

Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

Scholarship: Conflict With Observance? (Rashbam: Introduction to Parshat Mishpatim):

Let knowers of wisdom know and understand that I have not come to explain halakhot, even though these are the essence of Torah, as I have explained in my Genesis commentary (e.g., at Genesis 1:1; 37:2). For it is from the apparent superfluousness of Scriptural language that aggadot and halakhot are derived. Some of these can be found in the commentary of our Rabbi Solomon, my mother's father, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing. But I have come to explain the contextual meaning of Scripture. And I will explain the laws and halakhot according to realia (lit. "the way of the world"). And (I will do this) even though (the rabbinic understanding of) the halakhot is the essence, as the Rabbis taught: "halakha uproots Scripture" (BT Sota 16a, with emendation).

Post-Mosaic Authorship of Torah? "Hint, Hint! Shhh..."? Or: "No Problem!" (R. Abraham Ibn Ezra on Genesis 12:6):

וַיַּעֲבֵר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם עַד אֵילֹן מוֹרָה וְהַפְּנֵעֵי אֵז בְּאֶרֶץ:

Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

It is possible that the Canaanites seized the land of Canaan from some other tribe at that time. Should this interpretation be incorrect, then there is a secret meaning to the text: let the one who understands it remain silent!

Tzafanat Paneab: R. Yosef ben Eliezer Tov Elem (Bonfils), Genesis 12:6:

Ibn Ezra's commentary is related to how the (phrase beginning with the) word "then" was used here. For its meaning is that "then" they were in the land, but now they are no longer in it. But did not Moses write the Torah? And in his days the land was still held by Canaanites! It is thus not possible for Moses to have written the (phrase beginning with the word) "then"; indeed, reason dictates that the (phrase beginning with the word) "then" was written at a time when the Canaanites were no longer in the land. And we know that the Canaanites were driven out from there only after the death of Moses, when Joshua conquered it. According to this logic, it appears that Moses did not write this phrase here; rather Joshua or one of the other prophets wrote it... But since we are to believe in the words of the Tradition and the prophetic writings, what difference does it make to me if Moses wrote it or if some other prophet wrote it? In any event, they are all words of truth and are of prophetic origin!

I Pshat the Torah (R. Yosef Kara on 1 Samuel 1:17):

...Know well, that when Scripture was written, it was written completely, with every explanation and need taken care of, so that future generations would not stumble in it, and in its place, it lacks nothing. Moreover, one does not need to bring proofs from another place, and certainly not midrash, for the Torah was “given completely and written completely” (see Psalm 19:8), and lacks nothing. Whereas the midrash of the Sages is for the purpose of “glorifying Torah and enhancing it” (Isaiah 42:21). But anyone who doesn’t know the context of Scripture (i.e., the methodology of *peshat*), and prefers to incline towards a midrashic explanation, is similar to one who is drowning in a river, and the depths of the waters are sweeping him away, and who grabs hold of any old thing that comes into his hand to save himself. Whereas had he paid attention to the word of the Lord, he would have investigated the true explanation of the matter and its context (*peshuto*), and would have fulfilled that which is written: *If you seek it as you do silver, and search for it as for treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and attain knowledge of God* (Proverbs 2:4–5).

Biblical Scholarship and the Search for Truth (R. Samuel David Luzzato, Introduction to Isaiah, Part 4):

The fourth principle: This is the love of truth. It should be the purpose of our endeavor to discern the truth of the writers’ intentions. Nor should there be in the chambers of our hearts a desire to discover in the Holy Scriptures a sustenance and strengthening for faith and theology that have come to us from other sources, whether they be of philosophical logic or beliefs about the Torah current among our people. This approach was precious to the great exegetes, and was to a great extent the guiding principle of Rashi and his grandson, Rashbam. For inasmuch as they held fast with a whole heart to the words of our Sages, may their memories be a blessing, they did not avoid interpreting Scripture according to their contexts [or “plain meaning”: *peshat*]. Moreover, they did so even when their interpretations contradicted halakha (see, e.g., Rashi on Exodus 23:2 and Rashbam on Leviticus 7:18).