

GREAT BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS

By Dr. Avigail Rock

Lecture #14: R. Avraham ibn Ezra, Part II

A. Exegetical Approach

In our previous lecture, we dealt with Ibn Ezra's biography and the four exegetical approaches that he rejects. In this lecture, we will discuss the fifth approach, the way in which Ibn Ezra interprets the Torah. Already in his introduction to the Torah (*Peirush Ha-Katzar*), Ibn Ezra alludes to his exegetical approach:

This is the book of the straight
By Avraham the bard, the work I create
According to binding grammar's dictate,
Fit in reason's eyes, beyond debate,
And all its supporters it shall elate.

Ibn Ezra describes his commentary as "the book of the straight,"¹ and an analysis of his commentaries indicates that the word "straight" is a reference to following the way of *peshat*. Ibn Ezra explains the work as a commentary based on the fundamentals of grammar ("According to binding grammar's dictate") and conforming to the requirements of logic ("Fit in reason's eyes"). As his introduction continues, Ibn Ezra lays out what defines his interpretation, "The fifth among these ways:"

The fifth among these ways,
The foundation of my commentary upon them stays;
And it is right in my eye,
Before God's face on High.
His awe alone I savor;
In the Torah, I will never show favor.
I will explicate each word's grammar with all of my strength,
And afterwards as I am able, I will explain it at length...
Because *derash* does not make the way of *peshat* mistaken,
For the Torah has seventy faces which we may awaken.
Only when it comes to teachings, laws, and decrees,
If the verse has two reasons which may please,
And the one reason relies on the scribes' expertise,

¹ Certainly, his intent is not to refer to the Book of *Bereishit*, which is also described as "the book of the straight," because Ibn Ezra writes explicitly that this is "the book of the straight/ by Avraham the bard," i.e., the work composed by R. Avraham Ibn Ezra.

For they are all righteous, we need no guarantees,
We will doubtless rely on their truth, with strong hands and ease.
God forbid that we may involve ourselves with Sadducees,
Who say that the scribes contradict the details written in these.
Rather, our predecessors embody truth,
And all of their words are truth;
And Lord God of truth
Shall direct his servant on the way of truth.

Ibn Ezra begins by declaring that he does not feel himself chained to previous commentaries (“In the Torah, I will never show favor”); this refers both to Midrashic sources and the commentaries of his predecessors. Furthermore, Ibn Ezra expresses his intent to explain the Torah through the rules of grammar, linguistics, and reason – i.e., human intelligence.

However, this is all stated with regard to the narrative sections of the Torah; in his commentaries to the halakhic part of the Torah, Ibn Ezra indeed sees himself as bound to the Sages’ exegesis. (Even if he is not chained to the Sages’ method, the nature of halakhic exegesis, he sees himself as committed to the Sages’ conclusion.²)

The nature of the commentary in practice matches his declarations of intent. Ibn Ezra’s commentary is indeed characterized by a great emphasis on grammar, language, and stylistic sensitivity. Similarly, his commentary is anchored in rationalism, and he includes, among the rest, comments based on his multi-disciplinary knowledge. Ibn Ezra sets himself apart from his contemporaries, the *peshat*-based exegetes of France: although they do display some stylistic sensitivity, linguistic and grammatical exactitude is not common among the French *pashtanim*. Moreover, in his uncompromising desire to explain *Tanakh* according to the Sages’ views as well, Ibn Ezra is different from the French exegetes.³

In general, Ibn Ezra writes in a concise, terse form, and sometimes his severe brevity makes it difficult to understand what exactly he means.⁴ Ibn Ezra does not have the expansive knowledge of Talmudic sources that we find among the sages of northern France, and he therefore does not quote a great deal from the Sages or refer to them often. A particularly prominent characteristic of Ibn Ezra’s commentary is his reference to other commentaries. (In his commentaries, over thirty other exegetes are mentioned!⁵) Sometimes, he accepts their words and sometimes he rejects them; this rejection may be expressed with respect and admiration or with anger and mockery, usually accompanied with caustic wit.

B. Issues of Language and Grammar

2 We will expand on this, God willing, in the coming lesson.

3 As we continue our analysis, it will become clear that despite his declaration of principles concerning his fidelity to the Sages, Ibn Ezra often diverges from the Sages’ exegesis.

4 We have discussed the motives for his terse, difficult style in the previous lesson.

5 A full list appears in E.Z. Melamed, *Mefarshai Ha-Mikra* vol. II (Jerusalem, 5735).

As we have said, Ibn Ezra's commentaries include broader reference to linguistic and grammatical issues. Aside from specific commentaries in which Ibn Ezra explains a word or verse based on grammatical considerations (based in part on the commentaries of the grammarians who preceded him), Ibn Ezra formulates in a consistent way linguistic and grammatical rules in his commentary. Let us see a number of examples for this.

1) Ibn Ezra has a tendency to avoid identifying exceptions to the rule; he strives to formulate rules which are adequate for all circumstances. This is apparent in his approach to the confounding term "*na*." Ibn Janach, in *Sefer Ha-shorashim*, explains that the meaning of the word "*na*" is "now" or "please" (as Rashi, *Bamidbar* 12:13, explains as well). When Aharon asks Moshe to pray for Miriam, he says (*Bamidbar* 12:12), "Let her *na* not be like the dead..." Ibn Janach interprets this as a term of supplication and request. As for Moshe's prayer, "God, *na*, heal her, *na*" (ibid. v. 13), Ibn Janach explains the first appearance of the word as a term of supplication and the second appearance as a term of urgency, thus rendering it: "God, please, heal her now."⁶ Ibn Ezra (*Shemot* 4:13) opposes this, preferring to define "*na*" the same way throughout the passage:

...I have already explained **that every "*na*" in *Tanakh* is "now."** Similarly, "Speak now in the people's ears" (*Shemot* 11:2); "Hear now, Yehoshua" (*Zekharya* 3:8); "This man must now be put to death" (*Yirmeyahu* 38:4); "Woe now to us, for we have sinned" (*Eikha* 5:16).

Ibn Ezra systematically explains all of the appearances of the word "*na*"⁷ as meaning "now" exclusively.⁸

Ibn Ezra also defines the word "*im*" following the same principle. The word describes a state that is not necessarily applicable — in other words, a conditional situation. This interpretation creates a problem with the verse, "*Im* you shall lend money to my people" (*Shemot* 22:24), because there is a *mitzva* to lend to a pauper. Rashi, in his commentary to this verse, quotes the view of the Sages, according to whom this is one of three instances in which "*im*" does not indicate what follows is optional. Ibn Ezra, as is his wont, attempts to reduce the number of exceptions to any rule, and he gives a

6 Thus, it makes sense that God responds that healing her immediately is not an option, declaring (v. 14) "Certainly, if her father were to spit in her face, would she not be embarrassed for seven days?"

7 In comparing Ibn Ezra's explanations of the verses in which Rashi states that "*na*" is a term of request, we find that Ibn Ezra's commentary fits well in the *peshat* of the verses.

8 There is, however, one case in which "*na*" does have another meaning. In describing the eating of the paschal offering, the Torah commands, "Do not eat of it *na*" (*Shemot* 12:9). Ibn Ezra explains this as well:

What appears correct to me is that it has nothing like it in *Tanakh*. What it means is the opposite of cooked, that which is called "raw" elsewhere, for example, "He will not take from you cooked meat, but rather raw" (*II Shemuel* 2:15). As I have already said, the Arabic language for the most part is similar to the Hebrew language. Now, raw meat is called in Arabic *nayyeh*, and the letter *alef*, *heh*, *vav* and *yud* are interchangeable in their language as in ours.

Thus, the Arabic *nayyeh* becomes the Hebrew *na*, but only in this case.

unique meaning to all of the ostensibly exceptional appearances of “*im*.” He thus explains the verse: “If God has given you the wherewithal to allow you to lend to a pauper.” The lending is conditional because not every individual is in a financial position to be able to and required to lend to his impoverished brother.⁹

2) An additional linguistic element of Ibn Ezra’s view is the meaninglessness of trivial changes; the verse uses synonyms frequently, and there need be no justification for interchanging them. Similarly, there is no reason necessary for variations in spelling. In this context, one of the most prominent examples that Ibn Ezra addresses (*Shemot* 20:1) is the difference between the Ten Commandments in *Shemot* and in *Devarim*:

Behold, we have seen that from the beginning “I” until the end “who will bear His name in vain” (*Shemot* 20:7), there is no difference between the two passages. From the beginning of “Remember” (*ibid.* v. 7) until the end of the Ten Commandments, there is an alteration at every opportunity. The first is “Remember,” while the second is “Keep” (*Devarim* 5:12)...

After a long list of comparisons and various answers attempting to resolve the contradictions, Ibn Ezra writes:

Avraham the author says: This is the way of those who speak the Holy Tongue. Sometimes they will explain their words in great detail, and sometimes they will state matters succinctly and tersely, so that the listener may understand their meaning. Know that the words are like bodies, while the meanings are like souls, and the body is like the soul’s utensil; therefore, the rule of all the wise in every language is that they maintain the meanings, but they do not worry about changing the terminology as long as the meaning remains the same.

I will present some examples of this. God says to Kayin, “You are cursed from the earth... When you work the earth, it will no longer give its strength to you; you shall be a wanderer and a nomad in the land” (*Bereishit* 4:11-12). Kayin replies, “Behold, you have banished me today from the face of the earth” (v. 14). Only a thoughtless person would believe that the meaning is not the same because of the change

⁹ Ibn Ezra does the same in the two additional places in which the Sages interpret “*im*” as introducing an obligation. In *Shemot* 20:21-22, the verse states, “Make me an altar of earth... *Im* you shall build an altar of stones,” and Ibn Ezra explains the following:

The meaning of “*Im* you shall build” is as follows: Make Me an altar of earth right now... And if you merit to enter the land, then you shall build an altar of stones.

In *Vayikra* 2:14, the verse states, “*Im* you shall offer a first-fruits offering to God.” Ibn Ezra explains that we are not talking about the *omer* offering, which is mandatory, but rather a voluntary flour-offering:

Many have said that the word “*im*” refers to an obligation. In my view, this is unnecessary, because the obligation is to bring the premier of the first-fruits, not the first-fruits, and one who wants to bring a flour-offering from the first-fruits voluntarily is entitled to do so.

in terminology. Eliezer says (*ibid.* 24:17): "Please let me sip," but he later says (*ibid.* v. 45): "I said to her: 'Please let me drink.'"

There are many more examples of this phenomenon: one may find different words, but the meaning is the same. As I have already stated, sometimes their way is a brief one, and sometimes it is long, so that sometimes one will add or remove a prefix or suffix, but the matter remains the same...

Nevertheless, the members of this generation look for a reason for variations in spelling...

3) Another rule propounded by Ibn Ezra is "*Moshekh atzmo ve-acher immo*," "It draws itself and another along with it."¹⁰ This rule means that the verse will often use a word (or a number of words, or even a one-letter prefix) to refer to multiple items, even though it appears in the text only once. Using this rule, Ibn Ezra explains many verses in *Tanakh*.

One example of this is found in Moshe's final blessings to the tribes of Israel (*Devarim* 33:6), "May Reuven live and not die, and may his men¹¹ be numbered." The second clause is quite troubling, as it is not a blessing but a curse.¹² Ibn Ezra explains that "not" is subject to the rule of "*Moshekh atzmo ve-acher immo*:"

"And may his men be numbered" — And may his men **not** be numbered; it is like, "And I did not study wisdom" (*Mishlei* 30:2-3) and "as" in "as Almighty God" (*Shemot* 6:3), as I have explained many verses.

According to Ibn Ezra, the term "not" refers to both dying in the first clause and being numbered in the second, as if it were written, "May Reuven live and not die, and may his men **not** be numbered." The second half of the verse thus means: may the men of the tribe not be few in number, but rather many.

Let us look at two other examples of "*Moshekh atzmo ve-acher immo*":

For I am more of an ignoramus than any man; I do not have human understanding. And I did not study wisdom, and knowledge of the holy I know. (*Mishlei* 30:2-3)

10 The English term for this is [ellipsis](#).

11 The term "*metei mispar*," literally "men of number," appears a number of times in *Tanakh*, and it refers to a sparse population; see *Bereishit* 34:4, *Devarim* 26:5, *Yeshayahu* 3:25. The word "*mete*" should not be confused with "*meitei*," which means "the dead of," as in "*meitei milchama*," "casualties of war" (*ibid.* 22:2).

12 Rashi, following Onkelos, explains: "And may his men be numbered' — He shall be counted along with his other brothers..." In other words, his men should be considered in the number of the tribes of Israel. In Rashi's view, because of Reuven's sin (see *Bereishit* 35:22), there was speculation that he would not be considered a tribe. Moshe therefore stresses that despite the sin, he will still be considered in the number of tribes.

The verses are difficult: if the person is ignorant and unlearned, how would he know “knowledge of the holy”? According to Ibn Ezra, one should explain the verse so that the adverb “not” may be applied not only to the first clause, but to the second clause as well, as if it were written: And I did not study wisdom, and knowledge of the holy I know **not**.

The last example is from the beginning of *Parashat Vaera* (*Shemot* 6:3): “And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as ‘Almighty God’, but my name ‘Lord’ I did not make Myself known to them.” According to Ibn Ezra, one should explain the verse as if it is were written: And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as “Almighty God,” but **by** my name “Lord” I did not make myself known to them. An interesting point is that in this example, Ibn Ezra is applying the rule not to a word, but to a prefix, the single letter *bet*, which can mean in, as, by, with, etc.

C. Logic and Reason

Ibn Ezra applies the test of rationality when he explains the verses. He writes in his introduction (cited above) that his way is “Fit in reason’s eyes.” Therefore, when the words of the Sages are not logical in his eyes, he will challenge them (in the narrative part of the Torah).

Thus, for example, in the story of the Binding of Yitzchak (*Bereishit* 22:4), Ibn Ezra finds it illogical to say that Yitzchak was thirty-seven at the time, as the Sages suggest (*Bereishit Rabba* 56:1). If that were true, the test would be of Yitzchak, not of Avraham! Therefore, Yitzchak must be twelve or thirteen years old when the story takes place:

Our Rabbis have said that Yitzchak was, at the Binding, thirty-seven years old. Now, if these are words of tradition, we will accept them; but logically, this is not proper, for Yitzchak’s righteousness should be revealed, and his reward would be double the reward of his father – he gave himself over willingly to be slaughtered. However, the verse tells us nothing about Yitzchak. Others claim that he was five years old, but this cannot be, because he carried the wood for the offering. What is most reasonable is that he was about thirteen years old, and his father compelled him and bound him against his will. The evidence¹³ of this is that his father hid the secret from him.

We should note that in this interpretation, Ibn Ezra distinguishes between two types of Midrashic sources, tradition (*kabbala*) and speculation (*sevara*), and in this he determines the limits of following one’s personal view. If there is a *kabbala*, a tradition of the Sages handed down from Moshe Rabbeinu, we must accept their words. However, if their words are speculation, an interpretation that they concocted of their own accord, their

13 Literally, “the witness.” This is a common expression used by Ibn Ezra.

speculation is no better than anyone else's. This is what he says in his commentary¹⁴ to *Bereishit* 11:29 (*Peirush Ha-arokh*):

Now, some have said¹⁵ that Sara was called "Yiska" because she would foresee (*sokha*) with the Holy Spirit, but this is by way of hermeneutics or speculation, not tradition. Moreover, this is not an issue of a commandment.

In other words, there is no requirement to accept the Sages' words when it arises "by way of hermeneutics or speculation." However, if this aggadic material is the Sages' *kabbala*, then there would be no option but to accept them.

This is most explicitly stated when Ibn Ezra explains the term "*Ur Kasdim*." Is Ur the name of a city or is it a term for fire?

Our predecessors have stated that Avraham Avinu was cast into a fiery furnace. This is not mentioned in the verse, but if it is a tradition, we will accept it like the words of the Torah. (*Peirush Ha-arokh, Bereishit* 11:28)

An additional interpretation of the Ibn Ezra based on the rational approach is his understanding of the plagues in Egypt. According to Ibn Ezra, the Israelites suffered just as much from the plagues as the Egyptians. This is how Ibn Ezra explains *Shemot* 7:24: "All of Egypt dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the waters of the Nile." He writes:

Many say that when the water was in the hands of the Egyptian, it was as red as blood, but it turned clear again when in the hands of the Israelites. If so, why was this sign [miraculous occurrence] not written in the Torah? In my view, the plagues of blood and frogs and lice included Egyptians and Hebrews, for we must follow what is written. Now, these three caused a bit of damage, but in the plague of wild animals, which was severe, God distinguished between Egypt and Israel. The same was true of the plagues of pestilence and hail because of their herds. However, this was not true of boils and locusts, because they were leaving Egypt. (*Peirush Ha-arokh ad loc.*)

Thus, just as the Egyptians dug, the Hebrews dug as well. Ibn Ezra assumes that if the Torah is describing a situation in which the Jewish nation is miraculously spared suffering, it would mention this explicitly, because there is no reason for the Torah to conceal miracles.¹⁶ Therefore, one cannot assume that there is a difference between Israel and Egypt in the plagues unless this is stated explicitly in the verse. For example, concerning the plagues of wild animals, pestilence, and hail, it is explicitly stated that the Jews did not suffer

14 In the *Torat Chayim* edition, this appears at the end of volume I of *Bereishit*. In Bar-Ilan University's Responsa Project, it appears under the name *Shitta Acheret*.

15 *Seder Olam* II; *Sanhedrin* 69b; see Rashi *ad loc.* v. 29.

16 See also his commentary to *Bereishit* 46:23, addressing the Sages' view (cited by Rashi *ad loc.*, v. 26) that Yokheved was born "between the walls" as they entered Egypt.

from these plagues (*Shemot* 8:17; 9:6, 25). If so, according to Ibn Ezra, when the verse notes that “All of Egypt” had to dig for drinking water, this refers to all of the residents of Egypt, natives and Hebrews alike. Thus, the Israelites suffered equally from blood, frogs, lice, boils, and locusts.¹⁷

D. Structure and Sequence in the Torah

According to Ibn Ezra, the Torah is written generally according to chronological sequence. Despite this, sometimes there are some divergences from chronological sequence, a phenomenon that is described as “*Ein mukdam u-me’uchar ba-Torah*,” “There is no earlier or later in the Torah.” Ibn Ezra stresses that in every place in which we encounter this phenomenon, we must explain why the verses alter the chronological sequence and what the aim is in juxtaposing one passage with the next.¹⁸

One of the most famous examples of “*Ein mukdam u-me’uchar*” and the juxtaposition of passages appears in the beginning of *Parashat Yitro*. There is a famous dispute as to whether Yitro arrived before the Giving of the Torah, and the verses are written in their proper chronological order, or if Yitro came after the Giving of the Torah, and the verses are not in order.¹⁹ Ibn Ezra proves that Yitro arrived *after* the Giving of the Torah and he explains the reason for the change in the order:

Now I will explain why the passage of Yitro was inserted here. Because we have mentioned above the evil done by Amalek to Israel, here we mention the contrasting good that Yitro did for Israel. It is written, “And Yitro was elated about all the good” (*Shemot* 18:9), and he gave good and correct advice to Moshe and to Israel, and Moshe said to him, “And you will be eyes for us” (*Bamidbar* 10:31), and this means that he enlightened their eyes. Now, Sha’ul said [addressing the Kenites, Yitro’s descendants], “And you did kindness with all of the Israelites” (*I Shemuel* 15:6). Because it is written above (17:16), “God is at war with Amalek,” Israel must fight [Amalek] when God will grant them rest [from their other enemies]. So it mentioned the matter of Yitro here because [his descendants] reside near the nation of Amalek; this will remind Israel of the kindness of the ancestor, and they will not touch his seed. (*Peirush Ha-arokh, Shemot* 18:1)

According to Ibn Ezra, the reason for the change of the chronological sequence is to sharpen the distinction between Amalek and Yitro, “to separate between this act and that.”²⁰ Similarly, (Ibn Ezra adds the historical element of

17 Ibn Ezra (*ad loc.*) explains why the Israelites were spared certain plagues but not others.

18 I. Gottlieb, *Yesh Seder La-Mikra: Chazal U-Farshanei Yemei Ha-beinayim al Mukdam U-Me’uchar Ba-Torah* (Jerusalem-Ramat Gan, 2009), counts more than 150 cases of discussion of juxtaposition of passages, in its many varieties, in Ibn Ezra’s commentary.

19 See *Mekhilta*, beginning of *Parashat Yitro*; *Zevachim* 116a; Ramban, *Shemot* 18:1.

20 This juxtaposition is quite appropriate when we consider the similar terminology in the two passages, as Cassuto notes in his commentary on *Shemot*. About Amalek it says, “And Amalek came, and it waged **war**” (*Shemot* 17:8), and about Yitro it says, “And Yitro came... And each inquired of the other’s **peace**...” (18:5-7). Similarly, in the battle with Amalek,

the relationship to the family of the Kenites; despite the fact that the Kenites live among the Amalekites, we must repay the kindness of Yitro and not include them in the war with Amalek.

Ibn Ezra relates a great deal to the juxtaposition of the passages in the halakhic sections of the Torah, and he refuses to accept a capricious sequence of laws. In *Peirush Ha-arokh* to *Shemot* 21:2, he describes his essential approach to the order of *mitzvot* in the Torah:

“When you buy” — Before I am able to explain this, I must present the rule that each and every law or commandment stands on its own. If we happen to find a reason why this law is adjacent to that one or this commandment to that one, we will cling to it with all of our ability. However, if we are unable to do so, we will believe that the deficiency comes from our lack of intelligence.

[In this case, this law comes first because] there is no more difficult thing for a human being than being under the control of another human being; therefore, it starts with the law of the slave.²¹

There is an apparent contradiction here. On the one hand, Ibn Ezra proclaims that “each and every law or commandment stands on its own;” on the other hand, he says that there is a reason for the order of the laws. We may find a resolution in his comments to *Devarim* 24:6:

“No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge” — The deniers say that this passage is attached to “to be happy with his wife” (*ibid.* v. 5) because this alludes to sleeping, for it is prohibited to withhold himself from sleeping, but this is vanity and emptiness...

As for the one who relies on the juxtaposition of passages, this is not a valid claim, as every commandment stands on its own. The juxtaposition is the way of *derash*. Still, this passage is cohesive...

Ibn Ezra opposes the interpretation of the Karaites,²² who explain the *mitzva*, “No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge,” as a prohibition to withhold a wife’s conjugal rights. The Karaites reach this understanding based on the juxtaposition of the passages. In the previous verse, it says, “When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.” In their view, the first verse is a positive command, and the next verse, concerning the millstone, is the negative prohibition.²³ Concerning this, Ibn Ezra says that every *mitzva* stands on its own, that it is impossible to derive the content of the *mitzva*

Moshe says to Yehoshua, “**Select men** for us” (17:9), while in the application of Yitro’s counsel, it says “And Moshe **selected men** of valor” (18:25); other examples abound.

21 See also his commentary to *Vayikra* 19:3; *Devarim* 16:18, 24:6.

22 Ibn Ezra’s relationship to the Karaites will be dealt with in the next lecture.

23 They prove this from the verse in *Iyov* (31:10), “Then let my wife grind for another.” Thus, grinding is a euphemism for intercourse.

based on the juxtaposition; nevertheless, one may explain this “in the way of *derash*” – that is, in a way which does not affect the understanding of the *peshat* of the verses.

Finally, let us see the view of Ibn Ezra when it comes to the juxtaposition of passages in the context of verses 15-17 of chapter 21 of *Shemot*, in the first part of *Parashat Mishpatim*. In this passage, a number of laws are brought in sequence, and there is no apparent link between them:

- 15.** Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.
- 16.** Whoever steals a man and sells him, if he is found in his hands, shall be put to death.
- 17.** Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

Concerning the juxtaposition of these verses, Ibn Ezra cites the Gaon (Rabbeinu Saadia)²⁴ in his commentary to the middle verse (*Peirush Ha-arokh*):

The Gaon says: Why does this verse come in between striking a parent and cursing a parent? He responds that the verse addresses reality, because minors who are kidnapped and grow up in a foreign place do not know their fathers, so it may come to pass that they may strike them or curse them. The punishment is for the kidnapper.

According to Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon, the verses describe the reality of human trafficking: most of the victims are minors, and it may be that when they return as adults, they may strike or curse their parents without knowing who they are. In a case such as this, the punishment for striking or cursing is upon the kidnapper.

We must stress that Ibn Ezra says that “the verse addresses reality” (literally, “the present,” i.e., the usual circumstances). Ibn Ezra does not discount the simple meaning of the text, which prescribes the penalties in the usual case of a man knowingly striking his parents, and this distinguishes him from the Karaites mentioned above.

God willing, in the next lecture we will discuss Ibn Ezra’s understanding of the relationship between the Written and the Oral Torah.

Translated by Rav Yoseif Bloch

²⁴ Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon is quoted in Ibn Ezra’s commentary dozens of times – mainly so that Ibn Ezra may challenge his view.