[The idea of God putting a man to a test is a difficult concept. Surely God knows the extent of a person's righteousness without having to resort to testing him!¹ Ramban explains:]

ענין הנסיון הוא לרצוני - The following is, in my opinion, how we should understand the matter of God subjecting a person to a test: - בעבור היות מעשה האדם רשות מוחלטת בידו - Whereas a person's actions are completely within his own control, - אם ירצה יעשה ואם לא ירצה לא יעשה - i.e., if he wants to do a certain act, he will do it, and if he does not want to do it, he will not, - יקרא "נסיון" - יקרא "נסיון" [God's command to a particular person] is called a "test" from the point of view of the tested party. - אבל המנסה יתברך ויצוהו לו להוציא הדבר מן הכח אל הפועל - But the Tester, Blessed be He, commands [the tested party] to perform a certain act in order to bring forth the matter of that person's righteousness from the potential to the actual, - להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב - so that he should have the reward of having done a good deed, and not only the reward of having had a good heart.

[Since man's actions are completely optional for him, there is a chance that an individual might fail a test to which he is subjected. Why would God want that person tested, then, if it might prove detrimental to him? Ramban explains:]

ידע כי "השם צדיק יבדק" - You should know that "HASHEM examines only the righteous man" (Psalms 11:5). - בשהוא יודע בצדיק שיעשה רצונו ויחפץ להצדיקו - When He knows about a righteous person that he will fulfill His will, and He wants to grant him merit, - יצוה אותו בנסיון - He commands him to do some difficult act as a test. - ולא יבדק את הרשעים אשר לא ישמעו - He does not, however, examine the wicked, who would not listen to Him. - והנה כל הנסיונות שבתורה לטובת המנסה - Thus,

8 רמב"ן ויקרא פרק יח פסוק כה

כי עיקר כל המצות ליושבים בארץ ה'. ולפיכך אמרו בספרי (ראה פ), וירשתם אותה וישבתם בה ושמרתם לעשות (דברים יא לא לב), ישיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל המצות שבתורה,

Since the essence of all of the commandments are for those who are dwelling in the Land of the Lord. And therefore they said in Sifrei ""And you shall possess it and you shall dwell in it. And you will guard to keep."—Dwelling in the Land of Israel is equal to all of the [other] commandments in the Torah."

9 רמב"ן בראשית פרק א פסוק ג

ודע, כי הימים הנזכרים במעשה בראשית היו בבריאת השמים והארץ ימים ממש, מחוברים משעות ורגעים, והיו ששה כששת ימי המעשה, כפשוטו של מקרא:

ובפנימיות הענין יקראו "ימים" הספירות האצולות מעליון, כי כל מאמר פועל הויה תקרא "יום". והיו ששה, כי לה' הגדולה והגבורה, והמאמרים עשרה, כי הראשונות אין שם "יום" נתפס בהם. והפירוש בסדור הכתובים בזה נשגב ונעלם, ודעתינו בו פחות מטפה מן הים הגדול

And know that the days that are mentioned in the act of creation were, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, real days - composed of hours and minutes - and they were six like the six days of the [week], like the simple understanding of the verse. And in the inner [understanding] of the matter, the spheres (*sfirot*) that are emanated from the Most High are called 'days,' since any proclamation that brings existence is called a 'day.' And there were six, 'because to the Lord is greatness and strength.' And the proclamations were ten, since the name 'day' does not apply to the first ones. And the explanation of the order of the verses in this [way] is elevated and hidden, and our knowledge of it is less than a drop in the Great Sea.

10 רמב"ן דברים פרק לב פסוק ז

(ז - י) שאל אביך - רמז למבינים, וכן זקניך - והטעם, כמו שאמר (לעיל ד יט) אשר חלק ה' אלהיך אותם וגו', כי לכל חלק במטה חלק למעלה. וטעם למספר בני ישראל - כי צורת יעקב חקוקה בכסא הכבוד, והוא סוד גדול, והעד כי חלק ה' עמו - וזאת מעלה גדולה שלא עשה כן לכל גוי

רמב"ן בראשית פרק לג פסוק כ

11 ועל דרך האמת הוא כמדרש רבותינו שדרשו רבותינו במסכת מגלה (יח א) מנין שקראו הקדוש ברוך הוא ליעקב אל, שנאמר ויקרא לו אל אלהי ישראל. ויש בענין הזה סוד גדול הזכירוהו עוד בבראשית רבה (עט ח) בלשון אחר, אמר לו, אתה אלוה בעליונים ואני אלוה בתחתונים. ירמזו למה שהם אומרים תמיד שאיקונין של יעקב חקוקה בכסא הכבוד. והכונה שהשכינה שורה בארץ ישראל. והמשכיל יבין

[in Scripture] with reference to Adam and Eve: *Cursed is the ground for thy sake;*⁵⁶ *Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee;*⁵⁷ *In the sweat of thy face [shall thou eat bread]; for dust thou art, [and unto dust shalt thou return].*⁵⁸ Similarly, with regard to the woman, it states, *In pain thou shalt bring forth children.*⁵⁹ All of these [punishments] are still in effect today. Thus, all [punishments] that are observable and perceivable have not been atoned for in the era of your deliverer but you assert that the [affliction of] Gehenna, which is not [among the punishments] enumerated there [in Scripture], is forgiven. [You make this assertion] because there is no one to contradict you. *Send one of you,*⁶⁰ and let him come and tell [us whether Gehenna still exists or not]. Moreover, *Far be it from G-d, [that He should do wickedness].*⁶¹ The righteous are not doomed [to suffer] the punishment of Gehenna because of the sin of the first man, their ancestor. My soul has the same identical affinity to the soul of my father as it does to that of Pharaoh, but my soul will not enter Gehenna because of Pharaoh's sin! The punishments [for the first man's sin] relate only to the body, because my body comes from my father and my mother. When [eventual death] was decreed for both [Adam and Eve] and they became mortal, all their descendants became subject to mortality in a natural way."

46 [Fray Pul] then stood up and declared, "I will bring further proof that the time for [the advent of] the Messiah has passed."

47 I said, "My lord king, bear with me [a while]. The essence of our judgment, truth, and statute does not depend upon the Messiah. [For the purpose of fulfilling the commandments of the Torah], you are more beneficial to me than the Messiah. You are king, and he is king. You are a gentile king, and he is a Jewish king, for the Messiah is but a

(56) Genesis 3:17. (57) *Ibid.*, Verse 18. (58) *Ibid.*, Verse 19. (59) *Ibid.*, Verse 16. (60) *Ibid.*, Verse 42:16. (61) Job 34:10.

king of flesh and blood like you. When I worship my Creator in your dominion, exiled [from my homeland] suffering and under subjugation, *the shame of the nations*⁶² who taunt me always,⁶³ my reward is abundant, for I bring a whole-offering to G-d from my physical being. Because of that, I shall increasingly merit life in the World to Come. However, when a king of Israel, [a monarch] of my faith, will rule over all the nations and I will have no choice but to abide by the law of the Jews, my reward will not be as abundant. Nevertheless, the vital conflict and difference between the Jews and the Christians concerns your contention about the principle of G-d, [a suggestion] which is extremely unpalatable to the mind. All of your life, you, our lord king, a Christian son of a Christian father and mother, have heard priests, monks, and preachers speaking of the Nazarene's birth. They have filled your mind and the marrow of your bones with this thing, and it comes to you [now] out of habit. Yet, what you believe—and it is the root of your faith—is not acceptable to the [rational] mind. Nature does not work that way, and the prophets never said so. Furthermore, a miracle cannot disseminate itself in that way, as I shall explain⁶⁴ with valid proofs in its place and in its time. The mind of any Jew or any man will not permit him to believe that the Creator of heaven and earth [and all that is therein] would pass through the womb of a Jewish woman, to develop there for seven months,⁶⁵ [at which point] an infant was born, [who supposedly is G-d] and who afterwards grew up and later was turned over into the hands of his enemies, who judged him, condemned him to death, and killed him. You then claim, finally, that he became alive and returned to his former state [of divinity]! You voice your opinion in vain and to no

(62) Ezekiel 36:16. See in "The Book of Redemption," end of the Second Gate, where Ramban restates the same thought. (63) See Psalms 102:9. (64) Ramban must be referring to the preceding clause, "and the prophets never said so," which is fully explained in his commentary on the Scriptural passage which commences with, *Behold, My servant shall prosper.* See Kithvei Haramban, Vol. I, pp. 322-326. (65) Another version: "for nine months."

purpose, for this is the root of the controversy between us! Nevertheless, we shall also speak about the Messiah [an issue secondary to the principal point of contention, as I explained], in accordance with your wish.

48 Fray Pul inquired, "Do you [yourself] believe that he has already come?"

49 I answered, "No, I believe and know, rather, that he has not come. Besides the Nazarene, there has never been a person in the world who himself said or of whom it was said that he is Messiah. It is impossible for me to accept that he is the Messiah, for the prophet has said of the Messiah, *He will have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.*⁶⁶ The Nazarene though, had no dominion. During his life, he was persecuted by his enemies and was in hiding from them. In the end, he fell into their hands and was not [even] able to help himself. How [then] could he help Israel? Even after his death, he had no dominion, for the might of Rome was not due to him. On the contrary, before [the Romans] believed in him, the city of Rome ruled over the greatest part of the world, but after they adopted his religion, they lost many kingdoms. At present, the worshippers of Mohammed have more [dominion and] power than [the Christians]. Similarly, the prophet states that in the time of the Messiah, *They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: Know the Eternal, for they shall all know Me,* etc.⁶⁷ It is further stated, *For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Eternal, as the waters cover the sea,*⁶⁸ and it is also said, *And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*⁶⁹ From the days of the

(66) Psalms 72:8. In other words, though the Nazarene was the only person until Ramban's time who ever claimed to be the Messiah, he never fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures, as Ramban continues. (67) Jeremiah 31:33. (68) Isaiah 11:9. (69) *Ibid.*, 2:4.

Nazarene until now, the entire world has been full of violence and robbery. [Indeed], the Christians spill more blood than the rest of the nations, and they also lead immoral lives. How difficult it would be for you, my lord king, and these your knights if they would *neither . . . learn war any more!* The prophet further said about the Messiah, *And he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth.*⁷⁰ [The Rabbis] in the book of Hagadah which Fray Pul is holding explain it [as follows]: People will say to King Messiah, 'That country has rebelled against you.' He will declare, 'Let the locust come and lay it waste.' They will say to him, 'That district has rebelled against you.' He will say, 'Let [a horde of] mixed beasts come and destroy it.' This did not occur with the Nazarene. As for you, his servants, [despite your avowals of belief in the Nazarene's elimination of war], you [still] consider it advantageous to have [weapons and] mail-covered steeds. Yet, at times, *all this availeth nothing*⁷¹ for you. I will yet bring you many proofs from the words of the prophets."

50 [Fray Pul] cried out, "It is his constant habit to deliver such long-winded speeches. Nevertheless, I have a question to ask."

51 The king instructed me: "Be silent. He is the one who is asking." Thus, I was silent.

52 [Fray Pul] said, "Your Sages say that the Messiah is honored above the angels, and this can only refer to the Nazarene, who is the deliverer and the deity." He brought proof from [the Rabbis'] statement in the Hagadah: ⁷² *"He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high."*³⁶ *He shall be exalted* above Abraham; *and lifted up* above Moses; *and shall be very high* above the ministering angels."

(70) *Ibid.*, 11:4. (71) Esther 5:13. In other words, even though you insist that the Nazarene has brought an end to evil, there is still suffering, war, and death pervading the world, and you are powerless before them. (72) Yalkuth Isaiah 476.