Theological-Political Treatise

BARUCH SPINOZA
1632–1677

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Tractatus theologico-politicus

Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited



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CONTENTS

Introduction ix

Preface 1

Preface 1
Why this book was written 5
The plan of the work 7

Chapters 1–3 13

Chapter 1: Of prophecy 13
Words and images 16
What Scripture means by the Spirit of God 21
Prophecy comes through the imagination 26
Chapter 2: Of the prophets 29
Prophecy varied with the prophet 32
What the prophets did not know 38
Prophets who disagreed 43
Chapter 3: Of the vocation of the Hebrews 46
Chosen for a state, not for wisdom 50
Was prophecy peculiar to the Jews? 55
Is the election eternal? 58

Chapters 4–6 63

Chapter 4: Of the divine law 63
Is God a lawgiver? 68
Scripture praises the natural light 72
Chapter 5: Ceremonies and the historical narratives 76
Why societies need laws 80
Who needs the Bible's histories 84
Chapter 6: Of miracles 89
Miracles cannot show us God 93
Scripture's God works through nature 99
How to read a miracle story 102

Chapters 7–10 109
Chapter 7: Of the interpretation of Scripture 109
What the history of Scripture must contain 112
From the universal to the particular 115
The difficulties of the method 121
Against Maimonides 128
Against tradition and the pontiff 132
Chapter 8: Who wrote the Pentateuch and the histories 134
The books Moses really wrote 139
One historian, probably Ezra 143
Chapter 9: Ezra's unfinished work and the marginal notes . . . 147
Stories that do not fit 149
The chronology of the judges 152
The marginal readings 158
Chapter 10: The other books of the Old Testament 164
The prophets survive in fragments 166
Job, Daniel and the later histories 168
How the canon was formed 176

Chapters 11–15 179
Chapter 11: The apostles wrote as teachers 179
Different foundations, one religion 185
Chapter 12: The true original of the divine law 187
What “the word of God” means 191
Why the divine law is uncorrupted 194
Chapter 13: Scripture teaches only simple things 197
Chapter 14: What faith is 203
The dogmas of the universal faith 208
Chapter 15: Neither handmaid to the other 211
Moral certainty 217

Chapters 16–20 223
Chapter 16: The foundations of the state 223
The social contract 225
Democracy and the sovereign’s right 228
Civil right, wrongs and treason 232

Natural right and divine law 235
Chapter 17: The Hebrew commonwealth 239
How rulers secure their power 241
The covenant with God 244
The Hebrew theocracy 246
What restrained rulers and people 254
Why the Hebrew state fell 261
Chapter 18: Political lessons from the Hebrews 266
The danger of removing a king 272
Chapter 19: Religion and the sovereign 274
Piety must serve the peace of the state 279
Why Christians dispute this right 284
Chapter 20: Freedom of thought and speech 287
The purpose of the state is freedom 289
Why laws against opinions fail 292
The example of Amsterdam 295

INTRODUCTION

Baruch Spinoza published the *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670, anonymously and under a false imprint. Its subtitle states the thesis: freedom to philosophize can be granted without harm to piety or the peace of the state, and taking it away destroys both. In 1674 the States of Holland banned it as blasphemous.

To make the case, Spinoza reads the Bible as a historian would read any old book. The prophets had vivid imaginations, not special knowledge; miracles never break the laws of nature; Moses did not write the Pentateuch. What Scripture really teaches is simple—obedience to God through justice and charity—so it gives no authority to rule over anyone's thoughts.

The last chapters turn to politics: natural right, the social contract, the history of the Hebrew state, and why the sovereign should control religion's public practice but leave everyone free to think what they like and say what they think. The final chapter, set in tolerant Amsterdam, is one of the founding arguments for free speech.

Preface

Superstition and freedom
Fear breeds superstition and serves tyranny; Spinoza explains why he wrote the book and how it is laid out.

PREFACE

Fear breeds superstition, and superstition serves tyrants; Spinoza sets out to show that freedom to philosophize is safe for piety and the state.

Praef1 If people could manage all their affairs by sure judgment, or if fortune always smiled on them, they would never be gripped by superstition. But they are often reduced to such straits that they can find no plan at all. And for the sake of fortune's uncertain goods, which they crave without limit, they mostly waver wretchedly between hope and fear. So for the most part their minds are extremely ready to believe anything at all. While the mind is in doubt, the slightest impulse drives it this way and that, and all the more easily when, shaken by hope and fear, it is at a loss. At other times it is overconfident, boastful, and puffed up. Praef2 No one, I think, is unaware of this, though I believe most people are unaware of themselves. For no one has lived among human beings without seeing how most people behave. When things go well, however inexperienced they may be, they are so overflowing with wisdom that they feel insulted if anyone tries to give them advice. In adversity, however, they do not know where to turn. They beg advice from everyone they meet, and they hear no advice so foolish, so absurd, or so empty that they will not follow it. Then, for the slightest reasons, they now hope for better things and now fear worse. Praef3 For if, while they are

afraid, they see something happen that reminds them of some past good or evil, they think it foretells a happy or an unhappy outcome. So they call it a lucky or an unlucky omen, even though it deceives them a hundred times. Again, if they see something unusual and are greatly astonished by it, they believe it is a portent revealing the anger of the gods or of the supreme deity. And so people who are in thrall to superstition and hostile to religion consider it a sin not to expiate it with sacrifices and vows. In this way they invent countless fictions, and they interpret nature in strange ways, as though the whole of nature were as mad as they are. Praef4 Since this is how things stand, we see above all that those who crave uncertain things without limit are the most devoted to every kind of superstition. We see too that all people, especially when they are in danger and cannot help themselves, implore divine help with vows and with tears and pleading. They call reason blind, because it cannot show them a sure path to the empty things they crave, and they call human wisdom vain. On the other hand, they believe that the delusions of the imagination, dreams, and childish nonsense are answers from God. Indeed, they believe that God turns away from the wise and has written his decrees not in the mind but in the entrails of animals, or that fools, madmen, and birds foretell them by divine inspiration and prompting. That is how mad fear makes people. Praef5 The cause from which superstition arises, and by which it is preserved and nourished, is therefore fear. Anyone who wants particular examples of this, beyond what has already been said, should look at Alexander. Only when he first learned to fear fortune, at the Susian Gates, did he begin, out of superstition, to employ seers (see Quintus Curtius, book 5, §4). After he had defeated Darius, however, he stopped consulting soothsayers and seers. Then he was again terrified by the hardship of the times. The Bactrians had revolted, the Scythians were provoking him to battle, and he himself lay helpless from a wound. So once more (as Curtius himself says in book 7, §7) *he turned back to superstition, that mockery of human minds, and ordered Aristander, to whom he had entrusted his credulity, to dis-*

cover the outcome of events by sacrifices.[1] Praef6 Very many other examples of this kind could be given, and they show as clearly as possible precisely this. People are troubled by superstition only while their fear lasts. Everything they have ever worshiped in empty religion has been nothing but phantoms and the delusions of a sad and fearful mind. And seers have held the greatest sway over the people, and have been most feared by their kings, when the state was in the gravest straits. But since I think all this is well enough known to everyone, I pass it over.

Praef7 From this cause of superstition, then, it clearly follows that all people are by nature subject to superstition. This holds whatever others may say, who think that it arises because all mortals have some confused idea of a deity. It follows, next, that superstition must be extremely varied and inconstant, like all the mind's delusions and fits of frenzy. Finally, it follows that superstition is upheld only by hope, hatred, anger, and deceit. This is because it arises not from reason but from affect alone, and from the most powerful affect at that. Praef8 So it is as difficult to make people persist in one and the same superstition as it is easy for them to be captured by any kind of superstition. Indeed, because the common people always remain equally wretched, they never rest content for long. What pleases them most is only what is new and has not yet deceived them. This inconstancy has been the cause of many riots and savage wars. For, as is evident from what has just been said, and as Curtius also observed very well (book 4, chapter 10), *nothing governs the multitude more effectively than superstition*. That is why, under the pretext of religion, the multitude is easily led now to worship its kings as gods, and now to curse them and loathe them as the common plague of the human race. Praef9 To avoid this evil, then, enormous effort has been devoted to adorning religion, whether true or false, with worship and pageantry. The aim was for it to be held weightier than any other consideration and to be

1 Quintus Curtius Rufus, a Roman historian of the first century AD, wrote a history of Alexander the Great. The Susian Gates, a mountain pass in Persia, were where Alexander met fierce resistance in 330 BC; Aristander was his chief seer.

observed by everyone, always, with the utmost reverence. In this the Turks have been most successful. They consider even debate a sin, and they fill each person's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no room in the mind for sound reason, not even for doubt.

Praef10 The great secret of monarchical rule, and its whole interest, may be to keep people deceived and to cloak with the fair-sounding name of religion the fear by which they must be held in check. Then they will fight for their servitude as if for their salvation, and will think it no disgrace but the highest honor to spend their blood and their lives for the vanity of one man. In a free commonwealth, however, nothing more ill-fated could be devised or attempted. For it is wholly contrary to the common freedom to fill each person's free judgment with prejudices or to constrain it in any way. Praef11 As for the seditions that are stirred up under the pretext of religion, they surely arise only because laws are made about speculative matters, and because opinions are treated as crimes and condemned like wicked deeds. Those who defend and follow such opinions are sacrificed not to the public welfare but only to the hatred and cruelty of their opponents. If, by the right of the state, only deeds were prosecuted and words went unpunished, such seditions could not be dressed up with any show of right, and controversies would not turn into seditions. Praef12 We have been granted the rare good fortune of living in a commonwealth where each person is given complete freedom of judgment and is allowed to worship God according to his own mind, and where nothing is held dearer or sweeter than freedom. I therefore thought I would be doing something neither unwelcome nor useless if I showed two things. The first is that this freedom can be granted without harm to piety and to the peace of the commonwealth. The second is that it cannot be taken away without taking away the peace of the commonwealth and piety along with it. Praef13 This is the main thing I have set out to demonstrate in this treatise. For this purpose it was above all necessary to point out the chief prejudices about religion, that

is, the traces of our ancient servitude. It was necessary also to point out the prejudices about the right of the sovereign powers. Many people strive, with the most brazen license, to seize a large part of this right for themselves. Under the pretext of religion, they also strive to turn the minds of the multitude, still in thrall to the superstition of the Gentiles, away from the sovereign powers, so that everything may collapse into servitude again.[2]

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

Christians who preach love live in hatred, and religion has become empty ceremony and prejudice against reason.

I will say briefly in a moment in what order all this is shown. But first I will explain the reasons that moved me to write.

Praef14 I have often wondered that people who boast of professing the Christian religion—that is, love, joy, peace, self-control, and good faith toward all—quarrel with more than ordinary hostility and vent the bitterest hatred on one another every day. As a result, each person's faith is more easily known from the hatred than from the virtues. Things have long since come to the point where you can hardly tell who anyone is, whether a Christian, a Turk, a Jew, or a pagan. You can tell only by the outward dress and adornment of his body, or by which church he attends, or finally by which opinion he is devoted to and in whose words, as some master's, he is in the habit of swearing. Otherwise, everyone lives the same life.[3] Praef15 As I looked for the cause of this evil, I had no doubt that it arose because the common people have made it part of their religion to regard the ministries of the Church as dignities and its offices as benefices, and to hold pastors in the highest honor. As soon as this abuse began in the Church, the worst people were at once seized by an enormous desire to administer the sacred offices. Love of

2 The commonwealth is the Dutch Republic, where the treatise was published anonymously in 1670.

3 The list of virtues echoes Paul's "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22–23). "Swearing by the words of a master" recalls Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.14.

spreading divine religion degenerated into sordid greed and ambition. And so the house of worship itself degenerated into a theater, where one heard not teachers of the Church but orators. None of these orators was moved by a desire to teach the people. They wanted to carry the people away in admiration of themselves, to criticize dissenters publicly, and to teach only what was new and unusual and what the common people would most admire. From this, surely, great disputes, envy, and hatred were bound to arise, and no passage of time has been able to calm them. Praef16 No wonder, then, that nothing of the old religion has remained except its outward worship, by which the common people seem to flatter God rather than adore him. No wonder that faith is now nothing but credulity and prejudices. And what prejudices! They turn people from rational beings into beasts, since they entirely prevent each person from using his own free judgment and distinguishing true from false. They seem to have been deliberately devised to extinguish the light of the intellect altogether. Praef17 Piety and religion—immortal God!—consist in absurd mysteries. And those who utterly despise reason, and who reject and shun the intellect as corrupt by nature, are the very ones believed to possess the divine light. Nothing could be more unjust. Surely, if they had even a spark of the divine light, they would not rave so arrogantly. They would learn to worship God more wisely, and they would stand out among others for love, as they now do for hatred. Nor would they persecute those who disagree with them so hostilely. Rather, they would pity them, if indeed it is the salvation of others, and not their own fortunes, that they fear for. Praef18 Besides, if they had any divine light, it would at least be apparent from their teaching. I admit that they could never marvel enough at the profound mysteries of Scripture. Yet I see that they have taught nothing but the speculations of the Aristotelians or the Platonists. And they have adapted Scripture to these speculations, so as not to seem to be following the Gentiles. Praef19 It was not enough for them to rave with the Greeks. They wanted the prophets to have raved along with the Greeks too. This shows clearly that they do not see the

divinity of Scripture even in a dream. The more fervently they marvel at these mysteries, the more they show that they do not so much believe Scripture as flatter it. This is evident also from the fact that most of them assume as a foundation, for understanding Scripture and drawing out its true meaning, that it is everywhere truthful and divine. Yet this is the very thing that ought to be established only at the end, from understanding Scripture and examining it strictly. What Scripture itself, which has no need of human fictions, would teach us much better, they lay down at the very threshold as the rule for interpreting it.

THE PLAN OF THE WORK

Spinoza outlines the book: prophecy, the Hebrews' election, method, faith, natural right, and the sovereign's authority.

Praef20 I weighed these things in my mind. The natural light is not only despised but condemned by many as a source of impiety. Human inventions are taken for divine teachings. Credulity is counted as faith. The controversies of philosophers are fought out with the most violent feeling in the Church and in the halls of government. I observed that from this arise the most savage hatreds and dissensions, by which people are easily turned to sedition, along with very many other things that would take too long to recount here. So I resolved earnestly to examine Scripture anew, with a whole and free mind. I resolved to affirm nothing about it, and to admit nothing as its teaching, that I was not most clearly taught by it. Praef21 With this precaution, then, I worked out a method of interpreting the sacred books. Equipped with this method, I began first of all to ask: What is prophecy? In what way did God reveal himself to the prophets? And why were they acceptable to God? Was it because they had sublime thoughts about God and nature, or only because of their piety? Once I knew this, I could easily determine that the authority of the prophets carries weight only in matters that concern the conduct of life and true virtue, and that otherwise their opinions concern us little. Praef22 Having learned this, I next asked why the

Hebrews were called God's chosen. I saw that this meant nothing other than that God had chosen for them a certain region of the world where they could live securely and comfortably. From this I learned that the laws of Moses revealed by God were nothing but the laws of the Hebrews' particular state. So no one but the Hebrews ought to have accepted them, and indeed not even the Hebrews were bound by them except while their state stood. Praef23 Further, I wanted to know whether it could be concluded from Scripture that the human intellect is corrupt by nature. So I wanted to inquire whether the catholic, or universal, religion is different from the one that the natural light also teaches. By this religion I mean the divine law revealed through the prophets and apostles to the whole human race. Next, I wanted to inquire whether miracles have happened contrary to the order of nature. I also wanted to know whether miracles teach God's existence and providence more certainly and more clearly than the things we understand clearly and distinctly through their first causes.[4] Praef24 In what Scripture expressly teaches, however, I found nothing that does not agree with the intellect and nothing that contradicts it. I saw, moreover, that the prophets taught nothing but very simple things, which anyone could easily grasp. They adorned these things in the style, and confirmed them with the reasons, that could best move the minds of the multitude to devotion toward God. So I became fully convinced that Scripture leaves reason absolutely free and has nothing in common with philosophy, but that each of them stands on its own feet. Praef25 To demonstrate this conclusively and settle the whole matter, I show how Scripture must be interpreted. I show that all knowledge of Scripture and of spiritual things must be sought from Scripture alone, and not from what we know by the natural light. From there I go on to show the prejudices that have arisen because the common people worship the books of Scripture rather than the word of God itself. The common people are devoted to superstition, and they love the relics of time more than eternity itself. Praef26 After this I show that the

4 "Catholic" here has its root sense of "universal," not the name of a church.

revealed word of God is not some fixed number of books. It is a simple concept of the divine mind revealed to the prophets, namely, to obey God wholeheartedly by practicing justice and charity. And I show that this is taught in Scripture according to the understanding and opinions of those to whom the prophets and apostles used to preach this word of God. They did so in order that people might embrace it without any resistance and wholeheartedly. Praef27 Next I show the fundamentals of faith. Then I conclude, finally, that the object of revealed knowledge is nothing but obedience. Revealed knowledge is therefore entirely distinct from natural knowledge in its object, its foundations, and its means, and it has nothing in common with natural knowledge. Each holds its own domain without any conflict with the other, and neither ought to be the handmaid of the other. Praef28 Further, human temperaments vary greatly. One person is more at ease with these opinions, another with those, and what moves one person to religion moves another to laughter. From this, together with what was said above, I conclude that everyone must be left the freedom of his own judgment and the power to interpret the foundations of faith according to his own temperament. Each person's faith, whether pious or impious, must be judged by his works alone. In this way everyone will be able to obey God with a whole and free heart, and justice and charity alone will be prized by all. Praef29 In this way I show the freedom that the revealed divine law grants to everyone. Then I proceed to the other part of the question. This same freedom can be granted, and indeed must be granted, without harm to the peace of the commonwealth and the right of the sovereign powers. And it cannot be taken away without great danger to peace and great harm to the whole commonwealth. To demonstrate this, I begin from each person's natural right. This right extends as far as each person's desire and power extend. By the right of nature no one is bound to live according to another's temperament, and each person is the defender of his own freedom. Praef30 Further, I show that no one actually gives up this right except someone who transfers to another the power of

defending himself. Each person transfers to another his right to live according to his own temperament, together with his power of defending himself. The one to whom this right is transferred necessarily retains this natural right absolutely. From this I show that those who hold sovereign rule have the right to do everything they are able to do. They alone are the defenders of right and freedom, and everyone else must do everything only by their decree. Praef31 But no one can so deprive himself of his power of defending himself as to cease to be a human being. From this I conclude that no one can be absolutely deprived of his natural right. Subjects retain certain things, as if by right of nature, that cannot be taken from them without great danger to the state. These things are therefore either tacitly granted to them, or else the subjects expressly stipulate them with those who hold rule. After these considerations I move on to the commonwealth of the Hebrews, which I describe at some length. I do this in order to show how, and by whose decree, religion began to have the force of law, and also, along the way, to show other things that seemed worth knowing. Praef32 After this I show that those who hold sovereign rule are the defenders and interpreters not only of civil right but also of sacred right. They alone have the right to decide what is just and what is unjust, what is pious and what is impious. And finally I conclude that they can best retain this right and safely preserve their rule if only each person is allowed both to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks.

Praef33 These, philosophical reader, are the things I give you here to examine. I trust they will be welcome because of the importance and usefulness of the subject, both of the whole work and of each chapter. I would add more about them, but I do not want this preface to grow into a volume, especially since I believe the main points are more than well known to philosophers. To everyone else I do not try to commend this treatise, for I have no reason to hope that it could please them in any way. I know how stubbornly the prejudices that the mind has embraced under the guise of piety cling to it. I know, too, that it

is as impossible to rid the common people of superstition as it is to rid them of fear. I know, finally, that the constancy of the common people is obstinacy, and that they are not governed by reason but are swept along by impulse to praise or to blame. Praef34 So I do not invite the common people to read this, nor anyone who struggles with the same affects as the common people. Indeed, I would rather they ignored this book completely than made themselves a nuisance by interpreting it perversely, as they interpret everything. That way they would do themselves no good and would harm others. Those others would philosophize more freely were it not for one obstacle: they think that reason must be the handmaid of theology. For them, I trust, this work will be most useful.

Praef35 For the rest, many people may have neither the leisure nor perhaps the inclination to read the whole work. So I am obliged to give notice here, as I also do at the end of this treatise, that I write nothing that I would not most willingly submit to the examination and judgment of the sovereign powers of my country. If they judge anything I say to be contrary to the laws of my country or harmful to the common welfare, I wish it unsaid. I know that I am human and may have erred. But I have taken pains not to err, and above all to see that whatever I wrote would agree entirely with the laws of my country, with piety, and with good morals.

Chapters 1–3

Prophecy
What prophecy is, what the prophets knew, and why the Hebrews were chosen.

CHAPTER 1: OF PROPHECY

Prophecy is certain knowledge revealed by God; natural knowledge is just as divine, though common to all.

I 1 Prophecy, or revelation, is certain knowledge of some matter revealed by God to human beings. A prophet is one who interprets what God has revealed to those who cannot have certain knowledge of the things God has revealed, and who can therefore embrace them only by mere faith. Among the Hebrews a prophet is called נביא *nabi*[1], that is, a speaker and interpreter, but in Scripture the word is always used for an interpreter of God, as can be gathered from Exodus 7:1. There God says to Moses, *See, I make you God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet*. It is as if he were saying: since Aaron plays the part of a

1 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 1. When the third root letter of a verb is one of those called quiescent, it is usually dropped, and the second letter of the stem is doubled in its place. Thus from קלה, with the quiescent ה dropped, comes קוללֹ and from that קול. From נבא comes נובב, and from this ניב שפתים, *speech* or *utterance*. Likewise from בזא comes בזז or בוז. So Rashi interpreted this verb נבא very well, but he is wrongly criticized by Ibn Ezra, who did not know the Hebrew language so precisely. It should also be noted that the noun נבואה, *prophecy*, is general and covers every kind of prophesying. The other names are more specific and mostly refer to this or that kind of prophesying, which I believe is known to scholars.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105) was the most influential medieval Jewish commentator on the Bible and Talmud. Abraham ibn Ezra (c. 1089–1167) was a Spanish-Jewish grammarian and biblical commentator.

prophet by interpreting to Pharaoh what you say, you will be like a God to Pharaoh, that is, one who acts in God's place.

I 2 We shall deal with prophets in the next chapter. Here we deal with prophecy, and from the definition just given it follows that natural knowledge can be called prophecy. For what we know by the natural light depends solely on the knowledge of God and on his eternal decrees. But this natural knowledge is common to all people, since it depends on foundations common to all people. For that reason the common people do not value it so highly, because they always long for what is rare and foreign to their own nature and scorn the gifts of nature. So when they speak of prophetic knowledge, they mean to exclude it. I 3 Yet it can be called divine with as much right as any other knowledge, whatever that may be. God's nature, insofar as we share in it, and God's decrees, as it were dictate it to us. It differs from the knowledge everyone calls divine only in two respects: that knowledge extends beyond the limits of natural knowledge, and the laws of human nature, considered in themselves, cannot be its cause. But with respect to the certainty that natural knowledge involves, and the source from which it derives (namely God), it is in no way inferior to prophetic knowledge. That is, unless someone wants to suppose, or rather to dream, that the prophets had a human body but not a human mind, and that their sensations and consciousness were therefore of an entirely different nature from ours. I 4 But although natural knowledge is divine, those who spread it cannot be called prophets[2]. What they teach, other people can perceive and embrace with the

2 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 2. That is, interpreters of God. An interpreter of God is one who interprets the decrees of God revealed to him for others to whom they have not been revealed. Those others rely, in embracing them, solely on the prophet's authority and on the trust they place in him. If the people who listen to prophets became prophets, just as those who listen to philosophers become philosophers, then the prophet would not be an interpreter of the divine decrees. His hearers would then rely, as he does, on divine revelation itself and on inner testimony, not on the prophet's own testimony and authority. In the same way, sovereign powers are the interpreters of the right of their own state, because the laws they enact are upheld solely by the authority of those sovereign powers and rest solely on their testimony.

same certainty and worth as they themselves do, and not by faith alone.

I 5 Our mind has the power to form certain notions that explain the nature of things and teach us how to live, and it has this power simply because it contains the nature of God objectively within itself and shares in it. We can therefore rightly hold that the nature of the mind, insofar as it is conceived in this way, is the first cause of divine revelation. For everything we understand clearly and distinctly is dictated to us by the idea of God (as we have just indicated) and by nature. It is dictated not in words but in a far more excellent way, one that agrees perfectly with the nature of the mind, as everyone who has tasted the certainty of the intellect has no doubt experienced within himself.

I 6 But since my main purpose is to speak only of what concerns Scripture alone, it is enough to have said these few words about the natural light.[3] I therefore move on to treat at greater length the other causes and means by which God reveals to people things that exceed the limits of natural knowledge, and also things that do not. For nothing prevents God from communicating to people, in other ways, the very things we know by the light of nature.

I 7 Whatever can be said about them, however, must be sought from Scripture alone. For what can we say about things that exceed the limits of our intellect beyond what the prophets themselves have handed down to us, by mouth or in writing? And since today, as far as I know, we have no prophets, nothing is left for us but to unroll the sacred books the prophets left us. We must take this precaution, though: we must assert nothing about such matters, and attribute nothing to the prophets themselves, that they did not clearly state. I 8 But here it must be particularly noted that the Jews never mention intermediate or particular causes, nor do they care about them. For the sake of religion and piety, or (as people commonly say) devotion, they always have recourse to God. For if, for example, they have

3 "Objectively" is used in the scholastic sense of the time: as an object of thought, that is, as represented in the mind.

made money by trade, they say that God provided it for them. If they desire something, as people do, they say that God disposed their heart. And if they so much as think something, they say that God told it to them. So not everything Scripture says God told someone is to be taken as prophecy and supernatural knowledge. Only what Scripture expressly says was prophecy or revelation, or what follows from the circumstances of the narrative to have been such, should be taken that way.

WORDS AND IMAGES

God revealed himself to the prophets through real or imagined voices and figures; only Christ knew God mind to mind.

I 9 If, then, we run through the sacred books, we shall see that everything God revealed to the prophets was revealed to them either in words, or in figures, or in both ways, that is, in words and figures together. The words, and the figures too, were either real and outside the imagination of the prophet who heard or saw them, or else imaginary. They were imaginary when the prophet's imagination, even while he was awake, was so disposed that he seemed clearly to himself to hear words or to see something.

I 10 For God revealed to Moses, with a real voice, the laws he wanted prescribed to the Hebrews. This is clear from Exodus 25:22, where he says, *And I will be ready for you there, and I will speak with you from that part of the cover which is between the two cherubim*. This shows that God used some real voice, since Moses, whenever he wished, found God there ready to speak to him. And this voice alone, the one in which the law was uttered, was a real voice, as I shall shortly show.

I 11 I would suspect that the voice with which God called Samuel was real, because the last verse of 1 Samuel 3 says, *And God appeared again to Samuel in Shiloh, because God was made manifest to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of God*. It is as if it said that God's appearing to Samuel was nothing other than God's manifesting himself to him by his word, or nothing other than

Samuel's hearing God speak. Yet because we are forced to distinguish between the prophecy of Moses and that of the other prophets, we must necessarily say that this voice Samuel heard was imaginary. This can also be gathered from the fact that it resembled the voice of Eli. Samuel was most accustomed to hearing that voice, and so could imagine it more readily: when God called him three times, he supposed that Eli was calling him. I 12 The voice Abimelech heard was imaginary. For Genesis 20:6 says, *And God said to him in a dream*, etc. So he could imagine God's will not while awake but only in a dream. That is the time when the imagination is most naturally apt to imagine things that do not exist.

I 13 In the opinion of some Jews, the words of the Decalogue were not uttered by God. They think instead that the Israelites heard only a sound that uttered no words, and that while it lasted they perceived the laws of the Decalogue with the pure mind. I too once suspected this, because I saw that the words of the Decalogue in Exodus differ from those of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy. Since God spoke only once, it seems to follow that the Decalogue means to convey not God's very words but only their sense. I 14 Yet unless we want to do violence to Scripture, we must certainly grant that the Israelites heard a real voice. For Scripture expressly says in Deuteronomy 5:4, *Face to face God spoke with you*, etc. That is, he spoke the way two people usually communicate their thoughts to each other, by means of their two bodies. So it seems more in keeping with Scripture that God really created some voice by which he revealed the Decalogue. As for why the words and reasons of the one version differ from those of the other, see chapter 8. I 15 But even this does not remove every difficulty. It seems quite contrary to reason to hold that a created thing, depending on God in the same way as all other things, could express or explain God's essence or existence, in fact or in words, through its own person, namely by saying in the first person, "I am Jehovah your God," etc. Granted, when someone says with his mouth, *I have understood*, no one thinks that his mouth has understood, only the mind of the per-

son saying it. But the mouth belongs to the nature of the person saying it, and the one he says it to has himself perceived the nature of the intellect. So he easily understands the speaker's mind by comparison with his own. I 16 But the Israelites knew nothing of God before except his name, and they wanted to speak with him in order to become certain of his existence. I do not see how their request was satisfied by a creature saying, "I am God." A creature is no more related to God than any other created thing, and it does not belong to God's nature. What, I ask, if God had twisted the lips of Moses (but why Moses? why not some animal?) to pronounce those same words and say, "I am God"? Would they have understood God's existence from that? I 17 Moreover, Scripture certainly seems to indicate that God himself spoke, which is why he came down from heaven onto Mount Sinai. It also seems to indicate that the Jews not only heard him speaking but that their leaders even saw him (see Exodus 24). Nor did the Law revealed to Moses ever command us to believe that God is incorporeal, or even that he has no image or form. Nothing could be added to this Law or taken away from it, and it was established as the law of the land. It commanded only that God exists, that they should believe in him, and that they should worship him alone. And so that they would not depart from his worship, it commanded them not to invent any image of him and not to make one. I 18 For since they had not seen an image of God, they could not make one that represented God. They could make only one that necessarily represented some other created thing they had seen. So when they worshipped God through that image, they would be thinking not of God but of the thing the image represented, and in the end they would give God's honor and worship to that thing. Indeed, Scripture clearly indicates that God has a form, and that Moses beheld it when he heard God speaking, yet was allowed to see nothing of God but his back. So I have no doubt that some mystery lies hidden here, and we shall speak of it more fully below. Here I shall go on to show the passages of Scripture that indicate the means by which God revealed his decrees to people.

I 19 That revelation came through images alone is clear from 1 Chronicles 21, where God showed David his anger through an angel holding a sword in his hand. So too with Balaam. Maimonides and others hold that this story happened in a dream, and likewise all the stories that tell of an angel appearing, such as those of Manoah, and of Abraham when he thought he was to sacrifice his son, and so on. They deny that anyone could have seen an angel with open eyes. They are simply babbling. They cared about nothing except wringing Aristotelian trifles and their own fictions out of Scripture, and to me nothing seems more ridiculous.[4]

I 20 But God revealed to Joseph his future dominion by images that were not real but depended solely on the prophet's imagination. By images and words God revealed to Joshua that he would fight for them. He showed him an angel with a sword, like the commander of an army, and he had also revealed this to him in words, which Joshua heard from the angel. To Isaiah too (as chapter 6 tells) it was represented through figures that God's providence was abandoning the people. He imagined God, thrice holy, on a very high throne, and the Israelites stained with the filth of their sins and, as it were, sunk in dung heaps, and so very far from God. From these images he understood the present wretched state of the people, while their future calamities were revealed to him in words, as if spoken by God. I could bring many examples of this kind from Holy Scripture, if I did not think they were well enough known to everyone.

I 21 But all this is confirmed more clearly by Numbers 12:6–7, which runs as follows: *If anyone among you is a prophet of God, I will reveal myself to him in a vision*. That is, through figures and hieroglyphs, for of Moses' prophecy the text says that it is a vision without hieroglyphs. *I will speak to him in dreams*. That is, not with real words and a real voice. *But not so with Moses* (do I reveal myself); *I speak with him mouth to mouth, and in a vision, but not in riddles, and he beholds the image of God*. That is, looking

4 Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), the leading medieval Jewish philosopher, set out his reading of prophecy in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

at me, he speaks with me as a companion, not in terror, as we read in Exodus 33:11. So there can be no doubt that the other prophets did not hear a real voice. This is confirmed still further by Deuteronomy 34:10, which says, *And there never stood* (properly, arose) *in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom God knew face to face*. This must be understood of the voice alone, for not even Moses himself had ever seen God's face (Exodus 33). I 22 Apart from these means, I find no others in Holy Scripture by which God has communicated himself to people. So, as we showed above, no others are to be invented or admitted. We clearly understand that God can communicate himself to people immediately, for he communicates his essence to our mind without using any bodily means. Still, for someone to perceive by the mind alone things that are not contained in the first foundations of our knowledge and cannot be deduced from them, his mind would necessarily have to be superior to the human mind, and far more excellent than it. I 23 So I do not believe that anyone else has reached such perfection above others except Christ. To him the decisions of God that lead people to salvation were revealed not in words or visions but immediately. Thus God manifested himself to the apostles through the mind of Christ, as he once did to Moses by means of a voice in the air. And for this reason the voice of Christ, like the voice Moses heard, can be called the Voice of God. In this sense we can also say that the Wisdom of God, that is, a Wisdom above human wisdom, took on human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way of salvation.

I 24 But I must point out here that I am not speaking at all about what certain Churches maintain concerning Christ, nor am I denying it. I gladly confess that I do not grasp it. What I have just asserted, I infer from Scripture itself. Nowhere have I read that God appeared or spoke to Christ. I have read rather that God was revealed to the apostles through Christ, that he is the way of salvation, and finally that the old law was handed down through an angel and not by God immediately, and so on. So if Moses spoke with God face to face, as a man does with his

companion (that is, by means of two bodies), Christ communicated with God mind to mind.

WHAT SCRIPTURE MEANS BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Spinoza traces the senses of the Hebrew ruagh and what it means to say a prophet had God's Spirit.

I 25 We maintain, therefore, that apart from Christ no one received God's revelations except with the help of the imagination, that is, with the help of words or images. So prophesying requires not a more perfect mind but a more vivid imagination, as I shall show more clearly in the next chapter. Now we must ask what Holy Scripture means by the Spirit of God poured into the prophets, or by saying that the prophets spoke from the Spirit of God. To investigate this, we must first ask what the Hebrew word רוח *ruagh* means, which the common people translate as "Spirit."

I 26 The word רוח *ruagh*, in its proper sense, means wind, as is well known. But it is very often used to signify many other things, which nonetheless derive from that sense. It is taken, first, to signify breath, as in Psalm 135:17, *nor is there any Spirit in their mouth*. Second, it signifies spirit, or breathing, as in 1 Samuel 30:12, *and his Spirit returned to him*, that is, he breathed again. From this it is taken, third, for courage and strength, as in Joshua 2:11, *nor did Spirit remain any longer in any man*. Likewise Ezekiel 2:2, *and the Spirit came into me* (or force), *which made me stand on my feet*. From this it is taken, fourth, for virtue and aptitude, as in Job 32:8, *surely the Spirit itself is in man*. That is, knowledge is not to be sought only among the old, for I now find that it depends on a person's particular virtue and capacity. I 27 So too Numbers 27:18, *a man in whom there is Spirit*. Next it is taken, fifth, for a way of thinking, as in Numbers 14:24, *because he had another Spirit*, that is, another way of thinking, or another mind. Likewise Proverbs 1:23, *I will declare to you my Spirit* (that is, my mind). And in this sense it is used to signify the will, or decree, and the appetite and impulse of the spirit, as in Ezekiel

1: 12, *wherever the Spirit* (or will) *was to go, they went*. Likewise Isaiah 30:1, *and to pour a casting, and not from my Spirit*. And 29:10, *because God has poured on them a Spirit* (that is, an appetite) *for sleep*. And Judges 8:3, *then their Spirit*, or impulse, *was calmed*. Likewise Proverbs 16:32, *he who rules his Spirit* (or appetite), *than he who takes a city*. The same book, 25:28, *a man who does not restrain his Spirit*. And Isaiah 33:11, *your Spirit is a fire that consumes you*. [I 28] Further, this word רוח *ruagh*, insofar as it signifies the spirit, serves to express all the passions of the spirit, and also its gifts. Thus *a high Spirit* signifies pride; *a lowly Spirit*, humility; *an evil Spirit*, hatred and melancholy; *a good Spirit*, kindness. So too *a Spirit of jealousy*; *a Spirit* (or appetite) *of fornication*; *a Spirit of wisdom, counsel, strength*—that is (for in Hebrew we use nouns more often than adjectives), a wise, prudent, strong spirit, or the virtue of wisdom, counsel, strength; *a Spirit of benevolence*, and so on. Sixth, it signifies the mind itself, or the soul, as in Ecclesiastes 3:19, *the Spirit* (or *soul*) *is the same for all*, and *the Spirit returns to God*. Seventh, and finally, it signifies the quarters of the world (because of the winds that blow from them), and also the sides of any thing that face those quarters of the world. See Ezekiel 37:9 and 42:16–19, etc.

[I 29] Next, it should be noted that a thing is referred to God, and said to be God's, for several reasons. First, because it pertains to God's nature and is, as it were, a part of God, as when we say *the power of God*, *the eyes of God*. Second, because it is in God's power and acts at God's bidding. Thus in Holy Scripture the heavens are called *the heavens of God*, because they are God's chariot and dwelling; Assyria is called the scourge of God, and Nebuchadnezzar the servant of God, and so on. Third, because it is dedicated to God, as *the temple of God*, *the Nazirite of God*, *the bread of God*, and so on. Fourth, because it is handed down through the prophets and not revealed by the natural light; that is why the Law of Moses is called the Law of God. Fifth, to express something in the superlative degree, as *mountains of God*, that is, the highest mountains, or *sleep of God*, that is, the deepest sleep. It is in this sense that Amos 4:11 must be explained, where God him-

self speaks thus: *I overthrew you as the overthrow of God* (overthrew) *Sodom and Gomorrah*, that is, like that memorable overthrow. For since it is God himself who is speaking, the passage cannot properly be explained in any other way. Solomon's natural knowledge, too, is called the knowledge of God, that is, divine knowledge, or knowledge beyond the ordinary. In the Psalms, too, we read of *cedars of God*, to express their unusual size. And in 1 Samuel 11:7, to signify a very great fear, it is said: *and the fear of God fell upon the people*. I 30 In this sense everything that surpassed the Jews' understanding, and whose natural causes they did not know at the time, was customarily referred to God. So a storm was called *the rebuke of God*, and thunder and lightning the arrows of God. For they thought that God kept the winds shut up in caves, which they called God's treasuries. In this opinion they differed from the pagans in believing that the ruler of the winds was God, not Aeolus. For this reason too, miracles are called works of God, that is, astonishing works. For of course all natural things are works of God, and exist and act through divine power alone. In this sense, then, the Psalmist calls the miracles of Egypt the powers of God: they opened a way to safety for the Hebrews in extreme danger, when they expected nothing of the kind, and so the Hebrews marveled at them above all things.[5]

I 31 Since, then, unusual works of nature are called works of God, and trees of unusual size are called trees of God, it is not at all surprising that in Genesis very strong men of great stature are called sons of God, even though they were impious robbers and fornicators. So the ancients—not only the Jews but the pagans as well—used to refer to God absolutely anything in which someone surpassed everyone else. When Pharaoh heard the interpretation of his dream, he said that the mind of the gods was in Joseph; and Nebuchadnezzar likewise told Daniel that he had the mind of the holy gods. Indeed, nothing is more common among the Latins too. For they say that things skillfully made were fashioned by a divine hand; and if anyone

5 Aeolus: in Greek and Roman myth, the keeper of the winds.

wished to translate this into Hebrew, he would have to say *fashioned by the hand of God*, as those who know Hebrew are aware. I 32 With these points in mind, the passages of Scripture that mention the Spirit of God can easily be understood and explained. In some places, then, *Spirit of God* and *Spirit of Jehovah* mean nothing other than a very violent, very dry, and deadly wind. So in Isaiah 40:7, *the wind of Jehovah blew upon it*, that is, a very dry and deadly wind. And in Genesis 1:2, *and the wind of God* (or a very strong wind) *moved over the water*. I 33 Next, it signifies a great spirit. For in Holy Scripture the spirit of Gideon and of Samson is called *the Spirit of God*, that is, a most daring spirit, ready for anything. So too any virtue or power beyond the ordinary is called *the Spirit*, or *the virtue, of God*, as in Exodus 31: 3, *and I will fill him* (namely Bezalel) *with the Spirit of God*, that is (as Scripture itself explains), with talent and skill beyond the common lot of men. So in Isaiah 11:3, *and the Spirit of God shall rest upon him*, that is, the virtue of wisdom, counsel, strength, and so on—as the prophet himself makes clear afterward by explaining it point by point, a practice very common in Holy Scripture. So too Saul's melancholy is called *an evil Spirit of God*, that is, a very deep melancholy. For Saul's servants, who called his melancholy a melancholy of God, advised him to summon a musician who might refresh him by playing the lyre; this shows that by a melancholy of God they meant a natural melancholy. I 34 Next, *the Spirit of God* signifies the very mind of a human being, as in Job 27:[6] 3, *and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils*, alluding to what we find in Genesis, namely that God breathed the soul of life into man's nostrils. So Ezekiel, prophesying to the dead, says in 37:14, *and I will give my Spirit to you, and you shall live*; that is, I will restore your life to you. In this sense it is said in Job 34:14, *if he* (namely God) *wills, he will gather back to himself his Spirit* (that is, the mind he has given us) *and his soul*. So too we must understand Genesis 6: 3, *my Spirit will never reason* (or will never decide) *in man, since he is flesh*. That is, from now on man will act from the decrees of the flesh, and not of the mind, which I gave

6 Bezalel: the craftsman who built the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1–5).

him so that he might discern the good. So too Psalm 51:12–13, *create a pure heart for me, O God, and renew in me a Spirit* (that is, an appetite) *that is fitting* (or moderate)*; do not cast me from your sight, nor take from me the mind of your holiness*. Because sins were believed to arise from the flesh alone, while the mind urges nothing but good, he calls on God's help against the appetite of the flesh; but as for the mind that the holy God gave him, he prays only that God preserve it. [I 35] Now, because of the weakness of the common people, Scripture is accustomed to depict God like a human being and to ascribe to him a mind, a spirit, and the affects of a spirit, as well as a body and breath. So *the Spirit of God* is often used in Holy Scripture for God's mind—that is, his spirit, affect, and force—and for the breath of his mouth. Thus Isaiah says in 40:13, *who has set in order the Spirit* (or mind) *of God*? That is, who but God himself has determined God's mind to will anything? And in 63:10, *and they afflicted the Spirit of his holiness with bitterness and sorrow*. [I 36] Hence it comes about that the phrase is commonly used for the Law of Moses, because the Law sets out, as it were, the mind of God. So Isaiah himself, in the same chapter, verse 11, *where is* (he) *who put in its midst the Spirit of his holiness,* namely the Law of Moses, as is clearly gathered from the whole context of the passage. And Nehemiah 9:20, *and you gave them your good Spirit, or mind, to make them understand*; for he is speaking of the time of the Law, and also alludes to Deuteronomy 4:6, where Moses says, *for it* (namely the Law) *is your knowledge and prudence*, and so on. So too in Psalm 143:10, *your good mind will lead me into level land*, that is, your mind revealed to us will lead me onto the right path. [I 37] As we have said, the Spirit of God also signifies God's breath, which Scripture ascribes to God just as improperly as it does a mind, a spirit, and a body, as in Psalm 33:6. Next, it signifies God's power, force, or virtue, as in Job 33:4, *the Spirit of God made me*, that is, the virtue or power of God, or, if you prefer, God's decree. For the Psalmist, speaking poetically, also says that by God's command the heavens were made, and by the Spirit, or breath, of his mouth (that is, by his decree, uttered as if in a single

breath) all their host. Likewise Psalm 139: 7, *where shall I go* (to be) *beyond your Spirit, or where shall I flee* (to be) *beyond your sight*? That is (as is clear from the words with which the Psalmist goes on to amplify this), where can I go to be beyond your power and presence? [I 38] Finally, *the Spirit of God* is used in Holy Scripture to express the affects of God's spirit, namely God's kindness and mercy, as in Micah 2:7, *has the Spirit of God been straitened* (that is, God's mercy)? *are these* (cruel things, that is) *his works*? Likewise Zechariah 4:6, *not by an army, nor by force, but by my Spirit alone*, that is, by my mercy alone. In this sense too, I think, we must understand verse 12 of chapter 7 of the same prophet, namely: *and they made their heart wary, so as not to obey the Law and the commandments that God sent from his Spirit* (that is, from his mercy) *through the first prophets*. In this sense too Haggai says in 2:5, *and my Spirit* (or my grace) *remains among you; do not be afraid*. [I 39] As for what Isaiah says in 48: 16, *but now the Lord God has sent me, and his Spirit*, this can indeed be understood as God's spirit and mercy, or else as his mind revealed in the Law. For he says: *from the beginning* (that is, when I first came to you to proclaim God's anger and the sentence he had pronounced against you) *I have not spoken in secret; from the time when it* (was pronounced) *I was there* (as he himself testified in chapter 7); but now I am a joyful messenger, sent by God's mercy to sing of your restoration. It can also, as I said, be understood as God's mind revealed in the Law—that is, he has now come to admonish them by command of the Law as well, namely Leviticus 19:17. That is why he admonishes them on the same conditions and in the same way that Moses used to.

PROPHECY COMES THROUGH THE IMAGINATION

The prophets had singular virtue and a vivid imagination; how this worked by the laws of nature Spinoza does not know.

And finally, as Moses also did, he ends by foretelling their restoration. Still, the first explanation seems to me more fitting. [I 40] To return at last to our purpose: from all this, these phrases of

Scripture become clear—*the prophet had the Spirit of God, God poured his Spirit into men, men were filled with the Spirit of God and with the Holy Spirit*, and so on. For they mean nothing other than that the prophets had a singular virtue beyond the ordinary[7], and that they practiced piety with exceptional constancy of spirit; and further, that they perceived God's mind, or judgment.

I 41 For we have shown that in Hebrew "spirit" signifies both the mind and the mind's judgment, and that for this reason the Law itself, because it set out God's mind, is called the Spirit, or mind, of God. With equal right, then, the imagination of the prophets, insofar as God's decrees were revealed through it, could also be called the mind of God, and the prophets could be said to have had the mind of God. Our mind, too, has the mind of God and his eternal judgments inscribed in it, and consequently we too perceive the mind of God (to speak with Scripture). Yet because natural knowledge is common to all, it is not so highly esteemed by people, as we have already said—and least of all by the Hebrews, who boasted that they were above everyone, and indeed used to look down on everyone, and consequently on knowledge common to everyone.

I 42 Finally, the prophets were said to have the Spirit of God because people did not know the causes of prophetic knowledge, and marveled at it; and so, as with other prodigies, they used to refer it to God and call it the knowledge of God.

I 43 We can now, therefore, affirm without hesitation that the prophets perceived what God revealed only by means of the imagination, that is, through words or images, whether real or imaginary. For since we find no other means than these in Scripture, we are not permitted, as we have already shown, to invent

7 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 3. Although some people have certain things that nature does not grant to others, they are not said to exceed human nature unless what they singularly possess is such that it cannot be perceived from the definition of human nature. For example, a giant's size is rare, but it is human nonetheless. Again, composing poems on the spot is given to very few, and yet it is human; so too is someone's imagining certain things, with eyes open, as vividly as if he had them before him. But if there were someone who had another means of perceiving and other foundations of knowledge, he would indeed transcend the limits of human nature.

any others. I 44 But by what laws of nature this came about, I confess I do not know. I could, of course, have said, as others do, that it came about by the power of God; but I would seem to be babbling. For that would be the same as trying to explain the form of some singular thing by some transcendental term. For all things have been done through God's power. Indeed, since the power of Nature is nothing but the very power of God, it is certain that we fail to understand God's power to the extent that we are ignorant of natural causes. It is foolish, then, to fall back on this same power of God when we do not know the natural cause of something, that is, when we do not know God's power itself. But we have no need now to know the cause of prophetic knowledge. For, as I have already pointed out, here we are only trying to investigate the teachings of Scripture, so that we may draw our conclusions from them as if from the data of nature. The causes of those teachings do not concern us at all.

I 45 Since, then, the prophets perceived God's revelations with the help of the imagination, there is no doubt that they could perceive much that lies beyond the limits of the intellect. For far more ideas can be put together from words and images than from those principles and notions alone on which all our natural knowledge is built.

I 46 It is clear, next, why the prophets perceived and taught almost everything in parables and riddles, and expressed all spiritual things in bodily terms. All this fits better with the nature of the imagination. Nor shall we any longer wonder why Scripture, or the prophets, speak so improperly and obscurely of the Spirit, or mind, of God, as in Numbers 11:17 and 1 Kings 22:2, etc. Nor shall we wonder why Micaiah saw God seated, Daniel saw him as an old man clothed in white garments, and Ezekiel as a fire. Those who were present with Christ saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, the apostles saw it as tongues of fire, and Paul, finally, at his conversion, saw a great light. For all these things agree entirely with the common people's imaginings about God and spirits.[8] I 47 Finally, because the imagination is

8 Micaiah son of Imlah, the prophet of 1 Kings 22, whom Spinoza calls Michaeas.

wandering and inconstant, prophecy did not stay long with the prophets. Nor was it frequent. It was very rare, found in very few people, and even in them very rarely. I 48 Since this is so, we are now compelled to ask where the prophets could have gotten their certainty about things they perceived only through the imagination, and not from the sure principles of the mind. But whatever can be said on this matter must also be sought from Scripture, since (as we have said) we do not have true knowledge of this thing, that is, we cannot explain it through its first causes. I shall show what Scripture teaches about the certainty of the prophets in the next chapter, where I have decided to deal with the prophets.

CHAPTER 2: OF THE PROPHETS

The prophets had more vivid imaginations, not more perfect minds, and their certainty rested on signs and a will set on the good.

II 1 It follows from the preceding chapter, as we have already indicated, that the prophets were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but rather with a power of imagining more vividly. The narratives of Scripture also teach this abundantly. Of Solomon, for instance, it is well known that he excelled others in wisdom, but not in the gift of prophecy. Those very wise men Heman, Darda, and Calcol were not prophets either. On the other hand, rustic men with no education at all, and even women, like Hagar, Abraham's servant, were endowed with the gift of prophecy. This also agrees with experience and with reason. For those who are most powerful in imagination are less fit for understanding things purely. Conversely, those who are more powerful in intellect, and cultivate it most, have their power of imagining more tempered and more under their control. They hold it in check, as it were, with a bridle, so that it is not confused with the intellect.[9] II 2 Those, then, who try to seek wisdom and knowledge of natural and spiritual things in the

9 Heman, Darda, and Calcol are named in 1 Kings 4:31 as sages whom Solomon surpassed in wisdom.

books of the prophets have wandered completely off the road. Since the times, philosophy, and finally the matter itself demand it, I have decided to show this here at length. I care little what superstition snarls, for it hates no one more than those who cultivate true knowledge and the true life. And, sadly, things have now come to such a pass that people who openly confess that they have no idea of God, and know God only through created things (whose causes they do not know), do not blush to accuse philosophers of atheism.

II 3 To develop the subject in order, I shall show that prophecies varied according to the imagination and bodily temperament of each prophet, and also according to the opinions with which the prophets had been imbued. And so prophecy never made the prophets more learned, as I shall presently explain more fully. But first I must deal here with the certainty of the prophets, both because it belongs to the subject of this chapter and because it serves somewhat toward what we intend to demonstrate.

II 4 Simple imagination does not by its own nature involve certainty, as every clear and distinct idea does. Rather, for us to be certain of the things we imagine, something must necessarily be added to the imagination, namely reasoning. It follows that prophecy cannot of itself involve certainty, since, as we have already shown, it depended on the imagination alone. And therefore the prophets were not certain of God's revelation through the revelation itself, but through some sign. This is clear from Abraham (see Genesis 15:8), who asked for a sign on hearing God's promise. He did believe God, and he did not ask for a sign in order to have faith in God, but in order to know that it was God who was making him this promise. II 5 The same is even clearer in the case of Gideon, for he says to God: *and make me a sign* (that I may know) *that you are speaking with me*. II 6 See Judges 6:17. God also says to Moses: *and let this* (be) *a sign to you that I have sent you*. Hezekiah, who had long known that Isaiah was a prophet, asked for a sign when Isaiah prophesied his recovery. This shows that the prophets always had some sign by

which they were made certain of the things they imagined prophetically. And so Moses warns (see Deuteronomy 18, last verse) that the people should ask a prophet for a sign, namely the outcome of some future event. In this respect, then, prophecy falls short of natural knowledge, which needs no sign and involves certainty by its own nature. Indeed, this prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral. This is also established from Scripture itself. For in Deuteronomy 13 Moses warns that if any prophet wants to teach new gods, he is to be condemned to death, even if he confirms his teaching with signs and miracles. For, as Moses himself goes on to say, God also performs signs and miracles to test the people. II 7 Christ, too, warned his disciples of this, as is clear from Matthew 24:24. Indeed, Ezekiel 14:9 plainly teaches that God sometimes deceives people with false revelations. For he says: *and when a prophet* (a false one, that is) *is enticed and has spoken a word, I, God, have enticed that prophet*. Micaiah (see 1 Kings 22:23) bears witness to the same thing about Ahab's prophets.

II 8 This seems to show that prophecy and revelation are a thoroughly doubtful thing. Yet, as we said, prophecy had a great deal of certainty. For God never deceives the pious and the elect. Rather, according to that ancient proverb (see 1 Samuel 24:14), and as is clear from the story of Abigail and her speech, God uses the pious as instruments of his piety, and the impious as the executors and means of his wrath. II 9 This is also very clear from the case of Micaiah which we have just cited. For although God had decreed to deceive Ahab through the prophets, he used only the false prophets. To the pious one he revealed the matter as it was, and he did not prevent him from foretelling the truth. Yet, as I said, the prophet's certainty was only moral. This is because no one can justify himself before God or boast that he is an instrument of God's piety, as Scripture itself teaches and in fact shows. For God's wrath led David astray into numbering the people, though Scripture abundantly attests his piety. II 10 All prophetic certainty, then, was founded on these three things: 1. That they imagined the things revealed very vividly, in the way

we are usually affected by objects when awake. 2. A sign. 3. Finally, and chiefly, that their minds were inclined only to what is right and good. Scripture does not always mention a sign. We must nevertheless believe that the prophets always had a sign. For Scripture is not in the habit of recounting all the conditions and circumstances (as many have already noted), but rather assumes them as known. II 11 Moreover, we may grant that prophets who prophesied nothing new, nothing beyond what is contained in the Law of Moses, did not need a sign, because they were confirmed by the Law. For example, Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem was confirmed by the prophecies of the other prophets and by the threats of the Law, and so it needed no sign. But Hananiah, who prophesied the speedy restoration of the city against all the prophets, necessarily needed a sign. Otherwise he ought to have doubted his own prophecy until the outcome of what he had foretold confirmed it. II 12 See Jeremiah 28:9.

PROPHECY VARIED WITH THE PROPHET

Revelations followed each prophet's temperament, style of imagination, and prior opinions.

The certainty that arose in the prophets from signs was not mathematical (that is, the kind that follows from the necessity of the perception of the thing perceived or seen), but only moral. And signs were given only to persuade the prophet. It follows, therefore, that signs were given according to the opinions and capacity of the prophet. Thus a sign that made one prophet certain of his prophecy might fail entirely to convince another who was imbued with other opinions. And so signs varied from prophet to prophet. II 13 In the same way, as we have already said, the revelation itself varied in each prophet according to the disposition of his bodily temperament and his imagination, and according to the opinions he had previously embraced. It varied according to temperament in this way. If a prophet was cheerful, victories, peace, and whatever else moves people to joy were

revealed to him, for people of this kind are apt to imagine such things more often. If, on the other hand, he was sad, wars, punishments, and every kind of evil were revealed to him. And so, in proportion as a prophet was compassionate, gentle, irascible, severe, etc., he was better suited to *these* revelations than to *those*. II 14 It also varied according to the disposition of the imagination, in this way. If a prophet was elegant, he also perceived God's mind in an elegant style; if he was muddled, he perceived it in a muddled way. And so too with revelations represented through images. If the prophet was a countryman, oxen and cows, etc., were represented to him; if a soldier, generals and armies; if, finally, a courtier, a royal throne and things of that kind. II 15 Finally, prophecy varied according to the diversity of the prophets' opinions. To the Magi (see Matthew 2), who believed in the trifles of astrology, the birth of Christ was revealed through the image of a star risen in the east. To Nebuchadnezzar's augurs (see Ezekiel 21:26) the destruction of Jerusalem was revealed in entrails. The same king also learned of it from oracles and from the direction of arrows he shot up into the air. Then, to prophets who believed that people act from free choice and by their own power, God was revealed as undecided and as not knowing future human actions. We shall now demonstrate all of this from Scripture itself, point by point.

II 16 The first point is established by the case of Elisha (see 2 Kings 3:15). In order to prophesy for Jehoram, he asked for a musical instrument, and he could not perceive God's mind until he had been delighted by its music. Only then did he foretell good things to Jehoram and his allies. He could not do this before, because he was angry with the king, and those who are angry with someone are apt to imagine bad things about them, not good. II 17 As for those who choose to say that God is not revealed to the angry and the sad, they are simply dreaming. For God revealed that wretched slaughter of the firstborn to Moses when he was angry with Pharaoh (see Exodus 11:8), and he did so without any instrument being used. God was also revealed to Cain in his rage. The misery and stubbornness of the Jews were

revealed to Ezekiel when he was impatient with anger (see Ezekiel 3:14). And Jeremiah, deeply sorrowful and gripped by great weariness of life, prophesied the calamities of the Jews. Josiah would not consult him for this reason, and consulted instead a woman of his time, since, being a woman, she was more apt to have God's mercy revealed to her (see 2 Chronicles 34). II 18 Micaiah, too, never prophesied anything good to Ahab, as other true prophets did (as is clear from 1 Kings 20). All his life he prophesied evil (see 1 Kings 22:8, and more clearly 2 Chronicles 18:7). The prophets, then, were better suited to *these* revelations than to *those*, according to their differing bodily temperaments. II 19 Next, the style of prophecy varied with the eloquence of each prophet. The prophecies of Ezekiel and Amos are not written in an elegant style like those of Isaiah and Nahum, but in a rougher one.[10] II 20 If anyone who knows Hebrew wishes to look into this carefully, let him compare chapters of different prophets that deal with the same subject. He will find a great discrepancy in style. Let him compare, for instance, chapter 1 of the courtier Isaiah, from verse 11 to verse 20, with chapter 5 of the countryman Amos, from verse 21 to verse 24. Let him then compare the order and reasoning of the prophecy concerning Edom that Jeremiah wrote in chapter 49 with the order and reasoning of Obadiah. Let him further compare Isaiah 40:19–20 and 44:8 onward with Hosea 8:6 and 13:2. And so with the rest. If all these passages are weighed properly, they will readily show that God has no particular style of speaking of his own. He is elegant, concise, severe, rough, prolix, or obscure only according to the prophet's learning and capacity. II 21 Prophetic representations and hieroglyphs also varied, even when they signified the same thing. The glory of God leaving the temple was represented one way to Isaiah, and another way to Ezekiel. The rabbis, however, will have it that both representations were exactly the same, and that Ezekiel, being a countryman, marveled at it beyond measure and therefore recounted it in all its circumstances. Yet unless they had a sure tradition about this, which I do not at all

10 The woman is the prophetess Huldah (2 Chronicles 34:22).

believe, they are plainly making it up. For Isaiah saw seraphim with six wings each, while Ezekiel saw beasts with four wings each. Isaiah saw God clothed and seated on a royal throne, while Ezekiel saw him like fire. Each, without doubt, saw God as he was accustomed to imagine him. The representations varied, moreover, not only in manner but also in clarity. Zechariah's representations were too obscure for him to understand without an explanation, as is clear from his account of them. And Daniel's, even when explained, could not be understood by the prophet himself. This happened not because the thing to be revealed was difficult (for it concerned only human affairs, which do not exceed the limits of human capacity, except in being future), but only because Daniel's imagination was not as strong for prophesying while awake as in dreams. This is apparent from the fact that at the very beginning of the revelation he was so terrified that he almost despaired of his strength. Therefore, because of the weakness of his imagination and of his strength, the things were represented to him very obscurely, and he could not understand them even when they were explained. II 22 And here it should be noted that the words Daniel heard were only imaginary (as we showed above). So it is no wonder that, being troubled at the time, he imagined all those words so confusedly and obscurely that afterward he could understand nothing of them. Those who say that God did not want to reveal the matter clearly to Daniel seem not to have read the words of the angel, who said expressly (see Daniel 10:14) *that he had come to make Daniel understand what would happen to his people in the latter days*. So those things remained obscure because no one could be found at that time with enough power of imagination for them to be revealed to him more clearly. II 23 Finally, it had been revealed to certain prophets that God would carry Elijah away. Those prophets wanted to persuade Elisha that Elijah had been carried somewhere else, where they could still find him. This clearly shows that they had not rightly understood God's revelation. There is no need to show this at greater length. For nothing is clearer from Scripture than that God

endowed one prophet with far greater grace for prophesying than another. II 24 But I shall show more carefully and at greater length two further points. Prophecies, or representations, also varied according to the opinions the prophets had embraced. And the prophets held different, indeed contrary, opinions and different prejudices. (I am speaking of purely speculative matters; about what concerns uprightness and good morals one must think quite differently.) I consider this a matter of greater importance. From it I shall finally conclude that prophecy never made the prophets more learned, but left them with their preconceived opinions, and that therefore we are not at all bound to believe them on purely speculative matters.

II 25 With astonishing haste, everyone has persuaded themselves that the prophets knew everything the human intellect can attain. Certain passages of Scripture tell us as plainly as can be that the prophets were ignorant of certain things. Yet these people would rather say that they do not understand Scripture in those passages than admit that the prophets were ignorant of anything. Or else they try to twist the words of Scripture so that it says what it plainly does not mean. Surely, if either of these is allowed, it is all over with the whole of Scripture. We shall try in vain to show anything from Scripture if we may place what is clearest among the obscure and impenetrable, or interpret it at will. II 26 For example, nothing in Scripture is clearer than that Joshua, and perhaps also the author who wrote his history, thought that the sun moves around the earth while the earth stands still, and that the sun stood motionless for some time. Yet many people refuse to admit that any change can occur in the heavens, and so they explain that passage in a way that makes it seem to say nothing of the kind. Others, who have learned to philosophize more correctly, understand that the earth moves and that the sun stands still, or at least does not move around the earth. They strain with all their might to wring this same view out of Scripture, even though Scripture openly protests against it. These people truly amaze me. II 27 Are we really obliged, I ask, to believe that Joshua, a soldier, was skilled in

astronomy? Or that a miracle could not be revealed to him, or that the sun's light could not stay above the horizon longer than usual unless Joshua understood its cause? Both ideas seem to me plainly ridiculous. I prefer, then, to say openly that Joshua did not know the true cause of that longer daylight. He and the whole crowd that was present all thought that the sun moves around the earth in a daily motion and that on that day it stood still for a while, and they believed this to be the cause of the longer daylight. They gave no thought to the possibility that the great quantity of ice in the atmosphere at that time (see Joshua 10:11) could have produced a greater refraction than usual, or something else of the kind, which we will not investigate now. II 28 In the same way, the sign of the receding shadow was revealed to Isaiah in accordance with his understanding, namely through the sun's moving backward. For he too thought that the sun moves and the earth stands still. And perhaps he never thought of parhelia, not even in a dream.[11] We may assert this without the slightest hesitation. The sign really could happen and be foretold to the king by Isaiah, even though the prophet did not know its true cause. II 29 The same must also be said of Solomon's building, if indeed it was revealed by God. All its measurements were revealed to him in accordance with Solomon's understanding and opinions. We are not obliged to believe that Solomon was a mathematician, so we may affirm that he did not know the ratio between the circumference and the diameter of a circle, and that, like the common run of workmen, he thought it was 3 to 1. But if we are allowed to say that we do not understand the text at 1 Kings 7: 23, then I honestly do not know what we can understand from Scripture, since the building is described there simply and purely as history. II 30 Indeed, if we may imagine that Scripture meant something else but chose to write this way for some reason unknown to us, the result is nothing less than the complete overthrow of Scripture as a whole. For anyone could say the same, with equal right, of every

11 The sign given to King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:8–11; Isaiah 38:7–8). Parhelia, or "mock suns," are bright spots beside the sun produced by refraction in ice crystals.

passage in Scripture. And so whatever absurd and evil thing human malice can devise could be both defended and committed without damage to the authority of Scripture. What we have maintained, by contrast, contains nothing impious. Solomon, Isaiah, Joshua, and the others, though prophets, were only human beings, and nothing human should be thought foreign to them. II 31 It was also revealed to Noah, in accordance with his understanding, that God was going to destroy the human race, because he thought that the world outside Palestine was uninhabited.[12] The prophets could be ignorant not only of matters like these but also of others of greater importance without any harm to piety, and in fact they were ignorant of them. They taught nothing special about the divine attributes. Rather, they held quite ordinary opinions about God, and their revelations were adapted to those opinions as well, as I shall now show from many testimonies of Scripture. You will then readily see that they are praised and so highly commended not so much for the loftiness and excellence of their minds as for their piety and steadfastness of spirit.

WHAT THE PROPHETS DID NOT KNOW

Adam, Abraham, Moses and others held ordinary and sometimes mistaken views of God, and revelation was fitted to them.

II 32 Adam, the first to whom God was revealed, did not know that God is omnipresent and omniscient. He hid himself from God and tried to excuse his sin before God as if he were dealing with a human being. So God was revealed to him in accordance with his understanding, namely as one who is not everywhere and who did not know where Adam was or that he had sinned. For Adam heard, or seemed to hear, God walking through the garden, calling him and asking where he was. Then, prompted by Adam's shame, God asked him whether he had eaten from the forbidden tree. Adam, therefore, knew no attribute of God

12 An echo of Terence, *The Self-Tormentor* 77: "I am human; I consider nothing human foreign to me."

other than that God was the maker of all things. II 33 To Cain, too, God was revealed in accordance with his understanding, namely as unaware of human affairs. Nor did Cain need a loftier knowledge of God in order to repent of his sin. God revealed himself to Laban as the God of Abraham, because Laban believed that each nation has its own particular god. See Genesis 31:29. II 34 Abraham, too, did not know that God is everywhere and foreknows all things. When he heard the sentence against the people of Sodom, he prayed that God would not carry it out before learning whether they all deserved that punishment. For he says (see Genesis 18:24), *perhaps there are fifty righteous people in that city*. Nor was God revealed to him in any other way. In Abraham's imagination God speaks thus: *I will go down now, to see whether they have done according to the whole outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know* (the matter). The divine testimony about Abraham, too (on which see Genesis 18: 19), contains nothing but his obedience, and that he urged his household toward what is just and good. It does not say that he had lofty thoughts about God. II 35 Moses, too, did not sufficiently grasp that God is omniscient and that all human actions are directed by his decree alone. God had told him (see Exodus 3:18) that the Israelites would obey him, yet Moses calls this into doubt and replies (see Exodus 4:1), *what if they do not believe me, and do not obey me?* And so God was revealed to him, too, as undecided and as unaware of future human actions. For he gave him two signs and said (Exodus 4: 8), *if it should happen that they do not believe the first sign, they will still believe the last; but if they do not believe even the last, take* (then) *a little water from the river*, etc. II 36 Indeed, anyone willing to weigh Moses' statements without prejudice will clearly find that his opinion of God was that he is a being who has always existed, exists, and always will exist. For this reason Moses calls him by the name יהוה *Jehovah*, which in Hebrew expresses these three tenses of existing. About his nature, however, Moses taught nothing except that he is merciful, kind, and so on, and supremely jealous, as is clear from a great many passages of the Pentateuch. Next, he believed and

taught that this being differs from all other beings so greatly that it cannot be expressed by any image of a visible thing, and cannot even be seen. This is not so much because seeing it involves a contradiction as because of human weakness. He taught, further, that in power it is singular, or unique. II 37 He did admit that there are beings who (no doubt by God's ordinance and command) acted in God's place—that is, beings to whom God gave authority, right, and power to direct the nations and to provide and care for them. But he taught that the being whom they were bound to worship was the highest and supreme God, or (to use the Hebrews' phrase) the God of gods. That is why in the song in Exodus (15:11) he said, *who among the gods is like you, Jehovah?* And Jethro said (18: 11), *now I know that Jehovah is greater than all the gods*. That is: at last I am compelled to grant Moses that Jehovah is greater than all the gods and unique in power. Whether Moses believed that these beings who acted in God's place were created by God may be doubted, since, as far as we know, he said nothing about their creation and origin. II 38 He taught, moreover, that this being brought this visible world into order out of chaos (see Genesis 1:2) and planted seeds in nature, and therefore has supreme right and supreme power over all things. By this supreme right and power, he taught (see Deuteronomy 10:14–15), God chose for himself alone the Hebrew nation and a certain region of the world (see Deuteronomy 4:19 and 32: 8–9), leaving the other nations and regions to the care of the other gods whom he had appointed in his place. That is why he was called the God of Israel and (see 2 Chronicles 32:19) the God of Jerusalem, while the other gods were called the gods of the other nations. II 39 For this reason, too, the Jews believed that the land God had chosen for himself required a special worship of God, wholly different from the worship of other lands. Indeed, they believed it could not tolerate the worship of other gods proper to other lands. For the nations that the king of Assyria brought into the lands of the Jews were believed to have been torn apart by lions because they did not know the worship of the gods of that land (see 2 Kings 17:25–26, etc.). II 40 And according to

Ibn Ezra, this is why Jacob, when he wanted to return to his homeland, told his sons to prepare themselves for a new worship and to put away their foreign gods—that is, the worship of the gods of the land they were then living in (see Genesis 35:2–3). David, too, wishing to tell Saul that his persecution had forced him to live outside his homeland, said that he was being driven out of God's inheritance and sent off to worship other gods (see 1 Samuel 26:19). II 41 Finally, Moses believed that this being, or God, has his dwelling in the heavens (see Deuteronomy 33:27), an opinion that was very common among the pagans. If we now turn to Moses' revelations, we shall find that they were adapted to these opinions. Because he believed that God's nature admits the qualities we mentioned, namely mercy, kindness, and so on, God was revealed to him in keeping with this opinion and under these attributes (see Exodus 34:6–7, which tells how God appeared to Moses, and verses 4–5 of the Decalogue). II 42 Then, in 33:18, we are told that Moses asked God to let him see him. But since Moses, as already said, had formed no image of God in his brain, and since God (as I have already shown) is revealed to the prophets only according to the disposition of their imagination, God appeared to him in no image. And this happened, I say, because an image of God was contrary to Moses' imagination. For other prophets testify that they saw God, namely Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others. II 43 That is why God answered Moses, *you cannot see my face*. Moses believed that God is visible—that is, that seeing him involves no contradiction with respect to the divine nature, for otherwise he would not have asked for anything of the kind. So God adds, *for no one shall see me and live*. He therefore gives a reason in keeping with Moses' opinion. He does not say that it involves a contradiction with respect to the divine nature, as is in fact the case, but that it cannot happen because of human weakness. II 44 Further, to reveal to Moses that the Israelites, by worshiping the calf, had become like the other nations, God says in 33: 2–3 that he will send an angel—that is, a being to take care of the Israelites in place of the supreme being —but that he himself does not wish to be among them. This left

Moses nothing by which he could be sure that the Israelites were dearer to God than the other nations, whom God had also handed over to the care of other beings, or angels, as is clear from verse 16 of the same chapter. II 45 Finally, because God was believed to dwell in the heavens, he was revealed as descending from heaven onto the mountain, and Moses went up the mountain to speak with God. He would not have needed to do this at all if he had been able to imagine God as easily in any place. The Israelites knew almost nothing about God, even though he was revealed to them. They showed this more than enough when, a few days later, they transferred his honor and worship to a calf and believed it to be the gods who had brought them out of Egypt. II 46 And we certainly should not believe that people accustomed to the superstitions of the Egyptians, uneducated and worn down by the most wretched slavery, understood anything sound about God. Nor should we believe that Moses taught them anything but a way of living. He did so not as a philosopher, so that they might at last live well from freedom of mind, but as a lawgiver, so that they would be compelled by the command of the law to live well. II 47 For them, therefore, the rule of living well, or the true life, and the worship and love of God were more a servitude than true freedom and the grace and gift of God. He commanded them to love God and keep his law so that they would credit God with the benefits they had received (namely, freedom from slavery in Egypt, and so on). He also terrified them with threats if they should transgress those precepts and, on the other hand, promised them many good things if they observed them. So he taught them in the same way that parents usually teach children who are wholly lacking in reason. It is certain, then, that they did not know the excellence of virtue or true blessedness. II 48 Jonah thought he could flee from God's sight, which seems to show that he too believed God had handed over the care of the other lands outside Judea to other powers, though powers he had appointed in his place. No one in the Old Testament spoke of God more in accordance with reason than Solomon, who surpassed everyone of his age in nat-

ural light. II 49 And so he also considered himself above the Law (for it was given only to those who lack reason and the teachings of the natural intellect). He set little store by all the laws concerning the king, which consisted chiefly of three (see Deuteronomy 17:

PROPHETS WHO DISAGREED

Ezekiel, Samuel, Jeremiah and Paul contradict one another, so we need believe the prophets only on the moral point of each revelation.

16–17); indeed, he flatly violated them (in which, however, he erred and did something unworthy of a philosopher, namely by indulging in pleasures). He taught that all the goods of fortune are vain for mortals (see Ecclesiastes), that human beings have nothing more excellent than the intellect, and that they are punished by no greater penalty than folly (see Proverbs 16:22). But let us return to the prophets, whose conflicting opinions we have also undertaken to note. The rabbis who left us those books of the Prophets (the only ones that now survive) found Ezekiel's views so contrary to those of Moses (as is told in the tractate Shabbat, chapter 1, folio 13, page[13] 2) that they almost resolved not to admit his book among the canonical books. They would have hidden it away entirely had not a certain Hananiah undertaken to explain it, which, they say, he finally did with great labor and effort (as is told there). How he did it, however, is not clear enough: whether he wrote a commentary, which has perhaps been lost, or whether, bold as he was, he altered Ezekiel's actual words and speeches and embellished them according to his own fancy. Be that as it may, chapter 18 at least does not seem to agree with Exodus 34:7, nor with Jeremiah 32:18, and so on. II 50 Samuel believed that once God had decreed something, he never repented of his decree (see 1 Samuel 15:[14] 29). When Saul repented of his sin and wished to worship God and ask his

13 Shabbat is a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud; the passage is at Shabbat 13b.
14 Hananiah son of Hezekiah, a rabbi of the first century AD, whom the Talmud credits with reconciling Ezekiel with the Law of Moses.

pardon, Samuel told him that God would not change his decree against him. To Jeremiah, on the contrary, it was revealed (see Jeremiah 18:8, 10) that God, whether he has decreed some harm or some good for a nation, repents of his decree, provided that the people too change, for better or for worse, after the sentence is pronounced. Joel, however, taught that God repents only of harm (see Joel 2:13). II 51 Finally, Genesis 4:7 makes it very clear that a human being can master the temptations of sin and act rightly. This is said to Cain, who nevertheless, as is clear from Scripture itself and from Josephus, never mastered them. The same follows quite evidently from the chapter of Jeremiah just cited. It says that God repents of a decree pronounced for people's harm or good according as they are willing to change their ways and manner of life. Paul, on the contrary, teaches nothing more plainly than that people have no power over the temptations of the flesh except by God's special calling and grace. See the Epistle to the Romans 9:10 and following. And in 3:5 and 6:19, where he attributes justice to God, he corrects himself for speaking this way in human fashion and because of the weakness of the flesh.

II 52 From all this, then, what we set out to show is more than sufficiently clear: God adapted revelations to the understanding and opinions of the prophets; the prophets could be ignorant, and in fact were ignorant, of matters that concern speculation alone and not charity and the conduct of life; and they held contrary opinions. It is therefore far from true that we should seek knowledge of natural and spiritual things from them. II 53 We conclude, then, that we are not obliged to believe the prophets in anything except what is the end and substance of the revelation. In everything else, each person is free to believe as he pleases. For example, Cain's revelation teaches us only that God urged Cain toward the true life. That alone is the aim and substance of the revelation, not to teach freedom of the will or philosophical matters. So although freedom of the will is very clearly contained in the words and reasons of that admonition, we are nevertheless permitted to think the contrary, since those

words and reasons were adapted only to Cain's understanding. II 54 So too Micaiah's revelation aims to teach only that God revealed to Micaiah the true outcome of Ahab's battle against Aram, and so this is all we are bound to believe. Whatever else that revelation contains does not concern us at all: what it says about the true and the false Spirit of God, about the host of heaven standing on either side of God, and the remaining circumstances of that revelation. About these things, then, each person may believe whatever seems more in keeping with his own reason. II 55 The same must be said about the arguments by which God showed Job his power over all things. This assumes that they really were revealed to Job, and that the author was trying to tell a story and not, as some believe, to embellish his own ideas. They were offered to suit Job's understanding and only to convince him, not as universal arguments meant to convince everyone. II 56 We should take the same view of the arguments by which Christ convicts the Pharisees of obstinacy and ignorance and urges his disciples toward the true life: he adapted his arguments to the opinions and principles of each. For example, he said to the Pharisees (see Matthew 12:26), *And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then would his kingdom stand?* In saying this he wanted only to refute the Pharisees from their own principles, not to teach that there are demons or some kingdom of demons. So too he said to his disciples (Matthew 18:10), *See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven* etc. Here he wants to teach nothing other than that they should not be proud and should not despise anyone. He does not mean to teach the other things contained in his arguments, which he brings forward only to persuade the disciples of the point more effectively. II 57 Finally, the same must be said without qualification about the arguments and signs of the apostles, and there is no need to speak of them at greater length. Some passages of Scripture were written only ad hominem, that is, to suit someone's understanding, and yet they are defended as divine doctrine, to the great detriment of philosophy. If I had to list them all, I would

stray far from the brevity I am aiming for. Let it suffice, then, to have touched on a few general points; the curious reader can weigh the rest for himself. II 58 Only what we have discussed about prophets and prophecy bears chiefly on the goal I have in view, namely, separating philosophy from theology. Still, since I have touched on this question in general terms, I would like to inquire further whether the prophetic gift was peculiar to the Hebrews or common to all nations, and also what we should conclude about the calling of the Hebrews. On these questions, see the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: OF THE VOCATION OF THE HEBREWS

True happiness never lies in being preferred to others, so Scripture's talk of a chosen people suits its first hearers.

III 1 The true happiness and blessedness of each person consist solely in the enjoyment of the good. They do not consist in the glory of being the only one to enjoy it, with everyone else shut out. Some people think themselves more blessed because things go well for them alone and not for others, or because they are more blessed and more fortunate than the rest. Whoever thinks this way does not know true happiness and blessedness, and the joy he takes from it arises from nothing but envy and malice, unless it is merely childish. III 2 For example, a person's true happiness and blessedness consist solely in wisdom and the knowledge of the truth. They do not consist at all in being wiser than others, or in others lacking true knowledge, for this adds nothing whatever to his wisdom, that is, to his true happiness. So whoever rejoices in this rejoices in another's misfortune. He is therefore envious and malicious, and knows neither true wisdom nor the tranquility of the true life. III 3 Scripture urges the Hebrews to obey the law by saying that God chose them for himself above the other nations (see Deuteronomy 10:15), and that he is near to them and not to others (Deuteronomy 4:4, 7). It also says that he prescribed just laws to them alone (verse 8 of the same chapter), and finally that he made himself known to them

alone, passing over the rest (see verse 32 of the same chapter), and so on. In saying these things it is speaking only to suit the understanding of people who did not know true blessedness, as we showed in the previous chapter and as Moses also testifies (see Deuteronomy 9: 6–7). III 4 For surely they would have been no less blessed if God had called everyone equally to salvation. Nor would God be any less gracious to them if he were equally near to the rest. The laws would be no less just, and they themselves no less wise, if the laws had been prescribed to all. The miracles would have shown God's power no less if they had also been done for the sake of other nations. Nor, finally, would the Hebrews be any less bound to worship God if God had bestowed all these gifts on everyone equally. III 5 As for what God says to Solomon (see 1 Kings 3: 12), that no one after him would be as wise as he, this seems to be merely a way of speaking that signifies exceptional wisdom. However that may be, we should certainly not believe that God, to increase Solomon's happiness, promised him that he would never afterward bestow so much wisdom on anyone. That would add nothing to Solomon's intellect. A prudent king would give God no less thanks for so great a gift even if God had said he would endow everyone with the same wisdom.

III 6 We say that in the passages of the Pentateuch just cited Moses was speaking to suit the Hebrews' understanding. Even so, we do not mean to deny that God prescribed those laws of the Pentateuch to them alone, or that he spoke only to them. Nor do we deny that the Hebrews saw more wonders than befell any other nation. We mean only that Moses wanted to admonish the Hebrews in such a way, and chiefly with such arguments, as would bind them more firmly to the worship of God, given their childish understanding. Next, we wanted to show that the Hebrews surpassed the other nations not in knowledge or in piety, but in something else entirely. Or, to speak with Scripture in a way suited to their understanding, the Hebrews were chosen by God above the rest for something else entirely, not for

the true life and lofty speculations, though they were often urged toward these. What that was, I will now show in order.

III 7 But before I begin, I want to explain briefly what I shall mean in what follows by God's direction, by God's external and internal help, by God's election, and finally by fortune. By God's direction I mean that fixed and unchangeable order of nature, or the chain of natural things. III 8 For we said above, and have already shown elsewhere, that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but God's eternal decrees, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. So whether we say that all things happen according to the laws of nature, or that they are ordered by God's decree and direction, we are saying the same thing. III 9 Next, the power of all natural things is nothing but the very power of God, through which alone all things happen and are determined. It follows that whatever help a human being procures for himself in preserving his being, since he too is a part of nature, is offered to him by divine power alone. The same holds for whatever nature offers him without any effort on his part. In either case divine power acts either through human nature or through things outside human nature. So whatever human nature can achieve by its own power alone to preserve its being, we may rightly call God's internal help. Whatever else accrues to its advantage from the power of external causes, we may rightly call God's external help. III 10 From this it is also easy to infer what we should understand by God's election. No one does anything except by the predetermined order of nature, that is, by God's eternal direction and decree. It follows that no one chooses any way of life for himself, or accomplishes anything, except by a special calling of God, who has chosen this person above others for this work or for this way of life. III 11 Finally, by fortune I mean nothing other than God's direction insofar as he directs human affairs through external and unforeseen causes. With these preliminaries, let us return to our purpose, and see why the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God above the rest. To show this, I proceed as follows.

III 12 Everything we honorably desire comes down chiefly to three things: to understand things through their first causes; to master the passions, or acquire the habit of virtue; and finally to live securely and in good health. The means that serve the first and second directly, and that can be regarded as their proximate and efficient causes, are contained in human nature itself. Acquiring them therefore depends chiefly on our own power alone, or on the laws of human nature alone. For this reason we must firmly hold that these gifts have never been peculiar to any nation, but have always been common to the whole human race —unless we want to dream that nature once produced different kinds of human beings. III 13 But the means that serve to live securely and preserve the body lie chiefly in external things. They are called gifts of fortune precisely because they depend mostly on the direction of external causes, of which we are ignorant. In this respect a fool is almost as likely to be fortunate or unfortunate as a wise man. Still, human direction and vigilance can do much to help us live securely and avoid injuries from other people, and from animals too. III 14 Reason and experience have taught no surer means to this than to form a society with fixed laws, to occupy a definite region of the world, and to bring everyone's strength together into one body, as it were, the body of society. But forming and preserving a society requires no ordinary intelligence and vigilance. For that reason a society founded and directed chiefly by prudent and vigilant people will be more secure, more stable, and less exposed to fortune. By contrast, one made up of people of untutored minds depends for the most part on fortune and is less stable. III 15 If such a society nonetheless lasts a long time, it owes this to someone else's direction, not its own. Indeed, if it has overcome great dangers and its affairs have prospered, it cannot help admiring and adoring God's direction. This means God acting through hidden external causes, not through human nature and the mind. Everything that has happened to it was utterly unexpected and beyond all anticipation, and in truth this can even be regarded as a miracle.

CHOSEN FOR A STATE, NOT FOR WISDOM

The Hebrews excelled other nations only in the security and prosperity of their state, not in knowledge or virtue.

III 16 Nations are distinguished from one another in this respect alone: by the society and the laws under which they live and are governed. And so the Hebrew nation was not chosen by God above the others with respect to intellect or tranquility of mind. It was chosen with respect to its society and the fortune by which it gained a state and kept it for so many years. III 17 This is also as clear as can be from Scripture itself. Anyone who even skims through it sees clearly that the Hebrews surpassed the other nations only in managing successfully the affairs that concern the security of life and in overcoming great dangers. They did this chiefly by God's external help alone. In other respects they were equal to the others, and God was equally gracious to all. III 18 As regards intellect, it is established (as we showed in the previous chapter) that their thoughts about God and nature were quite ordinary, so they were not chosen by God above the others with respect to intellect. Nor were they chosen with respect to virtue and the true life, for in this too they were equal to the other nations, and only a very few were elect. III 19 Their election and calling, then, consisted solely in the temporal prosperity and advantages of their state. Nor do we see that God promised the patriarchs[15] or their successors anything besides this. Indeed, in the Law nothing is promised for obedience but the continued prosperity of the state and the other advantages of this life. Conversely, the ruin of the state and the greatest hardships are threatened for obstinacy and breaking the covenant. III 20 Nor is this surprising. The end of every society and state is to live securely and comfortably, as is evident from what has

15 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 4. Genesis 15 relates that God told Abraham he was his protector and would give him a very great reward. To this Abraham replied that he could expect nothing of any importance for himself, since he was already advanced in old age and childless.

just been said and as we will show more fully later. A state can only subsist through laws by which each person is bound. If all the members of a society chose to bid farewell to the laws, by that very act they would dissolve the society and destroy the state. III 21 So nothing else could be promised to the society of the Hebrews for steadfast observance of the laws but security of life[16] and its advantages. Conversely, no surer punishment could be foretold for obstinacy than the ruin of the state and the evils that commonly follow from it. Added to these were other evils that would arise peculiarly for them from the ruin of their particular state. But there is no need to treat these matters at greater length at present. III 22 I add only this: the laws of the Old Testament, too, were revealed and prescribed to the Jews alone. Since God chose them only to establish a particular society and state, they necessarily had to have particular laws as well. Did God also prescribe special laws to other nations and reveal himself prophetically to their lawgivers, that is, under the attributes by which they were accustomed to imagine God? That is not sufficiently clear to me. This at least is evident from Scripture itself: other nations too had a state and particular laws through God's external direction. III 23 To show this, I will cite just two passages of Scripture. Genesis 14:18–20 relates that Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and priest of the most high God. It also relates that he blessed Abraham, as was the priest's right (see Numbers 6:[17] 23), and finally that Abraham, beloved of God, gave a tenth of all the spoils to this priest of God. III 24 All this shows clearly enough that God, before he founded the Israelite nation, established kings and priests in Jerusalem and prescribed rites and laws to them. Whether he did so prophetically is, as we said, not sufficiently clear. I am at least persuaded that Abraham, while he lived there, lived religiously according to those laws. Abraham received no rites from God in particular, and yet Genesis 26:5

16 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 5. Mark 10:21 makes it plain that observing the commandments of the Old Testament is not enough for eternal life.

17 Genesis calls Melchizedek king of Salem, a place traditionally identified with Jerusalem.

says that Abraham observed the worship, precepts, statutes, and laws of God. This must no doubt be understood of the worship, precepts, statutes, and laws of King Melchizedek. III 25 Malachi 1: 10–11 rebukes the Jews in these words: *Who is there among you who would shut the doors* (that is, of the temple)*, so that fire may not be laid on my altar for nothing? I take no pleasure in you, etc. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and everywhere incense is brought to me, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the God of hosts.* These words can refer only to the present time, unless we want to do violence to them. With them he testifies more than enough that the Jews at that time were no more beloved by God than other nations. Indeed, God was then making himself known to other nations through miracles more than to the Jews, who had by then partly regained their state without miracles. The passage also shows that the nations had rites and ceremonies by which they were acceptable to God. III 26 But I set these matters aside, for my purpose it is enough to have shown what the election of the Jews concerned. It concerned only temporal bodily prosperity and freedom, that is, their state, and the manner and means by which they gained it. Consequently it also concerned the laws, insofar as they were necessary to establish that particular state, and finally the manner in which those laws were revealed. In other respects, including those in which a person's true happiness consists, the Jews were equal to the rest. III 27 So Scripture says (see Deuteronomy 4:7) that no nation has gods as near to it as the Jews have God. This must be understood only with respect to the state, and only of the time when so many miracles befell them, etc. For with respect to intellect and virtue, that is, with respect to blessedness, God is equally gracious to all, as we have already said and shown by reason itself. This is also clear enough from Scripture itself. III 28 For the Psalmist says in Psalm 145:18, *God is near to all who call on him, to all who truly call on him.* Likewise in verse 9 of the same psalm, *God is kind to all, and his mercy* (is) *over all that he has made.* III 29 Psalm 33:15 says clearly that God gave the same intellect to all, in these

words: *who forms their heart in the same way.* For the Hebrews believed the heart to be the seat of the soul and the intellect, which I think is well enough known to everyone. Next, it is clear from Job 29: 28 that God prescribed this law to the whole human race: to revere God and abstain from evil deeds, that is, to act well. And so Job, though a Gentile, was the most acceptable of all to God, because he surpassed everyone in piety and religion. Finally, it is very clear from Jonah 4:2 that God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and one who relents from doing harm, not only toward the Jews but toward all. For Jonah says, *That is why I resolved earlier to flee to Tarshish, because I knew* (that is, from the words of Moses found in Exodus 34:6) *that you are a gracious, merciful God, etc.* He knew, therefore, that God would pardon the Gentile Ninevites. III 30 We conclude, therefore, that each Jew, considered alone and apart from that society and state, has no gift of God above others, and that there is no difference between him and a Gentile. This follows since God is equally gracious to all, and the Hebrews were chosen by God only with respect to their society and state. III 31 It is true, then, that God is equally kind, merciful, and so on, toward all. And the prophet's task was not so much to teach the particular laws of his country as to teach true virtue and to admonish people about it. So there is no doubt that all nations had prophets, and that the prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews. Profane as well as sacred histories in fact attest to this. The sacred histories of the Old Testament do not show that other nations had as many prophets as the Hebrews. Indeed, they do not show that any Gentile prophet was expressly sent by God to the nations. But that makes no difference, for the Hebrews took care to write only about their own affairs, not about those of other peoples. III 32 It is enough, then, that we find in the Old Testament that Gentile and uncircumcised men such as Noah, Enoch, Abimelech, Balaam, and others prophesied. We also find that Hebrew prophets were sent by God not only to their own nation but to many others as well. For Ezekiel prophesied to all the nations then known. Indeed, Obadiah, so far as we know, was a

prophet to no one but the Edomites, and Jonah was chiefly a prophet to the Ninevites. III 33 Isaiah not only laments and foretells the calamities of the Jews and sings of their restoration, but does the same for other nations. For in chapter 16, verse 9, he says, *therefore I will lament Jazer with weeping*. And in chapter 19 he first foretells the calamities of the Egyptians and afterward their restoration (see verses 19, 20, 21, and 25 of that chapter). He foretells that God will send them a Savior who will set them free, that God will make himself known to them, and finally that the Egyptians will worship God with sacrifices and offerings. At last he calls this nation *Blessed Egypt, the people of God*. All of this is certainly well worth noting. III 34 Finally, Jeremiah is called a prophet not of the Hebrew nation alone but of the nations without qualification (see Jeremiah 1:5). He too weeps as he foretells the calamities of the nations, and he foretells their restoration. For in 48:31 he says of the Moabites, *therefore I will wail for Moab, and cry out for all Moab*, and so on. And in verse 36 he says, *therefore my heart resounds for Moab like drums*. And finally he foretells their restoration, as he also foretells the restoration of the Egyptians, the Ammonites, and the Elamites. III 35 There is no doubt, then, that the other nations also had their own prophets, just as the Jews did, and that these prophets prophesied to them and to the Jews. Scripture mentions only one, Balaam, to whom the future affairs of the Jews and of other nations were revealed. Yet we must not believe that Balaam prophesied on that occasion alone. The narrative itself makes it perfectly clear that he had long before been renowned for prophecy and other divine gifts. For when Balak sends for him, he says (Numbers 22:6), *for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed*. So he had the very same power that God bestowed on Abraham (see Genesis 12:3). III 36 Next, Balaam, as one accustomed to prophesying, tells the envoys to stay with him until God's will is revealed to him. When he prophesied, that is, when he interpreted the true mind of God, he used to say this of himself: *the utterance of him who hears the words of God, and who knows the knowledge* (or the mind and foreknowledge) *of the Most High,*

who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but with his eyes uncovered. Finally, after he had blessed the Hebrews at God's command, he begins to prophesy to other nations and to foretell their future, as, no doubt, he was accustomed to do. III 37 All this shows more than enough that he was always a prophet, or at least prophesied quite often. It also shows something else worth noting here. He had the very thing that chiefly made the prophets certain of the truth of their prophecy: a mind inclined only to what is right and good. For he did not bless or curse whomever he himself wished, as Balak thought, but only those whom God wished to be blessed or cursed. That is why he answered Balak: *even if Balak gave me as much silver and gold as his house could hold, I could not transgress God's command so as to do good or evil of my own will; what God speaks, I will speak*. III 38 As for God being angry with him while he was on his journey, the same thing happened to Moses as he was setting out for Egypt at God's command (see Exodus 4:24). As for his accepting money for prophesying, Samuel did the same (see 1 Samuel 9:7–8). And if he sinned in some matter (on this see 2 Peter 2:15–16 and Jude 11), *there is no one so righteous that he always does good and never sins* (see Ecclesiastes 7:20). Surely his prayers must always have carried great weight with God, and his power to curse was certainly very great. Scripture so often declares, as testimony to God's great mercy toward the Israelites, that God would not listen to Balaam and that he turned the curse into a blessing (see Deuteronomy 23:6, Joshua 24:10, Nehemiah 13:2). So he was beyond doubt most acceptable to God, for the prayers and curses of the impious do not move God at all.

WAS PROPHECY PECULIAR TO THE JEWS?

Every nation had its prophets, and Spinoza answers the Pharisees' texts and Paul's words in Romans.

III 39 He was, then, a true prophet, and yet Joshua (13:22) calls him קוסם, *diviner* or *augur*. It is therefore certain that this name is also taken in a good sense. Those whom the Gentiles used to call

augurs and diviners were true prophets. Those whom Scripture often accuses and condemns were false diviners, who deceived the nations just as false prophets deceived the Jews. Other passages of Scripture also make this clear enough. We conclude, therefore, that the prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews but common to all nations. III 40 The Pharisees, however, vehemently maintain the contrary. They hold that this divine gift was peculiar to their nation alone, and that the other nations foretold the future by some diabolical power or other (what will superstition not invent!). The chief passage they bring from the Old Testament to confirm this opinion by its authority is Exodus 33:16. There Moses says to God: *For by what shall it be known that I and your people have found favor in your eyes? Surely when you go with us, and we are set apart, I and your people, from every people that is on the face of the earth*. III 41 From this, I say, they want to infer that Moses asked God to be present to the Jews and to reveal himself to them prophetically, and furthermore to grant this favor to no other nation. It is surely absurd to suppose that Moses begrudged the nations God's presence, or that he would have dared to ask any such thing of God. The truth of the matter is this. Moses knew the temperament and stubborn spirit of his nation. He saw clearly that they could not carry through what they had begun without very great miracles and God's special external help, and indeed that without such help they would necessarily perish. So, to make it plain that God willed them to be preserved, he asks for this special external help from God. For he says in 34:9, *If I have found favor in your eyes, Lord, let the Lord, I pray, go among us, for this people is stubborn*, and so on. III 42 The reason why he asks for God's special external help, then, is that the people was stubborn. God's own reply shows still more clearly that Moses asked for nothing beyond this special external help. For he answered at once (verse 10 of the same chapter): *Behold, I make a covenant: before all your people I will do wonders such as have not been done in all the earth, nor among any of the nations*, and so on. So here Moses is concerned only with the election of the Hebrews as I have explained it, and he asked

God for nothing else. III 43 Yet in Paul's Epistle to the Romans I find another text which troubles me more. In Romans 3:1–2 Paul seems to teach something other than what we teach here. For he says, *What advantage, then, has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way; for the chief thing is that the oracles of God were entrusted to him*. But if we attend to the doctrine that Paul chiefly wants to teach, we shall find nothing in it that conflicts with this doctrine of ours. On the contrary, we shall find him teaching the same things we teach here. For he says in verse 29 of the same chapter that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles. And in 2:25–26 he says, *if a circumcised man falls away from the law, his circumcision will become uncircumcision; and conversely, if an uncircumcised man keeps the commandment of the law, his uncircumcision will be counted as circumcision*. III 44 Further, in 3:9 and 4:15 he says that all alike, Jews and Gentiles, were under sin, but that there is no sin without commandment and law. From this it is perfectly evident that a law was revealed to absolutely everyone (as we also showed above from Job 28:28), and that all have lived under it. This is the law that looks only to true virtue. It is not the law that is established according to the character and constitution of some particular state and adapted to the temperament of one nation. III 45 Finally, Paul concludes that God is the God of all nations, that is, equally gracious to all, and that all alike had been under law and sin. For this reason God sent his Christ to all nations, to free all alike from bondage to the law, so that they would no longer do good because the law commands it, but from a constant decision of the mind. Paul, then, teaches exactly what we maintain. III 46 So when he says that *the oracles of God were entrusted to the Jews alone*, there are two ways to read him. Either we must understand that the laws were entrusted to the Jews alone in writing, while the other nations received them only by revelation and in their minds. Or we must say that Paul is answering according to the understanding and the opinions of the Jews current at the time, since he is trying to fend off an objection that only Jews could raise. For in

teaching what he had partly seen and partly heard, he was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.[18]

IS THE ELECTION ETERNAL?

The Jews' survival comes from their separation and the hatred it provoked; in intellect and virtue no nation is chosen over another.

III 47 It remains only to answer the arguments of certain people who want to persuade themselves that the election of the Hebrews was eternal, not temporary and concerned with their state alone. They give two reasons. First, they say, we see that the Jews have survived for so many years after losing their state, scattered everywhere and separated from all nations, and this has happened to no other nation. Second, Holy Scripture seems to teach in many places that God chose the Jews for himself forever, so that they remain God's chosen even though they have lost their state. III 48 The passages they think teach this eternal election most clearly are chiefly these. I. Jeremiah 31:36, where the prophet declares that the seed of Israel will remain God's nation forever, comparing them with the fixed order of the heavens and of nature. II. Ezekiel 20:32ff. There Ezekiel seems to mean that God will gather the Jews again from all the lands in which they were scattered, even though they deliberately wish to bid farewell to the worship of God. God will lead them into the wilderness of the peoples, as he led their ancestors into the wilderness of Egypt. Then, after separating them from the rebels and the apostates, he will lead them from there to the mountain of his holiness, where the whole house of Israel will worship him. III 49 Other passages besides these are commonly brought forward, especially by the Pharisees, but I think I shall satisfy them all once I have answered these two. This will take little effort once I have shown from Scripture itself that God did not choose the Hebrews forever. He chose them only on the same condition on which he had earlier chosen the Canaanites. The Canaanites too, as we showed above, had priests who wor-

18 Paul says this of himself in 1 Corinthians 9:20–21.

shiped God devoutly, and yet God rejected them for their luxury, their sloth, and their wrong worship. III 50 For Moses, in Leviticus 18:27–28, warns the Israelites not to defile themselves with incest as the Canaanites did, lest the land vomit them out as it vomited out the nations that inhabited those places. And in Deuteronomy 8:19–20 he threatens them with total ruin in the most explicit words. For he says, *I testify against you today that you will utterly perish; as the nations that God makes perish before you, so you will perish*. The Law contains other passages of this kind, which show expressly that God did not choose the Hebrew nation absolutely or forever. III 51 The prophets did foretell to them a new and eternal covenant of the knowledge, love, and grace of God. But it is easily shown that this covenant is promised only to the pious. The same chapter of Ezekiel that we have just cited says expressly that God will separate the rebels and the apostates from them. And Zephaniah 3:12–13 says that God will remove the proud from their midst and leave the poor as survivors. Since this election looks to true virtue, we must not think it was promised only to the pious among the Jews, to the exclusion of others. Rather, we must plainly believe that the true Gentile prophets, whom we have shown all nations had, promised the same to the faithful of their own nations and consoled them with it. III 52 So this eternal covenant of the knowledge and love of God is universal, as is also most evident from Zephaniah 3:10–11. So in this matter no difference is to be admitted between Jews and Gentiles. Nor, therefore, is there any other election peculiar to the Jews beyond the one we have already shown. When speaking of this election, which looks only to true virtue, the prophets mix in much about sacrifices and other ceremonies, and about rebuilding the Temple and the City. They do so because, in keeping with the custom and nature of prophecy, they wished to explain spiritual matters under such figures. They also wished to indicate at the same time to the Jews, whose prophets they were, the restoration of their state and Temple that was to be expected in the time of Cyrus. III 53 Therefore the Jews today have absolutely nothing that they can claim for themselves above all

other nations.[19] That they have survived so many years dispersed and without a state is not at all surprising. They separated themselves from all nations in such a way as to draw the hatred of all upon themselves. They did this not only by external rites contrary to those of the other nations, but also by the sign of circumcision, which they observe most religiously. And experience has already shown that the hatred of the nations does much to preserve them. III 54 The king of Spain once forced the Jews either to accept the religion of the realm or to go into exile, and a great many Jews accepted the Catholic religion. Those who accepted it were granted all the privileges of native Spaniards and were deemed worthy of every honor. So they at once mingled with the Spaniards so thoroughly that a short time later no remnant of them was left, nor any memory.[20] Exactly the opposite happened to those whom the king of the Portuguese forced to accept the religion of his realm. Though converted, they always lived separated from everyone, because the king declared them unworthy of any honor. III 55 I think the sign of circumcision also has such power in this matter that I am persuaded this alone will preserve this nation forever. Indeed, if the foundations of their religion did not weaken their spirits, I would firmly believe that someday, given the opportunity, they would set up their state again, and that God would choose them anew—so changeable are human affairs.[21] III 56 We have a striking example of this in the Chinese. They too most religiously keep a kind of tuft on the head, which separates them from all others. Separated in this way, they have preserved themselves for so many thousands of years that they far surpass all other nations in antiquity. They have not always held sovereignty, yet they recovered it when it was lost. And they will no doubt recover it again once the spirits of the Tartars begin to grow slack through

19 Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed the exiled Jews to return and rebuild the Temple in 538 BC.

20 The edict of expulsion issued by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

21 Manuel I, who in 1497 compelled the Jews of Portugal to convert.

the luxury of riches and through sloth.[22] III 57 Finally, someone may wish to maintain that the Jews have been chosen by God forever, for this or some other reason. I will not oppose him, provided he holds the following. Insofar as this election, whether temporary or eternal, is peculiar to the Jews alone, it concerns only their state and bodily advantages, since this alone can distinguish one nation from another. But with respect to intellect and true virtue no nation is distinguished from another, and so in these matters God does not choose one nation over another.

22 The "Tartars" are the Manchus, who conquered China in 1644; the queue Spinoza mentions had in fact been imposed on the Chinese by them.

Chapters 4–6

Law and miracles
The divine law, the purpose of ceremonies and stories, and why miracles never break the order of nature.

CHAPTER 4: OF THE DIVINE LAW

Law is natural or human; the divine law aims at the highest good, the knowledge and love of God.

IV 1 The word *law*, taken absolutely, means that according to which each individual thing, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way. Law depends either on the necessity of nature or on human decision. A law that depends on the necessity of nature is one that follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of the thing. A law that depends on human decision, which is more properly called an ordinance (*jus*), is one that people prescribe for themselves and for others in order to live more safely and more conveniently, or for other reasons. IV 2 For example, that all bodies, when they strike other, smaller bodies, lose as much of their own motion as they communicate to the others is a universal law of all bodies, and it follows from the necessity of nature. In the same way, that a person who remembers one thing immediately remembers another thing like it, or one that he had perceived together with it, is a law that follows necessarily from human nature. But that people give up, or are compelled to give up, the right they have by nature, and bind themselves to a fixed way of living, depends on human decision. IV 3 And although I grant without qualification that all things are determined by the universal laws of nature to exist and to act in a fixed and determ-

inate way, I still say that these laws depend on human decision. I. Because a human being, insofar as he is a part of nature, to that extent constitutes a part of nature's power. So whatever follows from the necessity of human nature—that is, from nature itself insofar as we conceive it as determined through human nature—follows, even if necessarily, from human power. Hence it can very well be said that the enactment of these laws depends on human decision. For it depends chiefly on the power of the human mind, yet in such a way that the human mind, insofar as it perceives things as true or false, can still be conceived very clearly without these laws—but not without necessary law, as we have just defined it. IV 4 II. I also said that these laws depend on human decision because we ought to define and explain things through their proximate causes. That universal consideration of fate and of the chain of causes can be of very little use to us in forming and ordering our thoughts about particular things. Add to this that we are entirely ignorant of the actual coordination and connection of things—that is, of how things are really ordered and connected. So for the conduct of life it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible. So much for law considered absolutely.

IV 5 But the word *law* seems to be applied to natural things only by metaphor, and by law people commonly understand nothing other than a command that they can either carry out or neglect, since it confines human power within certain limits beyond which that power reaches, and commands nothing beyond its strength. It therefore seems that law should be defined more narrowly: as a way of living that a person prescribes for himself or for others for some end. IV 6 However, the true end of laws is usually plain to only a few, and most people are almost incapable of perceiving it and live anything but by reason. So legislators, in order to bind everyone alike, wisely set up another end, very different from the one that follows necessarily from the nature of laws. They promised those who upheld the laws what the common people love most, and threatened those who broke them with what the common people fear most. In this way they

tried to restrain the common people, as far as possible, like a horse with a bridle. IV 7 Hence it has come about that law is taken above all to mean a way of living prescribed to people by the command of others: and consequently that those who obey the laws are said to live under the law and appear to be in servitude. And in truth, someone who gives each person his due because he fears the gallows acts at another's command and under the compulsion of evil, and he cannot be called just. But someone who gives each person his due because he knows the true reason for laws and their necessity acts with a steadfast mind, by his own decision and not another's, and so is rightly called just. IV 8 This, I think, is also what Paul meant to teach when he said that those who lived under the law could not be justified through the law. For justice, as it is commonly defined, is the constant and perpetual will to give each person his right. And so Solomon says in Proverbs[1] 21:15 that the just rejoice when judgment is done, but the wicked are afraid. IV 9 Since, then, law is nothing other than a way of living that people prescribe for themselves or for others for some end, it seems that law should be divided into human and divine. By human law I mean a way of living that serves only to safeguard life and the commonwealth; by divine law, one that aims solely at the highest good, that is, the true knowledge and love of God. The reason I call this law divine lies in the nature of the highest good, which I will now set out briefly and as clearly as I can.

IV 10 Since the better part of us is the intellect, it is certain that if we really want to seek our own advantage, we must strive above all to perfect it as far as possible; for our highest good must consist in its perfection. Further, all our knowledge, and the certainty that truly removes all doubt, depends on the knowledge of God alone—both because without God nothing can be or be conceived, and because we can doubt everything as long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God. It follows that our highest good and perfection depend on the knowledge of God

1 The definition of justice is the jurist Ulpian's, quoted at the opening of Justinian's *Institutes*.

alone, and so on. IV 11 Next, since nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that everything in nature involves and expresses the concept of God in proportion to its essence and its perfection. Consequently, the more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect the knowledge of God we acquire. Or (since knowing an effect through its cause is nothing other than knowing some property of the cause): the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know the essence of God, which is the cause of all things. IV 12 And so all our knowledge, that is, our highest good, not only depends on the knowledge of God but consists entirely in it. This also follows from the fact that a person is more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing he loves above all others, and conversely. So the person who loves above all things the intellectual knowledge of God, the most perfect being, and takes the greatest delight in it, is necessarily the most perfect and shares most fully in the highest blessedness. This, then, is what our highest good and our blessedness come down to: the knowledge and love of God. IV 13 The means that this end of all human actions—namely God himself, insofar as his idea is in us—requires can therefore be called commands of God, because they are prescribed to us as if by God himself, insofar as he exists in our mind. And so the way of living that aims at this end is very properly called the divine law. But what these means are, what way of living this end requires, and how the foundations of the best commonwealth and of the way people live together follow from it, belong to a universal ethics. Here I will go on to treat only of divine law in general.

IV 14 Since, then, the love of God is the highest happiness and blessedness of a human being, and the final end and aim of all human actions, it follows that the only person who follows the divine law is one who takes care to love God—not from fear of punishment, nor out of love for some other thing, such as pleasures, reputation, and so on, but solely because he knows God, or knows that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good. IV 15 The sum of the divine law, then, and its highest precept, is to

love God as the highest good—as we have already said, not from fear of some punishment or penalty, nor out of love for some other thing in which we desire to take delight. For this is what the idea of God dictates: that God is our highest good, or that the knowledge and love of God is the final end to which all our actions are to be directed. IV 16 The carnal person, however, cannot understand these things, and they seem empty to him. His knowledge of God is too meager, and he finds nothing in this highest good that he can touch or eat or, in short, that affects the flesh, in which he takes the greatest delight; for it consists solely in contemplation and in the pure mind. But those who know that they possess nothing more excellent than intellect and a sound mind will no doubt judge these things to be most solid. IV 17 We have thus explained what the divine law chiefly consists in, and what human laws are: namely, all laws that aim at some other goal—unless they have been sanctioned by revelation. For in this respect, too, things are referred to God (as we showed above). In this sense the law of Moses, although it was not universal but was especially adapted to the character and particular preservation of one people, can nevertheless be called the law of God, or divine law, since we believe that it was sanctioned by prophetic light. IV 18 If we now attend to the nature of the natural divine law, as we have just explained it, we shall see: I. that it is universal, that is, common to all people, for we have deduced it from universal human nature; II. that it does not require belief in historical narratives, whatever they may be. For since this natural divine law is understood from the consideration of human nature alone, it is certain that we can conceive it just as well in Adam as in any other person, and just as well in a person who lives among others as in one who lives a solitary life. IV 19 Nor can belief in historical narratives, however certain, give us the knowledge of God, and consequently not the love of God either. For the love of God arises from knowledge of him, and knowledge of him must be drawn from common notions that are certain and known through themselves. So it is far from true that belief in historical narratives is a necessary requirement for

reaching our highest good. Still, although belief in historical narratives cannot give us the knowledge and love of God, we do not deny that reading them is very useful for civil life. For the more we have observed and the better we know people's characters and circumstances—which can be learned from nothing better than from their actions—the more cautiously we can live among them, and the better we can adapt our actions and our life to their temperament, as far as reason allows. IV 20 III. We see that this natural divine law does not require ceremonies, that is, actions that are indifferent in themselves and are called good only by institution; or actions that represent some good necessary for salvation; or, if you prefer, actions whose rationale surpasses human understanding. For the natural light requires nothing that the light itself does not reach, but only what it can show us very clearly to be good, or a means to our blessedness. Things that are good only by command and institution, or because they represent some good, cannot perfect our intellect. They are nothing but mere shadows, and cannot be counted among the actions that are, so to speak, the offspring or fruit of the intellect and a sound mind. There is no need to show this at greater length here. IV 21 IV. Finally, we see that the highest reward of the divine law is the law itself—namely, to know God and to love him in true freedom and with a whole and steadfast mind—and that its penalty is the loss of these things and bondage to the flesh, that is, an inconstant and wavering mind.

IS GOD A LAWGIVER?

God's decrees are eternal truths; Adam, the Hebrews and the prophets took them as laws only because they understood them poorly.

IV 22 With these points noted, we must now inquire: I. whether by the natural light we can conceive of God as a lawgiver or a prince prescribing laws to human beings; II. what Holy Scripture teaches about this natural light and law; III. for what purpose ceremonies were instituted in the past; IV. finally, what it matters to know the sacred histories and to believe them. I will

treat the first two questions in this chapter and the last two in the next.

IV 23 What we should conclude on the first question is easily deduced from the nature of God's will, which is distinguished from God's intellect only in relation to our reason. That is, God's will and God's intellect are in themselves really one and the same; they are distinguished only in relation to the thoughts we form about God's intellect. IV 24 For example, when we attend only to the fact that the nature of a triangle is contained in the divine nature from eternity, as an eternal truth, we say that God has the idea of a triangle, or understands the nature of a triangle. But when we then attend to the fact that the nature of a triangle is contained in the divine nature in this way from the necessity of the divine nature alone, and not from the necessity of the essence and nature of the triangle—indeed, that the necessity of the essence and properties of a triangle, insofar as these too are conceived as eternal truths, depends on the necessity of the divine nature and intellect alone, and not on the nature of the triangle—then we call the very thing we called God's intellect God's will, or decree. IV 25 So with respect to God we affirm one and the same thing whether we say that God decreed and willed from eternity that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right angles, or that God understood this very thing. From this it follows that God's affirmations and negations always involve eternal necessity, or truth. IV 26 So if, for example, God told Adam that he did not want him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it would be a contradiction for Adam to be able to eat of that tree, and it would therefore be impossible for Adam to eat of it; for that divine decree would have had to involve eternal necessity and truth. But since Scripture nevertheless relates that God commanded this of Adam, and that Adam ate of the tree all the same, we must necessarily say that God revealed to Adam only the evil that would necessarily befall him if he ate of that tree, but not the necessity with which that evil would follow. IV 27 Hence it came about that Adam perceived that revelation not as an eternal and necessary truth

but as a law—that is, as an institution from which gain or loss follows not from the necessity and nature of the act performed but solely from the pleasure and absolute command of some prince. So that revelation was a law only with respect to Adam, and only because of the deficiency of his knowledge; and God was, as it were, a lawgiver or prince. IV 28 For this same reason, namely a deficiency of knowledge, the Decalogue was a law only with respect to the Hebrews. Since they did not know God's existence as an eternal truth, they had to perceive as a law what was revealed to them in the Decalogue—namely, that God exists and that God alone is to be worshiped. But if God had spoken to them directly, without using any bodily means, they would have perceived this very thing not as a law but as an eternal truth. IV 29 And what we say about the Israelites and Adam must also be said about all the prophets who wrote laws in God's name: they did not perceive God's decrees adequately, as eternal truths. For example, it must be said of Moses himself as well that, by revelation or from foundations revealed to him, he perceived the way in which the people of Israel could best be united in a particular region of the world and form a complete society, that is, set up a state; and also the way in which that people could best be compelled to obey. But he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that this way was the best, nor that the goal they were aiming at would necessarily follow from the common obedience of the people in such a region. IV 30 So he perceived all these things not as eternal truths but as precepts and institutions, and he prescribed them as laws of God. Hence it came about that he imagined God as a ruler, lawgiver, king, merciful, just, and so on, although all these are attributes of human nature alone and must be entirely removed from the divine nature. And this, I say, must be said only of the prophets who wrote laws in God's name, not of Christ. IV 31 For although Christ too seems to have written laws in God's name, we must nevertheless hold that he perceived things truly and adequately; for Christ was not so much a prophet as the mouth of God. God revealed certain things to the human race through the mind of Christ (as we

showed in chapter 1), just as he had earlier done through angels, that is, through a created voice, visions, and so on. So it would be just as contrary to reason to maintain that God adapted his revelations to the opinions of Christ as to maintain that God had earlier adapted his revelations to the opinions of the angels—that is, of a created voice and of visions—in order to communicate to the prophets what was to be revealed. Nothing more absurd than that could be maintained. This is all the more so since Christ was sent to teach not the Jews alone but the whole human race. It was therefore not enough for him to have a mind adapted only to the opinions of the Jews; it had to be adapted to opinions and teachings universal to the human race, that is, to common and true notions. IV 32 And certainly, from the fact that God revealed himself to Christ, or to his mind, directly, and not, as to the prophets, through words and images, we can understand nothing other than that Christ perceived, or understood, the things revealed truly. For a thing is understood when it is perceived by the pure mind, apart from words and images. Christ, then, perceived the things revealed truly and adequately. IV 33 So if he ever prescribed them as laws, he did so because of the people's ignorance and obstinacy. In this respect he acted in God's place, in that he adapted himself to the character of the people. And so, although he spoke somewhat more clearly than the other prophets, he nevertheless taught the things revealed obscurely, and quite often through parables, especially when he was speaking to those to whom it had not yet been given to understand the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 13:10ff.). IV 34 And no doubt he taught those to whom it had been given to know the mysteries of heaven these things as eternal truths, rather than prescribing them as laws. In this way he freed them from bondage to the law, and yet all the more confirmed and established the law, and wrote it deep within their hearts. Paul, too, seems to indicate this in certain passages, namely in the Epistle to the Romans 7:6 and 3:28. IV 35 Yet he too does not want to speak openly; rather, as he himself says in 3:5 and 6:19 of the same epistle, he speaks in human terms. He says so expressly

when he calls God just. And no doubt it is also because of the weakness of the flesh that he ascribes mercy, grace, anger, and so on to God, and adapts his words to the character of the people, or (as he also says in 1 Corinthians 3:1–2) of carnal people. IV 36 For in Romans 9:18 he teaches without qualification that God's anger and his mercy depend not on human works but solely on God's calling, that is, on his will; and next, that no one becomes just by the works of the law, but by faith alone (see Romans 3: 28). By faith he surely means nothing other than the full assent of the mind. Finally, he teaches that no one becomes blessed unless he has the mind of Christ in him (see Romans 8:9), by which, that is, he perceives the laws of God as eternal truths. IV 37 We conclude, therefore, that God is described as a lawgiver or prince, and called just, merciful, and so on, only to suit the understanding of the common people and because of a defect in their thinking. In reality God acts and directs all things solely from the necessity of his own nature and perfection, and his decrees and volitions are eternal truths and always involve necessity. That is what I had resolved to explain and show in the first place.

SCRIPTURE PRAISES THE NATURAL LIGHT

The story of Adam, Solomon's Proverbs, and Paul's Romans all commend the intellect and the natural divine law.

IV 38 Let us pass, then, to the second point. Let us run through the sacred page and see what it teaches about the natural light and this divine law. The first thing we come across is the story of the first man itself, where we are told that God commanded Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This seems to mean that God commanded Adam to do good and to seek it as good, and not insofar as it is the contrary of evil. In other words, he was to seek the good from love of the good, not from fear of evil. For, as we have already shown, whoever does good from true knowledge and love of the good acts freely and with a steady mind. But whoever does it from fear of

evil acts under compulsion from that evil, like a slave, and lives under the command of another. IV 39 And so this single command that God gives Adam comprises the whole divine natural law and agrees absolutely with the dictate of the natural light. Nor would it be difficult to explain that whole story, or parable, of the first man on this basis. But I prefer to leave it aside. For one thing, I cannot be absolutely certain whether my explanation agrees with the writer's meaning. For another, most people do not grant that this story is a parable, but flatly hold it to be a simple narrative. IV 40 It will be better, then, to bring forward other passages of Scripture. I mean especially those dictated by a man who speaks from the power of the natural light, in which he surpassed all the wise men of his age, and whose sayings the people embraced as reverently as those of the prophets. I mean Solomon, who is commended in the sacred books not so much for prophecy and piety as for prudence and wisdom. IV 41 In his Proverbs he calls the human intellect the fountain of true life, and he places misfortune in folly alone. For he says in 16:22: *A fountain of life* (is) *the understanding of its lord*[2], *and the punishment of fools is folly*. Note here that in Hebrew "life" without qualification means true life, as is clear from Deuteronomy 30:19. He therefore places the fruit of the intellect in true life alone, and its punishment simply in being deprived of it. This agrees absolutely with what we noted in the fourth place about the divine natural law. That this fountain of life—that is, the intellect alone, as we have also shown—prescribes laws to the wise is plainly taught by the same wise man. For he says in 13:14: *The law of the prudent* (is) *a fountain of life*—that is, as is clear from the text just cited, the understanding. IV 42 Further, in 3:13 he teaches in the most explicit words that the intellect makes a person blessed and happy and gives true tranquility of mind. For he says: *Blessed is the man who finds knowledge, and the son of man who*

2 SPINOZA'S NOTE. A Hebraism. Someone who has a thing, or contains it in his nature, is called the lord of that thing. Thus in Hebrew a bird is called the lord of wings, because it has wings; and the lord of understanding is someone who understands, because he has understanding.

brings forth understanding. The reason, as he goes on in verses 16–17, is that *directly it gives length of days*[3]*, indirectly riches and honor; its ways* (namely, those that knowledge points out) *are pleasant, and all its paths are peace*. In Solomon's view too, then, only the wise live with a peaceful and steady mind. They are not like the impious, whose minds waver between contrary affects, so that (as Isaiah also says, 57:20) they have neither peace nor rest. IV 43 Finally, in these Proverbs of Solomon we must take particular note of what is found in the second chapter, since it confirms our view as clearly as possible. For verse 3 of that chapter begins: *For if you call out for prudence, and lift your voice to understanding, etc., then you will understand the fear of God, and you will find the knowledge of God* (or rather the love, for the verb ידע *Jadah* means both); *for* (note well) *God gives wisdom: from his mouth* (flow) *knowledge and prudence*. IV 44 With these words he indicates very clearly, first, that wisdom alone, that is, the intellect, teaches us to fear God wisely—that is, to worship him with true religion. Next he teaches that wisdom and knowledge flow from God's mouth, and that it is God who gives wisdom. We too have shown this above: our intellect and our knowledge depend on, arise from, and are perfected by the idea, or knowledge, of God alone. IV 45 He then goes on in verse 9 to teach in the most explicit words that this knowledge contains true ethics and politics, and that these are deduced from it: *then you will understand justice, and judgment, and uprightness,* (and) *every good path*. Not content with this, he continues: *when knowledge enters your heart, and wisdom is sweet to you, then your*[4] *foresight will keep watch over you, and prudence will guard you*. IV 46 All of this plainly agrees with natural knowledge. For natural knowledge teaches ethics and true virtue once we have acquired knowledge of things and tasted the excellence of knowledge. So in Solomon's view as well, the happiness and tranquility of someone who cultivates the natural intellect depend chiefly not on the rule of fortune

3 SPINOZA'S NOTE. A Hebraism, meaning nothing other than life.

4 SPINOZA'S NOTE. מזמה *mezima* properly means thought, deliberation, and watchfulness.

(that is, on God's external help), but on his own inner virtue (that is, on God's internal help). It is by keeping watch, acting, and taking good counsel that he best preserves himself. IV 47 Finally, we must by no means pass over here the passage of Paul in Romans 1:20. There, as Tremellius translates from the Syriac text, he says: *For the hidden things of God, from the foundations of the world, are seen in his creatures through the understanding, both his power and his divinity, which is forever, so that they are without escape*.[5] IV 48 With these words he indicates clearly enough that everyone clearly understands, by the natural light, the power and eternal divinity of God. From it they can know and deduce what they should seek and what they should avoid. He therefore concludes that all are without escape and cannot be excused by ignorance. They certainly could be, if he were speaking of a supernatural light and of the bodily passion and resurrection of Christ, and so on. IV 49 And so a little further on, in verse 24, he continues: *Therefore God gave them up to the unclean lusts of their hearts*, and so on to the end of the chapter. There he describes the vices of ignorance and recounts them as the punishments of ignorance. This plainly agrees with that proverb of Solomon, 15:22, which we have already cited: *and the punishment of fools is folly*. IV 50 It is no wonder, then, that Paul says wrongdoers are without excuse. For as each person sows, so shall he reap. Evils necessarily follow from evils, unless they are wisely corrected, and goods from goods, if constancy of mind goes with them. Scripture, then, absolutely commends the natural light and the divine natural law. And with this I have finished what I set out to do in this chapter.

5 Immanuel Tremellius (1510–1580), Italian-born Hebraist, published a Latin translation of the Syriac New Testament in 1569.

CHAPTER 5: CEREMONIES AND THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The Hebrew ceremonies served only their state and bodily welfare, and they bind no one now.

V 1 In the previous chapter we showed that the divine law, which makes people truly blessed and teaches true life, is universal to all people. Indeed, we deduced it from human nature in such a way that it must be considered innate in the human mind and, as it were, inscribed on it. V 2 The ceremonies, however—at least those found in the Old Testament—were instituted for the Hebrews alone. They were so adapted to the Hebrews' state that for the most part they could be practiced by the society as a whole, not by each individual. It is certain, therefore, that they do not belong to the divine law, and so contribute nothing to blessedness and virtue. They concern only the election of the Hebrews—that is (by what we showed in the third chapter), only their temporal bodily prosperity and the tranquility of their state. They could therefore be of any use only while their state was standing. V 3 If, then, in the Old Testament they were counted as part of the law of God, that was only because they had been instituted by revelation, or on revealed foundations. But since reason, however solid, carries little weight with ordinary theologians, I would like here to confirm what we have just shown by the authority of Scripture as well. Then, for greater clarity, I will show why and how the ceremonies served to establish and preserve the state of the Jews. V 4 Isaiah teaches nothing more clearly than that the divine law, taken absolutely, means that universal law which consists in the true way of living, and not ceremonies. For in 1:10 the prophet calls his nation to hear the divine law from him. From it he first excludes every kind of sacrifice and every festival, and then at last he teaches the law itself (see verses 16–17). He sums it up in these few things: purification of the mind, the practice or habit of virtue, that is, of good actions, and finally giving help to the needy. V 5 No less striking is the testimony of Psalm 40:7–9. Here the psalmist

addresses God: *Sacrifice and offering you did not desire*[6], *you have pierced my ears; burnt offering and sin offering you did not ask for; I have desired to do your will, my God, for your law is in my inmost parts*. He therefore calls only that law the law of God which is inscribed in a person's inmost parts, that is, in the mind, and he excludes ceremonies from it. For ceremonies are good only by institution and not by nature, and so they are not inscribed in minds either. Besides these, still other passages in Scripture testify to the same thing, but it is enough to have cited these two. V 6 That ceremonies contribute nothing to blessedness, but concern only the temporal prosperity of the state, is also evident from Scripture itself. For ceremonies it promises nothing but bodily comforts and pleasures; blessedness it promises for the universal divine law alone. In the five books commonly called the books of Moses, as we said above, nothing is promised but this temporal prosperity: honors or fame, victories, riches, pleasures, and health. V 7 And although these five books contain many moral precepts besides the ceremonies, these are not contained in them as moral teachings universal to all people. They are there as commands adapted above all to the understanding and character of the Hebrew nation alone, and which therefore also look only to the advantage of the state. For example, Moses does not teach the Jews, as a teacher or prophet, not to kill or steal. He commands these things as a lawgiver and prince. For he does not support his teachings with reasons; instead he attaches a penalty to his commands, and penalties can and must vary with the character of each nation, as experience has amply shown. V 8 So too the command not to commit adultery concerns only the advantage of the commonwealth and the state. Had he wanted to teach a moral precept concerned not only with the advantage of the commonwealth but with each person's tranquility of mind and true blessedness, he would have condemned not only the outward act but the very consent of the mind. This is what Christ did, who taught only universal precepts (see Matthew 5: 28). And for this reason Christ promises a spiritual

6 SPINOZA'S NOTE. This is an expression signifying perception.

reward, not a bodily one as Moses does. V 9 For Christ, as I said, was sent not to preserve the state and institute laws, but only to teach the universal law. From this we easily understand that Christ by no means abolished the law of Moses. Christ wished to introduce no new laws into the commonwealth, and he cared about nothing more than teaching moral precepts and distinguishing them from the laws of the commonwealth. He did this chiefly because of the ignorance of the Pharisees, who thought that whoever upheld the laws of the commonwealth, that is, the law of Moses, lived blessedly. Yet that law, as we have said, had regard only to the commonwealth, and served not so much to teach the Hebrews as to compel them. V 10 But let us return to our purpose and bring forward other passages of Scripture that promise nothing but bodily comforts for ceremonies, and blessedness for the universal divine law alone. Among the prophets no one taught this more clearly than Isaiah. In chapter 58, after condemning hypocrisy, he commends freedom and charity toward oneself and one's neighbor, and for these he promises the following: *then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your health shall spring up quickly, and your justice shall go before you, and the glory of God shall gather you*[7], etc. After this he also commends the sabbath, and for diligence in observing it he promises this: *then*[8] *you shall delight in God, and I will make you*[9] *ride upon the heights of the earth, and I will make you eat the inheritance of Jacob your father, for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken*. We see, then, that for freedom and charity the prophet promises a sound mind in a sound body, and the glory of God even after death. For ceremonies, however, he promises nothing but the security and prosperity of the state and bodily well-being. V 11 Psalms 15 and 24 make no mention of ceremonies, only of moral precepts. This is because they deal with blessedness alone and set forth blessedness alone, though figuratively. For it is certain

7 SPINOZA'S NOTE. A Hebraism signifying the time of death: "to be gathered to one's people" means to die; see Genesis 49:29, 33.

8 SPINOZA'S NOTE. This means to take pleasure honorably, as the Dutch also say, *met Godt, en met eere* [with God and with honor].

9 SPINOZA'S NOTE. This means holding rule as one holds a horse with a bridle.

that by the mountain of God, his tents, and dwelling in them, they mean blessedness and tranquility of mind, not the mountain of Jerusalem or the tabernacle of Moses. No one lived in those places, and they were tended only by members of the tribe of Levi. V 12 Furthermore, all those sayings of Solomon that I cited in the previous chapter promise true blessedness for the cultivation of the intellect and wisdom alone: namely, that from it the fear of God will at length be understood and the knowledge of God found. V 13 That the Hebrews are not bound to practice ceremonies after the destruction of their state is clear from Jeremiah. When he saw that the devastation of the city was imminent, and foretold it, he said that *God loves only those who know and understand that he exercises mercy, judgment, and justice in the world; and so in the future only those who know these things are to be considered worthy of praise* (see 9:23). It is as if he were saying that after the devastation of the city God requires nothing special of the Jews, and asks nothing else of them in the future beyond the natural law, by which all mortals are bound. V 14 The New Testament, moreover, plainly confirms this very point. For in it, as we have said, only moral precepts are taught, and the kingdom of heaven is promised for them. The apostles, for their part, abandoned the ceremonies once the Gospel began to be preached to other nations as well, who were bound by the law of another commonwealth. That the Pharisees retained the ceremonies, or at least a large part of them, after the loss of their state was done more in a spirit of opposition to the Christians than to please God. V 15 For after the first devastation of the city, when they were led captive to Babylon, they were not yet divided into sects, so far as I know, and they immediately neglected the ceremonies. Indeed, they bade farewell to the whole law of Moses, consigned the laws of their country to oblivion as quite superfluous, and began to mingle with the other nations, as is abundantly clear from Ezra and Nehemiah. There is therefore no doubt that the Jews, now that their state has been dissolved, are no more bound by the law of Moses than they were before their society and commonwealth began. For while they

lived among other nations before the exodus from Egypt, they had no laws of their own. They were bound by no right except natural right—and doubtless also by the law of the commonwealth in which they lived, insofar as it did not conflict with the divine natural law. V 16 As for the patriarchs' sacrificing to God, I think they did so in order to stir their minds, which had been accustomed to sacrifices since childhood, to greater devotion. For from the time of Enosh all people had been thoroughly accustomed to sacrifices, so that sacrifices above all moved them to devotion. The patriarchs, then, sacrificed to God not at the command of some divine right, nor because they had been taught the universal foundations of the divine law, but solely from the custom of that time. And if they did so at anyone's command, that command was nothing other than the law of the commonwealth in which they lived, by which they too were bound (as we have noted here and also in chapter 3, when we spoke of Melchizedek).

WHY SOCIETIES NEED LAWS

People do not live by reason, so states need laws; Moses used religion and ceremonies to make an enslaved people obey.

V 17 With this, I think, I have confirmed my view by the authority of Scripture. It remains now to show how and why the ceremonies served to preserve and establish the state of the Hebrews, and I will show this as briefly as I can from universal foundations. V 18 Society is very useful, and indeed most necessary, not only for living securely from enemies but also for sparing ourselves much labor. For unless people were willing to help one another, they would lack both the skill and the time to sustain and preserve themselves as far as possible. V 19 Not everyone is equally suited to everything, and no one on his own would be able to obtain what he most needs. Everyone, I say, would lack the strength and the time if he alone had to plow, sow, reap, grind, cook, weave, sew, and do a great many other things to sustain life—to say nothing of the arts and sciences, which are

also supremely necessary for the perfection of human nature and its blessedness. V 20 For we see that those who live in a rough state without civil order lead a wretched and almost animal life. And yet even the few wretched and crude things they have, they do not obtain without mutual help, such as it is. Now if people were so constituted by nature that they desired nothing but what true reason points to, society would surely need no laws. It would be quite enough to teach people true moral precepts, and they would do what is truly useful of their own accord, with an upright and free mind. V 21 But human nature is constituted very differently. Everyone does seek their own advantage, but hardly by the dictate of sound reason. For the most part people desire things and judge them useful because they are carried away by mere appetite and by the affects of the mind, which take no account of the future or of anything else. V 22 Hence no society can survive without rule and force, and consequently without laws to moderate and restrain people's appetites and unbridled impulses. Yet human nature will not allow itself to be coerced absolutely. As Seneca the tragedian says, "No one has held violent rule for long; moderate rule endures." For as long as people act only from fear, they do what they least want to do. They take no account of the usefulness and necessity of what is to be done; their only concern is to avoid incurring death or other punishment.[10] Indeed, they cannot help rejoicing at their ruler's misfortune or loss, even when it also brings great harm to themselves. They cannot help wishing every misfortune on him and bringing it about whenever they can. Moreover, there is nothing people can bear less than to be subject to their equals and ruled by them. Finally, nothing is more difficult than to take freedom away from people once it has been granted. V 23 From this it follows, first, that either the whole society should, if possible, hold power collectively, so that everyone is bound to serve themselves and no one is bound to serve an equal; or, if a few or one alone hold power, that ruler must possess something beyond

10 Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Stoic philosopher and author of tragedies; the line is from his *Trojan Women* 258–259.

common human nature, or at least strive with all his might to persuade the common people of this. V 24 Second, laws in any state must be so instituted that people are restrained not so much by fear as by hope of some good they greatly desire; in this way everyone will do their duty eagerly. V 25 Finally, obedience consists in carrying out commands solely on the authority of the one who commands. It follows that obedience has no place in a society where power is held by all and laws are enacted by common consent. In such a society, whether the laws are increased or reduced, the people remain just as free, because they act not on another's authority but by their own consent. The opposite happens where one man alone holds absolute power. For everyone carries out the commands of the state on the sole authority of one man. So unless they have been brought up from the beginning to hang on the ruler's words, he will find it hard, when the need arises, to institute new laws and to take away freedom once it has been granted to the people.

V 26 With these general considerations in place, let us come down to the commonwealth of the Hebrews. When they first left Egypt, they were no longer bound by the law of any other nation. So they were free to enact new laws as they pleased, or to establish new rights, to set up a state wherever they wished, and to occupy whatever lands they wished. V 27 Yet they were fit for nothing less than for establishing laws wisely and keeping power collectively among themselves. Almost all of them were untrained in mind and worn down by wretched slavery. Power, therefore, had to remain with one man alone, who would command the others and compel them by force, and who, finally, would prescribe the laws and interpret them thereafter. V 28 Moses could easily keep this power, because he surpassed the rest in divine power. He persuaded the people that he had it, and he showed this by many proofs (see Exodus 14:31 and 19: 9). So by the divine power he possessed, he established laws and prescribed them to the people. But in doing so he took the greatest care that the people should do their duty not so much from fear as willingly. Two things above all pressed him to this: the stub-

born temperament of the people, which will not allow itself to be compelled by force alone, and the imminent war. In war, if things are to go well, soldiers must be encouraged rather than terrified with punishments and threats; for then each of them strives to distinguish himself by courage and greatness of spirit, rather than merely to avoid punishment. V 29 For this reason, then, Moses, by divine power and command, introduced religion into the commonwealth, so that the people would do their duty not so much from fear as from devotion. Next, he bound them by benefits and promised them many things from God for the future. Nor did he enact very severe laws, as anyone who has studied them will readily grant—especially if he considers the conditions required to condemn an accused person. V 30 Finally, so that the people, who could not be their own masters, would hang on the words of their ruler, he allowed these men, accustomed as they were to slavery, to do nothing at their own discretion. The people could do nothing without being bound at the same time to remember the law and to carry out commands that depended solely on the ruler's will. They were not allowed to plow, sow, or reap as they pleased, but only according to a fixed and definite command of the law. Likewise they could not eat anything, dress, shave their head or beard, celebrate, or do anything at all except according to the orders and commands prescribed in the laws. Not only that: they were also bound to have certain signs on their doorposts, on their hands, and between their eyes, to remind them always of obedience. V 31 This, then, was the purpose of the ceremonies: that people should do nothing by their own decision but everything at another's command, and should acknowledge, by constant actions and reflections, that they were in no way under their own right but wholly under another's. From all this it is clearer than daylight that ceremonies contribute nothing to blessedness, and that those of the Old Testament—indeed the whole law of Moses—looked to nothing but the state of the Hebrews, and consequently to nothing beyond bodily advantages. V 32 As for the ceremonies of Christians—namely baptism, the Lord's Supper, festivals, out-

ward prayers, and any others there may be that are and always have been common to all Christianity—if they were ever instituted by Christ or by the apostles (which I am not yet sufficiently sure of), they were instituted only as outward signs of the universal Church. They were not instituted as things that contribute anything to blessedness, or that have any holiness in themselves. V 33 So although these ceremonies were not instituted with regard to the state, they were instituted only with regard to the society as a whole. Therefore someone who lives alone is not bound by them at all. Indeed, someone who lives in a state where the Christian religion is forbidden is bound to abstain from these ceremonies, and can nonetheless live a blessed life. V 34 An example of this is found in the kingdom of Japan, where the Christian religion is forbidden, and the Dutch who live there are bound, by order of the East India Company, to abstain from all outward worship. I do not think I need to confirm this by any other authority now. It would not be difficult to deduce this very point from the foundations of the New Testament as well, and perhaps also to show it by clear testimonies; but I gladly leave these things aside, because my mind is hurrying on to other matters. I proceed, then, to the second subject I resolved to treat in this chapter: for whom, and for what reason, faith in the histories contained in Holy Scripture is necessary. To investigate this by the natural light, it seems we must proceed as follows.[11]

WHO NEEDS THE BIBLE'S HISTORIES

Stories persuade those who cannot follow demonstrations; belief in them matters only for the moral teaching they carry.

V 35 Suppose someone wants to persuade people of something, or dissuade them from it, that is not self-evident. To get them to accept it, he must deduce his case from things already granted and convince them either by experience or by reason—that is,

11 The Dutch East India Company, which from 1641 held the only European trading post permitted in Japan, on the island of Dejima at Nagasaki.

either from things they have learned through the senses to happen in nature, or from self-evident intellectual axioms. But unless the experience is such that it is clearly and distinctly understood, then even though it may convince a person, it cannot affect the intellect and dispel its fog as well as when the thing to be taught is deduced solely from intellectual axioms—that is, solely from the power of the intellect and its order in perceiving. This is especially so if the question concerns a spiritual matter, one that in no way falls under the senses. V 36 But deducing things solely from intellectual notions very often requires a long chain of perceptions, as well as the greatest caution, sharpness of mind, and great self-restraint, all of which are rarely found in people. That is why people prefer to be taught by experience rather than to deduce all their perceptions from a few axioms and link them together. V 37 It follows that anyone who wants to teach some doctrine to a whole nation—not to say the whole human race—and to be understood by everyone in everything, is bound to confirm his case by experience alone. He must adapt his reasons, and the definitions of the things he teaches, as far as possible to the understanding of the people, who make up the greatest part of the human race. He must not link them together in a chain, nor give definitions in the form best suited to linking reasons together. Otherwise he will be writing only for the learned—that is, he will be understood only by very few people compared with the rest. V 38 Since, then, the whole of Scripture was revealed first for the use of a whole nation, and eventually for the whole human race, what it contains necessarily had to be adapted as far as possible to the understanding of the people, and confirmed by experience alone. Let us explain this more clearly. The things Scripture means to teach that concern speculation alone are chiefly these: that there is a God, a being who made all things and directs and sustains them with supreme wisdom; and that he has the greatest care for human beings—namely for those who live piously and honorably—while the rest he punishes with many penalties and separates from the good. V 39 And Scripture con-

firms these things by experience alone, namely by the histories it narrates. It gives no definitions of these things, but adapts all its words and reasonings to the understanding of the people. Experience cannot give any clear knowledge of these things, nor teach what God is and how he sustains and directs all things and cares for human beings. Even so, it can teach and enlighten people as much as is needed to impress obedience and devotion on their minds. V 40 From this I think it is clear enough for whom, and for what reason, faith in the histories contained in Holy Scripture is necessary. For it follows most evidently from what has just been shown that knowledge of them and faith in them are supremely necessary for the common people, whose minds are not capable of perceiving things clearly and distinctly. It follows, second, that whoever denies them because he does not believe that God exists, or that God provides for things and for human beings, is impious. But whoever is ignorant of them and nevertheless knows by the natural light that God exists, along with the other things we have mentioned, and who also has the true way of living, is wholly blessed—indeed more blessed than the common people, because besides true opinions he also has a clear and distinct concept. V 41 Finally, it follows that whoever is ignorant of these histories of Scripture and knows nothing by the natural light is, if not impious or obstinate, still less than human and almost a beast, and has no gift of God. But it should be noted here that when we say knowledge of the histories is supremely necessary for the common people, we do not mean knowledge of absolutely all the histories contained in Holy Scripture. We mean only the principal ones—those that by themselves, without the rest, show most evidently the doctrine we have just stated, and can most move people's minds. V 42 For suppose all the histories of Scripture were necessary to prove its doctrine, and no conclusion could be drawn except from a comprehensive consideration of absolutely all the histories it contains. Then surely the demonstration and conclusion of its doctrine would exceed not only the understanding and powers of the people, but human understanding and powers altogether.

For who could attend at once to so great a number of histories, and to all the circumstances and parts of a doctrine that would have to be drawn from so many and such diverse histories? V 43 I at least cannot persuade myself that the men who left us Scripture as we have it were so richly gifted that they could work out such a demonstration. Much less can I believe that the doctrine of Scripture could not be understood without hearing about Isaac's quarrels, the counsels Ahithophel gave Absalom, the civil war between the Jews and the Israelites, and other chronicles of this kind; or that the doctrine could not be demonstrated from the histories as easily to the first Jews, who lived in the time of Moses, as to those who lived in the time of Ezra. But more on this later. V 44 The common people, then, are bound to know only those histories that can most move their minds to obedience and devotion.[12] But the common people themselves are not well suited to judge these histories, since they take more delight in the stories, and in the strange and unexpected outcome of events, than in the doctrine of the histories itself. For this reason, besides reading the histories, they also need pastors, or ministers of the Church, to teach them in a way suited to the weakness of their understanding. V 45 But let us not wander from our purpose. Let us conclude what we chiefly intended to show: that faith in histories, whatever they may be, does not belong to divine law, does not of itself make people blessed, and has no usefulness except with regard to doctrine—the only respect in which some histories can be better than others. V 46 The narratives contained in the Old and New Testaments, then, are better than other, secular ones, and better than one another, in proportion to the salutary opinions that follow from them. So suppose someone reads the histories of Holy Scripture and believes them in every detail, yet pays no attention to the doctrine Scripture means to teach by them and does not amend his life. For him it is just the same as if he had read the Qur'an, or the stage plays of

12 Isaac's disputes with the herdsmen of Gerar over wells are told in Genesis 26; Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom during his revolt against David, in 2 Samuel 16–17.

the poets, or at any rate ordinary chronicles, with the kind of attention the common people usually give. Conversely, as we have said, someone who is wholly ignorant of them and nevertheless has salutary opinions and a true way of living is absolutely blessed, and truly has the Spirit of Christ in him. V 47 But the Jews think quite the opposite. They maintain that true opinions and a true way of living are of no use for blessedness as long as people embrace them by the natural light alone, and not as teachings prophetically revealed to Moses. Maimonides dares to state this openly in these words, in chapter 8 of the Laws of Kings, law 11: *Everyone who takes upon himself*[13] *the seven commandments and diligently carries them out is one of the pious of the nations and an heir of the world to come—that is, if he takes them on and carries them out because God commanded them in the law and revealed to us through Moses that they had previously been commanded to the children of Noah. But if he carries them out led by reason, he is not a resident, nor one of the pious, nor one of the wise of the nations.*[14] V 48 These are the words of Maimonides. To them Rabbi Joseph ben Shem Tov, in his book called *Kevod Elohim*, or *The Glory of God*, adds the following. Aristotle, whom he thinks wrote the highest ethics and whom he esteems above everyone else, omitted nothing that pertains to true ethics—which he also embraced in his *Ethics*—and diligently carried it all out. Even so, this could not help him toward salvation, because he did not embrace what he teaches as divine teachings prophetically revealed, but solely by the dictate of reason.[15] V 49 But I think it is clear enough to anyone who reads this attentively that all this is mere fiction, supported by no reasons and by no authority of Scripture; so to refute it, it is enough to have reported it. Nor do

13 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note that the Jews think God gave Noah seven commandments, and that all nations are bound by these alone, but that he gave the Hebrew nation a great many others besides, to make it more blessed than the rest.

14 From Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 8:11. "Resident" renders the Hebrew *ger toshav*, a non-Jew living among Jews who keeps the Noahide commandments.

15 Joseph ben Shem Tov (fifteenth century), Spanish Jewish philosopher; his *Kevod Elohim* (1442) compares Aristotle's ethics with the teaching of the Torah.

I intend here to refute the view of those who maintain that the natural light can teach nothing sound about what pertains to true salvation. For they grant themselves no sound reason, and so they cannot prove this by any reason either. And if they boast of having something above reason, it is mere fiction and far below reason, as their usual way of life has already shown well enough. But there is no need to speak more openly about this. V 50 I will add only this: we can know no one except by their works. So whoever abounds in these fruits—charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control, against which, as Paul says in Galatians 5:22, there is no law—whether taught by reason alone or by Scripture alone, has truly been taught by God and is wholly blessed. With this I have completed everything I had resolved to treat concerning divine law.

CHAPTER 6: OF MIRACLES

The common people think God shows himself most when nature seems to break its order.

VI 1 Just as people are accustomed to call knowledge that surpasses human understanding divine, so they call any work whose cause the common people do not know divine, or a work of God. For the common people think that God's power and providence are most clearly evident when they see something happen in nature that is unusual and contrary to the opinion they have formed of nature from habit—especially if it turns out to their profit or advantage. They think nothing proves God's existence more clearly than nature's failing, as they suppose, to keep its order. That is why they think that all who explain things and miracles through natural causes, or try to understand them that way, are doing away with God, or at least with God's providence. VI 2 They suppose, of course, that God does nothing as long as nature acts in its usual order, and conversely that the power of nature and natural causes are idle as long as God acts. So they imagine two powers numerically distinct from each other: the power of God and the power of natural things—the latter, how-

ever, determined by God in a certain way, or (as most people nowadays rather hold) created by him. VI 3 But what they understand by either power, and what they understand by God and Nature, they certainly do not know—except that they imagine God's power as the rule of some royal majesty, and nature's power as a kind of force and impetus. So the common people call unusual works of nature miracles, or works of God. Partly from devotion, and partly from a desire to oppose those who cultivate the natural sciences, they want to know nothing of the natural causes of things; they are eager to hear only what they least understand and therefore most marvel at. VI 4 That is, they can worship God and refer everything to his rule and will only by doing away with natural causes and imagining things outside the order of nature; and they never marvel more at God's power than when they imagine the power of nature as if subdued by God. This seems to have begun with the earliest Jews. The pagans of their time worshiped visible gods: the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, Water, Air, and so on. To prove those pagans wrong, and to show them that their gods were weak and inconstant, or changeable, and subject to the rule of an invisible God, the Jews told of their own miracles. Through these miracles they also tried to show that the whole of nature was directed, by the command of the God they worshiped, for their benefit alone. People liked this so much that to this very day they have not stopped inventing miracles, so that they might be believed dearer to God than everyone else, and the final cause for which God created all things and continually directs them. VI 5 What will the folly of the common people not claim for itself? It has no sound conception of either God or nature. It confuses what pleases God with what pleases human beings. Finally, it imagines nature to be so limited that it believes man is its chief part! I have now described at sufficient length these opinions and prejudices of the common people about nature and miracles. VI 6 But to set the matter out in order, I will show: I. That nothing happens contrary to nature, but that nature maintains an eternal, fixed, and immutable order; and at the same time, what is to be understood by a mir-

acle. II. That from miracles we can know neither the essence nor the existence of God, and consequently not his providence either, but that all these are far better perceived from the fixed and immutable order of nature. III. From some examples in Scripture I will show that Scripture itself means by God's decrees and volitions, and consequently by his providence, nothing other than the very order of nature, which follows necessarily from nature's eternal laws. IV. Finally, I will discuss how Scripture's miracles should be interpreted, and the main points to be noted in the narratives of miracles. These are the principal matters that bear on the subject of this chapter, and I think they also contribute not a little to the aim of this whole work.

VI 7 The first point is easily shown from what we demonstrated in chapter 4 about divine law: namely, that everything God wills or determines involves eternal necessity and truth. VI 8 For we showed that, since God's intellect is not distinct from his will, we affirm the same thing when we say that God wills something as when we say that God understands it. Hence the same necessity by which it follows from the divine nature and perfection that God understands a thing as it is also makes it follow that he wills that thing as it is. VI 9 But since nothing is necessarily true except by the divine decree alone, it follows very clearly that the universal laws of nature are simply decrees of God, which follow from the necessity and perfection of the divine nature. If, therefore, anything happened in nature that conflicted with nature's universal laws, it would necessarily also conflict with the divine decree, the divine intellect, and the divine nature. If anyone maintained that God acts against the laws of nature, he would at the same time be forced to maintain that God acts against his own nature, and nothing could be more absurd. The same could also easily be shown from the fact that the power of nature is the divine power and force itself, and that the divine power is the very essence of God. For the present, though, I am glad to

leave this aside. VI 10 Nothing, then,[16] happens in nature that conflicts with its universal laws. Nor does anything happen that does not agree with them or does not follow from them. For whatever happens, happens by God's will and eternal decree. That is, as we have already shown, whatever happens, happens according to laws and rules that involve eternal necessity and truth. VI 11 Nature therefore always observes laws and rules that involve eternal necessity and truth, even though we do not know them all, and so it also observes a fixed and immutable order; nor does any sound reason persuade us to attribute a limited power and force to nature, or to hold that its laws apply only to certain things and not to all. For since the force and power of nature are God's own force and power, and the laws and rules of nature are God's own decrees, we must certainly believe that the power of nature is infinite, and that its laws are so broad that they extend to everything conceived by the divine intellect itself. VI 12 Otherwise, what else are we asserting but that God created nature so powerless, and gave it laws and rules so barren, that he is often forced to come to its aid anew if he wants it preserved and wants things to turn out as he wishes? I consider this utterly foreign to reason. VI 13 We have established that nothing happens in nature that does not follow from its laws, that its laws extend to everything conceived by the divine intellect itself, and finally that nature maintains a fixed and immutable order. From these points it follows very clearly that the word "miracle" can be understood only in relation to human opinions. It means nothing but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain by the example of some other familiar thing, or at least one that the person who writes or reports the miracle cannot explain in this way. VI 14 I could indeed say that a miracle is something whose cause cannot be explained from principles of natural things known by the natural light. But miracles were performed to suit the understanding of the common people, who were wholly ignorant of the principles of natural things. So

16 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note that by Nature I here mean not only matter and its affections but, besides matter, infinitely many other things.

it is certain that the ancients took for a miracle whatever they could not explain in the way the common people usually explain natural things. That way is by turning to memory, in order to recall some other similar thing that they are used to imagining without wonder. For the common people think they understand a thing well enough when they do not wonder at it. VI 15 The ancients, then, and almost everyone down to the present day, have had no standard for a miracle but this. So there can be no doubt that Holy Scripture narrates as miracles many things whose causes can easily be explained from known principles of natural things. We already suggested this above in chapter 2, when we spoke of the sun standing still in the time of Joshua and going backward in the time of Ahaz. But we will deal with these matters at greater length shortly, when we discuss the interpretation of miracles, which I promised to treat in this chapter.[17]

MIRACLES CANNOT SHOW US GOD

A breach of nature's order would make us doubt God; his essence and providence are known far better from that order itself.

VI 16 Now it is time to move on to the second point, namely to show that from miracles we cannot understand God's essence, his existence, or his providence, but that, on the contrary, these are far better perceived from the fixed and immutable order of nature. To demonstrate this, I proceed as follows. VI 17 Since God's

17 See Joshua 10:12–14, and 2 Kings 20:8–11 and Isaiah 38:8, where the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz goes back in the reign of his son Hezekiah.

existence is not self-evident,[18] it must necessarily be inferred from notions whose truth is so firm and unshakable that no power can exist or be conceived by which they could be changed. At least they must appear so to us from the moment we infer God's existence from them, if we want to infer it beyond all risk of doubt. For if we could conceive that these notions could be changed by some power, whatever it might be, we would doubt their truth. Consequently we would also doubt our conclusion, namely God's existence, and we could never be certain of anything at all. VI 18 Next, we know that something agrees with nature or conflicts with it only when we have shown that it agrees or conflicts with these principles. So if we could conceive that some power (whatever it might be) could bring about something in nature that conflicts with nature, that thing would conflict with those first notions. Then either it must be rejected as absurd, or we must doubt the first notions (as we have just shown), and consequently doubt God and everything we perceive in any way at all. VI 19 So if by a miracle we mean a work that conflicts with the order of nature, miracles are far from showing us God's existence. On the contrary, they would make us doubt it, when without them we could be absolutely certain of it, namely when we know that all things follow a definite and immutable order of nature. VI 20 But suppose that a miracle is whatever cannot be explained by natural causes. This can be

18 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 6. We doubt God's existence, and consequently everything else, as long as our idea of God himself is confused rather than clear and distinct. Someone who does not properly know the nature of a triangle does not know that its three angles are equal to two right angles. In the same way, someone who conceives the divine nature confusedly does not see that existence belongs to God's nature. But for us to conceive God's nature clearly and distinctly, we must attend to certain very simple notions, which are called common notions, and link to them the things that belong to the divine nature. Only then does it become plain to us that God necessarily exists and is everywhere. At the same time it also becomes apparent that all the things we conceive involve God's nature in themselves and are conceived through it, and finally that everything we conceive adequately is true. But on these matters see the prolegomenon to the book titled *Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Spinoza's geometrical exposition of Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy* (1663), the only book he published under his own name in his lifetime.

understood in two ways. Either it has natural causes that the human intellect cannot discover, or it acknowledges no cause but God, or God's will. VI 21 But everything that happens through natural causes also happens solely through God's power and will. So in the end we must necessarily arrive at this: a miracle, whether it has natural causes or not, is a work that cannot be explained by its cause, that is, a work that exceeds human understanding. But from a work, and absolutely from anything that exceeds our understanding, we can understand nothing. For whatever we understand clearly and distinctly must become known to us either through itself or through something else that is clearly and distinctly understood through itself. VI 22 Hence from a miracle, or a work that exceeds our understanding, we can understand neither God's essence nor his existence, nor absolutely anything about God and nature. On the contrary, we know that all things are determined and ordained by God, that the operations of nature follow from God's essence, and that the laws of nature are God's eternal decrees and volitions. We must therefore conclude, without qualification, that we know God and God's will better the better we know natural things, and the more clearly we understand how they depend on their first cause and how they operate according to nature's eternal laws. VI 23 So, as far as our intellect is concerned, the works we understand clearly and distinctly have a far better right to be called works of God, and to be referred to God's will, than those of which we are wholly ignorant, however much the latter may occupy the imagination and carry people away in wonder at them. For only the works of nature that we understand clearly and distinctly make our knowledge of God more sublime and show God's will and decrees most clearly. Those who resort to God's will whenever they do not understand something are therefore simply talking nonsense. It is a ridiculous way, indeed, of confessing one's ignorance. VI 24 Further, even if we could infer something from miracles, God's existence could in no way be inferred from them. For since a miracle is a limited work and never expresses anything but a definite and limited power, it is

certain that from such an effect we cannot infer the existence of a cause whose power is infinite. At most we can infer a cause whose power is greater. I say "at most" because many causes acting together can also produce a work whose force and power is less than the power of all those causes combined, but far greater than the power of each single cause. VI 25 But the laws of nature (as we have already shown) extend to infinitely many things and are conceived by us under a certain aspect of eternity, and nature proceeds according to them in a definite and immutable order. To that extent, those laws do in some way indicate to us God's infinity, eternity, and immutability. VI 26 We conclude, then, that we cannot know God, or his existence and providence, through miracles, but that these are far better inferred from the fixed and immutable order of nature. In this conclusion I am speaking of a miracle insofar as nothing is meant by it but a work that exceeds human understanding, or is believed to. For if it were supposed to destroy or interrupt the order of nature, or to conflict with nature's laws, then to that extent (as we have just shown) it could give us no knowledge of God at all. On the contrary, it would take away the knowledge we naturally have and make us doubt God and everything else. VI 27 Nor do I recognize any difference here between a work contrary to nature and a work above nature. By the latter some mean a work that does not conflict with nature but that nature cannot produce or bring about. A miracle happens not outside nature but within nature itself. So even if it is held to be above nature, it must still interrupt the order of nature, which we otherwise conceive as fixed and immutable through God's decrees. VI 28 If, then, anything happened in nature that did not follow from its laws, it would necessarily conflict with the order that God has established in nature for all eternity through the universal laws of nature. It would therefore be contrary to nature and its laws. Consequently, believing in it would make us doubt everything and lead us to atheism. VI 29 With this, I think, I have shown by sufficiently firm reasons what I set out to show in the second place. From these reasons we can conclude once again that a miracle,

whether contrary to nature or above nature, is a sheer absurdity. Therefore, by a miracle in Holy Scripture nothing can be meant but a work of nature that, as we have said, exceeds human understanding or is believed to exceed it.

VI 30 Now, before I go on to the third point, I would like to confirm this view of ours, that we cannot know God from miracles, by the authority of Scripture. Scripture nowhere teaches this openly, but it can easily be inferred from Scripture. It follows above all from the fact that Moses (Deuteronomy 13) commands the people to condemn to death a prophet who leads them astray, even though he performs miracles. VI 31 For he says: and (even if) *the sign and wonder that he foretold to you should come to pass, etc., do not* (nevertheless) *assent to the words of that prophet, etc., because the Lord your God is testing you, etc. That prophet* (therefore) *shall be condemned to death*, etc. From this it clearly follows that miracles can be performed even by false prophets. It also follows that people who are not well fortified by the true knowledge and love of God can be led by miracles to embrace false gods just as easily as the true one. For Moses adds: *because Jehovah your God is testing you, to know whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.* VI 32 Again, the Israelites were unable to form any sound conception of God from all those miracles, as experience itself showed. When they persuaded themselves that Moses had left them, they asked Aaron for visible gods. A calf—for shame!—was the idea of God they finally formed from so many miracles. VI 33 Asaph had heard of so many miracles, yet he doubted God's providence. He would almost have turned aside from the true path had he not finally understood true blessedness (see Psalm 73).[19] Solomon too, in whose time the affairs of the Jews were at their height, suspects that everything happens by chance. See Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 and 9:2–3, etc. VI 34 Finally, almost all the prophets found one question very obscure: how the order of nature and the course of human affairs could agree with the conception they had formed of God's

19 The golden calf is told in Exodus 32. Asaph, a temple musician under David, is named in the heading of Psalm 73.

providence. Yet this has always been perfectly clear to philosophers, who try to understand things not from miracles but from clear conceptions. These are the people who place true happiness in virtue alone and in peace of mind, and who strive not to make nature obey them but, on the contrary, to obey nature themselves. They know for certain that God directs nature as its universal laws require, not as the particular laws of human nature require. And so they know that God takes account not of the human race alone, but of the whole of nature.[20] VI 35 It is therefore established from Scripture itself as well that miracles do not give true knowledge of God and do not clearly teach God's providence. Scripture often says that God performed wonders in order to make himself known to people. In Exodus 10:2, for example, God made sport of the Egyptians and gave signs of himself so that the Israelites might know that he was God. But it does not follow that miracles really teach this. It follows only that the Jews held opinions that made them easy to convince by those miracles. VI 36 For above, in chapter 2, we showed clearly that prophetic arguments, or those formed from revelation, are drawn not from universal and common notions. They are drawn from the assumptions, however absurd, and the opinions of those to whom things are revealed, or whom the Holy Spirit wishes to convince. We illustrated this with many examples, and also with the testimony of Paul, who was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews. VI 37 Those miracles could convince the Egyptians and the Jews on the basis of what they already accepted, but they could not give a true idea and knowledge of God. They could only make them grant two things. First, that there exists a deity more powerful than all the things known to them. Second, that this deity cared for the Hebrews above all others, since at that time everything had turned out for them most happily, beyond all hope. They could not make them grant that God cares for all equally, for this only philosophy can teach. VI 38 That is why the Jews persuaded themselves that they were dearer to God than others, as did all who have

20 Ecclesiastes was traditionally ascribed to Solomon.

come to know God's providence only from the unequal condition of human affairs and the uneven fortunes of human beings. Yet the Jews did not surpass the others in true human perfection, as we have already shown in chapter 3.

SCRIPTURE'S GOD WORKS THROUGH NATURE

Rainbows, winds and plagues show that Scripture's decrees of God are the ordinary workings of nature.

VI 39 I go on, then, to the third point. I will show from Scripture that God's decrees and commands, and consequently his providence, are in reality nothing but the order of nature. That is, when Scripture says that this or that was done by God or by God's will, it really means nothing other than that it was done according to the laws and order of nature. It does not mean, as the common people think, that nature stopped acting for that time, or that its order was interrupted for a while. VI 40 But Scripture does not directly teach things that do not bear on its doctrine, since it is not its business (as we showed concerning divine law) to teach things through natural causes, or to teach purely speculative matters. So what we want here must be drawn by inference from certain narratives in Scripture that happen to be told at greater length and with more detail. I will therefore bring forward a few of these. VI 41 1 Samuel 9:15–16 relates that God revealed to Samuel that he would send Saul to him. Yet God did not send Saul to Samuel in the way people usually send one person to another. This sending by God was nothing other than the order of nature itself. As that chapter relates, Saul was looking for the donkeys he had lost. He was already thinking of going home without them when, on his servant's advice, he went to the prophet Samuel to learn from him where he might find them. Nothing in the whole narrative shows that Saul had any command from God to go to Samuel other than this order of nature. VI 42 Psalm 105:24 says that God changed the hearts of the Egyptians so that they hated the Israelites. This change too was entirely natural, as is clear from Exodus 1, which

gives a weighty reason that moved the Egyptians to reduce the Israelites to slavery. VI 43 In Genesis 9:13 God tells Noah that he will set a rainbow in the cloud. This action of God is surely nothing other than the refraction and reflection that the sun's rays undergo in droplets of water. In Psalm 147:18 the natural action and warmth of the wind, by which frost and snow melt, is called the word of God, and in verse 15 wind and cold are called God's saying and word. In Psalm 104:4 wind and fire are called God's messengers and ministers. Many other things of this kind are found in Scripture, and they show most clearly that God's decree, command, saying, and word are nothing other than the action and order of nature itself. VI 44 So there can be no doubt that everything narrated in Scripture happened naturally. It is nevertheless referred to God because, as we have already shown, it is not Scripture's business to teach things through natural causes. Its business is only to narrate things that powerfully occupy the imagination, and to do so by the method and in the style best suited to make people marvel at things and so to impress devotion on the minds of the common people. VI 45 So if we find things in Holy Scripture whose causes we cannot explain, and which seem to have happened beyond, or even contrary to, the order of nature, they should not hold us up. We must firmly believe that whatever really happened, happened naturally. This is also confirmed by the fact that miracles involved a number of attendant circumstances, even though these are not always narrated, especially when the miracles are sung in poetic style. The circumstances of miracles, I say, clearly show that miracles require natural causes. VI 46 For instance, for the Egyptians to be afflicted with boils, Moses had to toss ashes up into the air (see Exodus 9:10). The locusts, too, came into the land of Egypt by a natural command of God, namely an east wind that blew for a whole day and night, and they left it by a very strong west wind (see Exodus 10:14, 19). By the same command of God the sea opened a way for the Jews (see Exodus 14:21), namely by an east wind that blew very strongly all night. VI 47 Again, to revive a boy who was believed dead, Elisha had to

lie on the boy several times, until the boy first grew warm and finally opened his eyes (see 2 Kings 4:34–35). So too in the Gospel of John 9, certain circumstances are recounted that Christ made use of to heal the blind man. Many other such things are found in Scripture, and all of them show clearly enough that miracles require something other than God's absolute command, as they call it. VI 48 So we must believe that, even though the circumstances of miracles and their natural causes are not always recounted, or not all of them, miracles nonetheless did not happen without them. This is also clear from Exodus 14:27, which relates only that the sea swelled back at a mere nod from Moses, and makes no mention of any wind. Yet the Song (Exodus 15:10) says that this happened because God blew with his wind (that is, a very strong wind). So this circumstance is left out of the narrative, and for that reason the miracle seems greater. VI 49 But perhaps someone will object that we find a great many things in Scripture that seem in no way explicable through natural causes. Examples are that people's sins and prayers can cause rain and the fertility of the earth, or that faith could heal the blind, and other things of this kind narrated in the Bible. But I think I have already answered this. For I have shown that Scripture does not teach things through their proximate causes. It only narrates them in the order and in the phrases by which it can most move human beings, and especially the people, to devotion. For this reason it speaks about God and about things very improperly, since its aim is not to convince reason but to affect and occupy people's fancy and imagination. VI 50 For if Scripture narrated the devastation of some state in the way political historians usually do, it would not stir the people at all. It stirs them greatly, by contrast, if it paints everything poetically and refers it to God, as it usually does. So when Scripture relates that the land is barren because of people's sins, or that the blind were healed through faith, these things should impress us no more than when it relates that God is angered by people's sins, grieves, and repents of the good he promised and did. The same holds when it says that God remembers his prom-

ise on seeing a sign, and of a great many other things that are either said poetically or reported according to the writer's opinions and prejudices. VI 51 Here, then, we conclude absolutely that everything Scripture truly narrates as having happened happened necessarily, as all things do, according to the laws of nature. If anything is found that can be demonstrated apodictically to conflict with the laws of nature, or to be such that it could not have followed from them, we must believe without reservation that it was added to Holy Scripture by sacrilegious men. For whatever is contrary to nature is contrary to reason, and what is contrary to reason is absurd and must therefore be rejected.

HOW TO READ A MIRACLE STORY

Narrators mix their own opinions and Hebrew figures of speech into events; Joshua's long day is an example.

VI 52 It remains only to note a few more points about the interpretation of miracles, or rather to gather them together, since the main ones have already been stated. I will also illustrate them with an example or two, as I promised to do here in the fourth place. I want to do this so that no one, by misinterpreting some miracle, may rashly suspect that he has found something in Scripture that conflicts with the natural light. VI 53 It very rarely happens that people narrate something simply, just as it happened, without mixing any of their own judgment into the narrative. Indeed, when they see or hear something new, they will usually be so taken over by their preconceived opinions, unless they guard carefully against them, that they perceive something quite different from what they see or hear has happened. This is especially so if the event exceeds the grasp of the narrator or the hearer, and most of all if it matters to his interests that it should happen in a certain way. VI 54 This is why people narrate their own opinions in their chronicles and histories more than the events themselves. It is also why one and the same event is narrated so differently by two people with different opinions that they seem to be speaking of two events. And

finally, it is why it is often not very hard to discover the opinions of a chronicler or historian from his histories alone. I could bring many examples to confirm this, both from philosophers who have written natural history and from chroniclers, if I did not think it superfluous. From Holy Scripture I shall cite only one, and the reader may judge the rest for himself. VI 55 In Joshua's time the Hebrews, like the common people (as we noted above), believed that the sun moves with what is called a daily motion and that the earth stands still. To this preconceived opinion they adapted the miracle that happened to them when they fought against those five kings. They did not simply narrate that that day was longer than usual. They said that the sun and moon stood still, or ceased from their motion. At that time this could also be of no small use to them in convincing the pagans, who worshiped the sun, and in proving by experience itself that the sun is under the rule of another deity, at whose nod it is bound to change its natural order. VI 56 So, partly from religion and partly from preconceived opinions, they conceived and narrated the event very differently from the way it could really have happened. Therefore, to interpret the miracles of Scripture and to understand from their narratives how they really happened, we need to know the opinions of those who first narrated them and left them to us in writing. We also need to distinguish those opinions from what their senses could have presented to them. Otherwise we shall confuse their opinions and judgments with the miracle itself as it really happened. And knowing their opinions matters for another reason too: it keeps us from confusing things that really happened with imaginary things that were only prophetic representations. VI 57 For Scripture narrates many things as real, and they were even believed to be real, which were nonetheless only representations and imaginary things. For instance, it says that God (the supreme being) came down from heaven (see Exodus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 5: 19), that Mount Sinai smoked because God had come down upon it surrounded by fire, and that Elijah ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot with fiery horses. All these were surely only representa-

tions, adapted to the opinions of those who handed them down to us as they had been represented to them, namely as actual events. VI 58 For everyone who is even a little wiser than the common people knows that God has no right hand or left. He neither moves nor rests, nor is he in a place. He is absolutely infinite, and all perfections are contained in him. These things, I say, are known by those who judge things by the perceptions of the pure intellect, and not as the imagination is affected by the external senses, which is how the common people judge. That is why the common people imagine God as corporeal and holding royal power. They picture his throne in the vault of heaven above the stars, and they believe the stars to be not very far from the earth. A great many episodes in Scripture have been adapted to these and similar opinions (as we have said), and so philosophers ought not to take them as real. VI 59 Finally, to understand miracles as they really happened, it matters to know the Hebrews' phrases and figures of speech. Anyone who does not pay enough attention to them will ascribe to Scripture many miracles that its writers never thought of narrating. He will thus be completely ignorant not only of the events and miracles as they really happened, but also of the meaning of the authors of the sacred books. VI 60 For example, Zechariah 14: 7, speaking of a future war, says: *and there will be one single day, known only to God, neither* (for it will be) *day nor night; but at evening time there will be light*. With these words he seems to foretell a great miracle. Yet he means nothing more by them than that the battle will be undecided all day, its outcome known only to God, and that at evening they will win the victory. For the prophets used to foretell and describe the victories and defeats of nations in similar phrases. VI 61 So we see Isaiah, who in chapter 13 depicts the devastation of Babylon in this way: *for the stars of heaven and its constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened at its rising, and the moon will not send forth the brightness of its light*. I do not think anyone believes that these things happened at the devastation of that state, any more than what he adds shortly after: *therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be*

moved from its place. VI 62 So too Isaiah, in chapter 48, in the next-to-last verse, wishing to signify to the Jews that they would return safely from Babylon to Jerusalem and would not suffer thirst on the way, says: *and they did not thirst; he led them through the deserts; he made water flow from the rock for them; he split the rock, and the waters gushed out*. By these words, I say, he means nothing more than that the Jews would find springs in the deserts, as happens, to relieve their thirst. For when they set out for Jerusalem with the consent of Cyrus, it is agreed that no such miracles happened to them. VI 63 A great many things of this kind occur in Holy Scripture which were merely ways of speaking among the Jews, and there is no need to review them all here one by one. I would only have this noted in general: the Hebrews were accustomed to use these phrases not only to speak ornately but also, and indeed above all, to speak devoutly. This is why Holy Scripture says *to bless God* in place of *to curse* (see 1 Kings 1:10 and Job 2:9). For the same reason they referred everything to God, and that is why Scripture seems to narrate nothing but miracles, even when it speaks of the most natural things. We have already given several examples of this above. So we must believe that when Scripture says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it means nothing more than that Pharaoh was obstinate. And when it says that God opens the windows of heaven, it means nothing more than that a great deal of rain fell, and so on.[21] VI 64 Anyone who pays proper attention to these points, and to the fact that many things are narrated very briefly, without any circumstances, and almost in mutilated form, will find almost nothing in Scripture that can be demonstrated to conflict with the natural light. On the contrary, with moderate reflection he will be able to understand and easily interpret many things that have seemed very obscure.

With this I think I have shown clearly enough what I set out to show. VI 65 But before I end this chapter, there is something else I want to point out here. On miracles I have proceeded by an

21 The passage meant is 1 Kings 21:10, 13, where Naboth is falsely accused of having "blessed" God, a euphemism for cursing.

entirely different method from the one I followed on prophecy. On prophecy I affirmed nothing except what I could conclude from foundations revealed in Holy Scripture. Here, by contrast, I have drawn the main points solely from principles known by the natural light, and I did so deliberately. Prophecy surpasses human grasp, and the question is purely theological. So I could affirm nothing about it, or even know what it chiefly consisted in, except from revealed foundations. I was therefore compelled at that point to put together a history of prophecy and to form from it certain doctrines that would teach me, as far as possible, the nature of prophecy and its properties. VI 66 But here, concerning miracles, I needed nothing of the kind, since what we are investigating is plainly philosophical: namely, whether we can grant that something happens in nature that conflicts with its laws, or that could not follow from them. Indeed, I thought it wiser to unravel this question from foundations known by the natural light, as being the best known. I say I thought it wiser, because I could also have easily solved it from the doctrines and foundations of Scripture alone. To make this clear to everyone, I shall show it here briefly. VI 67 In some places Scripture affirms of nature in general that it keeps a fixed and immutable order, as in Psalm 148:6 and Jeremiah 31:35–36. Moreover, in his Ecclesiastes 1:10 the Philosopher teaches very clearly that nothing new happens in nature, and in verses[22] 11–12, illustrating the same point, he says that although something sometimes happens that seems new, it is not new. It happened in ages that went before, of which there is no memory. For, as he says, there is no memory of those of old among people today, nor will there be any memory of people today among those who come after. VI 68 Next, in 3:11 he says that God has duly ordered all things for their time, and in verse 14 he says he knows that whatever God does will endure forever, and that nothing can be added to it or taken away from it. All of this teaches most clearly that nature keeps a fixed and immutable order. It teaches that God has been the same in all

22 "The Philosopher" is Solomon, traditionally regarded as the author of Ecclesiastes.

ages, both those known and those unknown to us, and that the laws of nature are so perfect and fruitful that nothing can be added to them or taken from them. Finally, it teaches that miracles seem something new only because of human ignorance. VI 69 These things, then, are expressly taught in Scripture. But nowhere does it teach that something happens in nature that conflicts with its laws or cannot follow from them, and so this should not be ascribed to Scripture either. Add to this that miracles require causes and circumstances (as we have already shown). They follow not from some royal command or other, such as the common people ascribe to God, but from the divine command and decree—that is (as we have also shown from Scripture itself), from the laws of nature and its order. And finally, miracles can also be performed by deceivers, as is proved from Deuteronomy 13 and Matthew 24:24. VI 70 From all this it follows most evidently that miracles were natural events. They must therefore be explained so that they seem neither new (to use Solomon's word) nor contrary to nature, but, as far as possible, as close as can be to natural things. And so that everyone can do this more easily, I have set out certain rules drawn from Scripture alone. VI 71 Still, although I say that Scripture teaches these things, I do not mean that it teaches them as doctrines necessary to salvation. I mean only that the prophets embraced them, just as we have. Everyone is therefore free to think about them as he judges best for himself, so that he may take up the worship of God and religion with his whole heart. VI 72 Josephus thinks so too, for he writes as follows at the end of Book 2 of the *Antiquities*:[23] *Let no one disbelieve the word "miracle" if to people of old, free of malice, a way of salvation was opened through the sea, whether by the will of God or of its own accord. For those too who were once with Alexander, king of Macedon, found that the Pamphylian Sea, which of old resisted, was divided; and when there was no other* way, *it gave them passage, by God's will, to destroy through it the rule of the Persians. And all who have written of Alex-*

23 Flavius Josephus (AD 37–c. 100), Jewish historian, author of the *Jewish Antiquities*.

ander's deeds admit this. Concerning these things, then, let each think as he pleases. These are Josephus's words, and this is his judgment on belief in miracles.[24]

24 In 333 BC Alexander the Great's army marched along the coast of Pamphylia (southern Asia Minor), where the sea was said to have drawn back to let it pass.

Chapters 7–10

Reading the Bible
A method for interpreting Scripture, and who really wrote the books of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 7: OF THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture must be interpreted as nature is: from its own history, not from reason or tradition.

VII 1 Everyone says, of course, that Holy Scripture is the word of God, which teaches people true blessedness, or the way of salvation. But their actions show something quite different. For the common people seem to care about nothing less than living by the teachings of Holy Scripture. And we see almost everyone peddling their own inventions as the word of God, and striving for nothing except to compel others, under the pretext of religion, to think as they do. VII 2 We see, I say, that theologians have mostly been concerned with how to wring their own fictions and opinions out of Holy Scripture and fortify them with divine authority. There is nothing they do with less scruple and greater rashness than interpret the Scriptures, or the mind of the Holy Spirit. And if anything worries them while they do it, it is not the fear of ascribing some error to the Holy Spirit and straying from the way of salvation. It is the fear of being convicted of error by others, so that their own authority would be trampled underfoot and they would be held in contempt. VII 3 If people sincerely meant what they profess in words about Scripture, they would live in an entirely different way. Their minds would not be troubled by so many quarrels. They would not fight one another with so much hatred. Nor would they be gripped by so

blind and rash a desire to interpret Scripture and to devise novelties in religion. On the contrary, they would not dare to embrace anything as the teaching of Scripture that Scripture itself did not teach them as clearly as possible. And finally, those sacrilegious people who have not shrunk from corrupting Scripture in a great many places would have guarded most carefully against so great a crime, and would have kept their sacrilegious hands off it. VII 4 But ambition and wickedness have at last become so powerful that religion is placed not so much in obeying the teachings of the Holy Spirit as in defending human inventions. Indeed, religion has come to consist not in charity but in spreading discord among people and propagating the bitterest hatred, which they disguise under the false name of divine zeal and ardent devotion. To these evils was added superstition, which teaches people to despise reason and nature, and to admire and venerate only what is contrary to both. VII 5 So it is no wonder that people, in order to admire and venerate Scripture all the more, try to explain it so that it seems as contrary as possible to these two, reason and nature. That is why they dream that the most profound mysteries lie hidden in Holy Scripture. They wear themselves out investigating them—that is, investigating absurdities—while neglecting everything else that is useful. Whatever they invent in this delirium they ascribe wholly to the Holy Spirit, and they try to defend it with the utmost force and with all the violence of their affects. For this is how people are made: whatever they conceive by pure intellect, they defend by intellect and reason alone; whatever, on the other hand, they believe because of the affects of the mind, they defend by those same affects. VII 6 We want to extricate ourselves from these disorders, to free the mind from theological prejudices, and not to embrace human fictions rashly as divine teachings. To that end we must deal with the true method of interpreting Scripture and discuss it. For without knowing this method we can know nothing for certain about what Scripture, or the Holy Spirit, means to teach. To put it briefly here, I say that the method of interpreting Scripture does not differ from

the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it entirely. VII 7 The method of interpreting nature consists chiefly in putting together a history of nature, from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things. In just the same way, to interpret Scripture we must prepare a faithful history of it, and from this, as from certain data and principles, infer the mind of the authors of Scripture by legitimate inferences. VII 8 For in this way everyone will always proceed without any danger of error—provided, of course, that he admits no other principles or data for interpreting Scripture and discussing what it contains than those drawn from Scripture itself and its history. He will be able to discuss things that surpass our grasp just as safely as things we know by the natural light. VII 9 This way is not only certain but also the only one, and it agrees with the method of interpreting nature. To make that clear, we should note that Scripture very often deals with things that cannot be deduced from principles known by the natural light. For the greatest part of it is made up of historical narratives and revelations. VII 10 The narratives consist mainly of miracles, that is (as we showed in the previous chapter), accounts of unusual things in nature, adapted to the opinions and judgments of the historians who wrote them. The revelations, too, were adapted to the opinions of the prophets, as we showed in the second chapter, and they genuinely surpass human grasp. Therefore knowledge of all these things—that is, of almost everything contained in Scripture—must be sought from Scripture alone, just as knowledge of nature must be sought from nature itself. VII 11 As for the moral teachings that the Bible also contains, they can indeed be demonstrated from common notions. But it cannot be demonstrated from those notions that Scripture teaches them. That can be established only from Scripture itself. Indeed, if we want to testify to the divinity of Scripture without prejudice, it must be established for us from Scripture alone that it teaches true moral teachings. For only from this can its divinity be demonstrated. We have shown that the certainty of the prophets was established chiefly by the fact that they had minds inclined to

what is right and good. So this same thing must also be established for us, if we are to put our faith in them. VII 12 And we have already shown that God's divinity cannot be proved from miracles—to say nothing of the fact that miracles could also be performed by a false prophet. Therefore the divinity of Scripture must be established from this alone: that it teaches true virtue. But this can be established only from Scripture. If it could not, we would be embracing Scripture and testifying to its divinity out of great prejudice. So all knowledge of Scripture must be sought from Scripture alone. VII 13 Finally, Scripture does not give definitions of the things it speaks about, any more than nature does. So just as the definitions of natural things must be inferred from the various operations of nature, these definitions must likewise be drawn out from the various narratives about each thing that occur in the Scriptures. VII 14 The universal rule for interpreting Scripture, then, is to attribute nothing to Scripture as its teaching that we have not perceived with the utmost clarity from its history. What sort of history this must be, and what it must chiefly relate, I must now explain.

WHAT THE HISTORY OF SCRIPTURE MUST CONTAIN

The language, the themes of each book, and the life and fortunes of each author and each text.

VII 15 I. It must include the nature and properties of the language in which the books of Scripture were written and which their authors usually spoke. In this way we will be able to investigate all the meanings that each passage can admit according to common usage. And since all the writers of both the Old and the New Testament were Hebrews, a history of the Hebrew language is certainly necessary above all. It is necessary not only for understanding the books of the Old Testament, which were written in this language, but also those of the New. For although these were published in other languages, their idiom is still Hebrew.

VII 16 II. It must collect the statements of each book and arrange them under main headings, so that we have at hand all the statements found on the same subject. Next it must note all those that are ambiguous or obscure, or that seem to contradict one another. Here I call statements clear or obscure according to whether their meaning is drawn from the context easily or with difficulty, not according to whether their truth is perceived by reason easily or with difficulty. For we are concerned only with the meaning of the passages, not with their truth. VII 17 Indeed, while we are seeking the meaning of Scripture, we must take special care not to let our minds be preoccupied by our own reasoning, insofar as it is founded on the principles of natural knowledge (to say nothing of prejudices). So as not to confuse the true meaning with the truth of things, the meaning must be investigated solely from the usage of the language, or from reasoning that acknowledges no other foundation than Scripture. To make all this clearer, I will illustrate it with an example. VII 18 These statements of Moses, that *God is fire* and that *God is jealous*, are as clear as can be, so long as we attend only to the meaning of the words. So I place them among the clear statements, even though with respect to truth and reason they are very obscure. Indeed, even though their literal meaning conflicts with the natural light, that literal meaning must still be retained, unless it is also clearly opposed to the principles and foundations drawn from the history of Scripture. Conversely, if these statements, taken literally, were found to conflict with principles drawn from Scripture, then however well they agreed with reason, they would still have to be interpreted otherwise (that is, metaphorically).[1] VII 19 So, to know whether or not Moses believed that God is fire, we must in no way infer it from whether this opinion agrees with reason or conflicts with it. We must infer it only from other statements of Moses himself. Moses also clearly teaches in many places that God has no likeness to visible things in the heavens, on the earth, or in the water. From this we must conclude that

1 Both phrases come from Deuteronomy 4:24: "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

either this statement or all those others must be explained metaphorically. VII 20 But since we must depart from the literal meaning as little as possible, we must first ask whether this single statement, *God is fire*, admits any meaning other than the literal one—that is, whether the word *fire* signifies anything other than natural fire. If usage showed that the word signifies nothing else, then this statement could not be interpreted in any other way either, however much it conflicts with reason. On the contrary, all the other statements, however consistent with reason, would have to be accommodated to it. VII 21 And if even this could not be done according to the usage of the language, then these statements would be irreconcilable, and we would have to suspend judgment about them. But the word "fire" is also used for anger and jealousy (see Job 31:12). So the statements of Moses are easily reconciled, and we legitimately conclude that these two statements, *God is fire* and *God is jealous*, are one and the same statement. VII 22 Further, Moses clearly teaches that God is jealous, and nowhere teaches that God lacks passions, or emotions of the mind. So we must plainly conclude that Moses believed this very thing, or at least wished to teach it, however much we may believe that this statement conflicts with reason. For, as we have already shown, we may not twist the mind of Scripture to fit the dictates of our reason and our preconceived opinions. All knowledge of the Bible must be sought from the Bible alone.

VII 23 III. Finally, this history must relate the circumstances of all the books of the prophets of which we have any record. It must give the life, character, and pursuits of the author of each book: who he was, on what occasion, at what time, and for whom he wrote, and finally in what language. Next, it must give the fortunes of each book: how it was first received and into whose hands it fell, how many different readings of it there have been, by whose decision it was accepted among the sacred books, and finally how all the books that everyone now acknowledges as sacred came together into one body. All this, I say, the history of Scripture must contain. VII 24 For to know which state-

ments are put forward as laws and which as moral teachings, it matters to know the life, character, and pursuits of the author. Besides, the better we know someone's temperament and cast of mind, the more easily we can explain his words. Next, so as not to confuse eternal teachings with those that could be useful only for a time or to only a few, it also matters to know on what occasion, at what time, and for what nation or age all the teachings were written. VII 25 Finally, it matters to know the other things we mentioned. Then, besides the authority of each book, we may also know whether or not it could have been defiled by corrupting hands, whether errors have crept in, and whether these have been corrected by men sufficiently skilled and trustworthy. All this is very necessary to know. Otherwise we will be carried away by blind impulse and embrace whatever is thrust upon us, instead of embracing only what is certain and beyond doubt.

VII 26 Once we have this history of Scripture, and have firmly resolved to assert nothing with certainty as the teaching of the prophets that does not follow from this history or is not drawn from it as clearly as possible, it will be time to set about investigating the mind of the prophets and of the Holy Spirit. But for this, too, we need a method and order similar to the one we use in interpreting nature from its history.

FROM THE UNIVERSAL TO THE PARTICULAR

First establish Scripture's universal teachings, then explain particular passages, as with turning the other cheek.

VII 27 In examining natural things, we try first of all to investigate the most universal things, those common to the whole of nature —namely, motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and through which it continually acts. From these we proceed step by step to other, less universal things. In the same way, we must first seek from the history of Scripture what is most universal: what is the basis and foundation of the whole of Scripture, and what, finally, all the prophets commend in it as an eternal teaching most useful to all mortals.

For example, that there exists a God, one and omnipotent, who alone is to be worshiped, who cares for all, and who loves above all those who worship him and love their neighbor as themselves, and so on. VII 28 These and similar things, I say, Scripture teaches everywhere so clearly and so explicitly that no one has ever been in doubt about its meaning on these points. But what God is, and in what way he sees all things and provides for them —these and similar things Scripture does not teach expressly, as an eternal doctrine. On the contrary, we have already shown above that the prophets themselves did not agree on these matters. So nothing on such subjects should be laid down as the teaching of the Holy Spirit, even though it can be determined very well by the natural light. VII 29 Once this universal teaching of Scripture is properly known, we must then proceed to other, less universal things. These nevertheless concern the common conduct of life and flow from this universal teaching like streams—such as all the particular outward actions of true virtue, which can be exercised only when the occasion arises. Whatever is found obscure or ambiguous about these in the Scriptures must be explained and determined from the universal teaching of Scripture. And if any passages are found that contradict one another, we must see on what occasion, at what time, or for whom they were written. VII 30 For example, when Christ says, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will receive comfort*, we do not know from this text what kind of mourners he means. But he later teaches that we should be anxious about nothing except the kingdom of God alone and its righteousness, which he commends as the highest good (see Matthew 6:[2] 33). It follows that by mourners he means only those who mourn that the kingdom of God and its righteousness are neglected by people. For only those who love nothing but the divine kingdom, or equity, and utterly despise the other gifts of fortune can mourn this. VII 31 So too when he says, *But whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also*, and what follows. If Christ were commanding this to judges, as a lawgiver, he would have destroyed

2 The beatitude is Matthew 5:4.

the law of Moses by this precept. Yet he openly warns against that (see Matthew 5:17). So we must see who said this, to whom, and at what time. VII 32 It was Christ who said it, and he did not institute laws as a lawgiver but taught teachings as a teacher, because (as we showed above) he wanted to correct not so much outward actions as the mind.[3] Moreover, he said this to oppressed people, who were living in a corrupt commonwealth where justice was utterly neglected, and whose ruin he saw to be imminent. And we see that this very thing which Christ teaches here, when the city's ruin was imminent, Jeremiah also taught at the first destruction of the city, that is, at a similar time (see Lamentations 3, letters Teth and Yod). VII 33 The prophets taught this only in times of oppression, and it was nowhere laid down as a law. Moses, on the contrary, did not write in a time of oppression, but—note this—worked to establish a good commonwealth; and although he too condemned revenge and hatred of one's neighbor, he nevertheless commanded that an eye be paid for an eye. From the foundations of Scripture alone, then, it follows very clearly that this teaching of Christ and Jeremiah about tolerating injury and yielding to the wicked in everything applies only where justice is neglected and in times of oppression, not in a good commonwealth. Indeed, in a good commonwealth, where justice is upheld, everyone who wishes to be considered just is bound to bring injuries before a judge (see Leviticus 5:1), not for revenge (see Leviticus 19:[4] 17–18), but with the intention of defending justice and the laws of his country, and so that it may not profit the wicked to be wicked. VII 34 All of this also agrees completely with natural reason. I could bring forward many other examples of this kind, but I think these suffice to explain my meaning and the usefulness of this method, which is all I am concerned with at present. Up to this point, however, we have taught how to investigate only those statements of

3 The saying about the other cheek is Matthew 5:39.

4 Lamentations 3 is an alphabetic acrostic; the stanzas under the Hebrew letters Teth and Yod are verses 25–30, which include "let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him" (3:30).

Scripture that concern the conduct of life, which can therefore be investigated more easily. For in fact there has never been any controversy about them among the writers of the Bible. VII 35 The other things that occur in the Scriptures, which belong solely to speculation, cannot be traced so easily, for the path to them is narrower. In speculative matters the prophets disagreed among themselves (as we have already shown), and the narratives of events are very much adapted to the prejudices of each age. So we are by no means permitted to infer the mind of one prophet from clearer passages of another, or to explain one by the other, unless it is established beyond all doubt that they held one and the same opinion.

VII 36 I will now explain briefly how the mind of the prophets on such matters is to be drawn out from the history of Scripture. Here too we must begin with the most universal things. Above all, we must ask, from the clearest statements of Scripture, what prophecy or revelation is, and in what it chiefly consists. Next we ask what a miracle is, and so on through the most general matters. From there we must descend to the opinions of each prophet. From these, finally, we must proceed to the meaning of each revelation or prophecy, each narrative, and each miracle. VII 37 Above, in the appropriate places, I have shown with many examples what caution we must use here, so that we do not confuse the mind of the prophets and historians with the mind of the Holy Spirit and with the truth of the matter. So I need not treat this at greater length. But one thing must be noted about the meaning of revelations. This method teaches us to investigate only what the prophets really saw or heard, not what they meant to signify or represent by those hieroglyphs. That we can guess at, but we cannot deduce it with certainty from the foundations of Scripture. VII 38 We have thus shown the way to interpret Scripture, and at the same time demonstrated that it is the only way, and the surest, to discover its true meaning. I admit, of course, that some people would be more certain of its meaning, if any such people exist: those who possess a sure tradition of it, that is, a true explanation received from the prophets them-

selves, as the Pharisees claim; or those who have a pontiff who cannot err in interpreting Scripture, as the Roman Catholics boast. VII 39 Yet since we can be certain neither of this tradition nor of the pontiff's authority, we can build nothing certain on them either. The earliest Christians denied the pontiff's authority, and the most ancient sects of the Jews denied the tradition. Other points aside, look at the series of years that the Pharisees received from their rabbis, by which they trace this tradition back to Moses. We will find that series to be false, as I show elsewhere. VII 40 Such a tradition, then, ought to be highly suspect to us. Our method does oblige us to assume that one tradition of the Jews is uncorrupted, namely the meaning of the words of the Hebrew language, which we received from them. But we doubt the other tradition, and not this one. For it could never have been of use to anyone to change the meaning of a word, though it has quite often been useful to change the sense of a passage. VII 41 Indeed, changing a word's meaning would be extremely difficult. Whoever tried it would at the same time be forced to deal with every author who wrote in that language and used that word in its accepted meaning. He would have to explain each of them according to that author's own character and mind, or else corrupt them with the greatest care. VII 42 Moreover, the common people preserve the language along with the learned, but only the learned preserve the meaning of passages and the books themselves. So we can easily conceive that the learned could have altered or corrupted the meaning of a passage in some very rare book in their keeping. They could not have done the same to the meaning of words. Add to this that someone who wanted to change the accustomed meaning of a word into another could not easily keep to the change afterward, whether speaking or writing. VII 43 For these and other reasons, then, we are easily persuaded that it could never have occurred to anyone to corrupt a language. It has often occurred to people to corrupt the mind of some writer, by altering his statements or interpreting them wrongly.

This method of ours rests on seeking knowledge of Scripture from Scripture alone, and it is the only true method. So whatever it cannot achieve toward a complete knowledge of Scripture, we must simply give up hope of. VII 44 But we must now state what difficulties the method involves, and what it still lacks if it is to lead us to a complete and certain knowledge of the sacred books. First of all, a great difficulty arises from the fact that the method requires a complete knowledge of the Hebrew language. But where is that to be found now? VII 45 The ancient students of the Hebrew language left nothing to posterity about its foundations and principles. At any rate, we have absolutely nothing from them: no dictionary, no grammar, no rhetoric. The Hebrew nation has lost all its ornaments and all its glory, which is no wonder after it has suffered so many disasters and persecutions. It has kept only a few fragments of the language and of a few books. Almost all the names of fruits, birds, fish, and a great many other things have perished through the ravages of time. Then too, the meaning of many nouns and verbs that occur in the Bible is either completely unknown or disputed. VII 46 We lack all this, and above all we lack the phraseology of the language. All-devouring time has erased from human memory nearly all the idioms and turns of speech peculiar to the Hebrew nation. So we will not always be able, as we would wish, to investigate every meaning that a passage can bear according to the usage of the language. Many passages will occur that are expressed in perfectly familiar words, yet whose meaning will be very obscure and quite incomprehensible. VII 47 We cannot have a complete history of the Hebrew language. On top of this comes the very structure and nature of the language, from which so many ambiguities arise that it is impossible to find a method[5] that would teach us to discover with certainty the true meaning of every passage of Scripture. Besides the causes of ambiguity common to all languages, this language has others of its own,

5 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 7. That is, impossible for us, who are not accustomed to this language and lack its phraseology.

which give rise to a great many ambiguities. I think it worthwhile to note them here.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE METHOD

Hebrew's ambiguities and the lost history of the books leave much of Scripture uncertain, though never its moral teaching.

VII 48 The first frequent cause of ambiguity and obscurity in the passages of the Bible is that letters of the same organ are used one for another. The Hebrews divide all the letters of the alphabet into five classes, according to the five instruments of the mouth used in pronunciation: the lips, the tongue, the teeth, the palate, and the throat. For example, א ח ע ה, alpha, ghet, hgain, he, are called gutturals. They are used one for another without any distinction, or at least without any distinction known to us. Thus אל *el*, which means "to," is often used for על *hgal*, which means "upon," and vice versa. As a result, every part of a sentence is often made either ambiguous or like sounds that have no meaning.

VII 49 The second cause of ambiguity in passages is the multiple meanings of conjunctions and adverbs. For example, ו *vau* serves indiscriminately to join and to separate, and it means "and," "but," "because," "however," "then." כי *ki* has seven or eight meanings: "because," "although," "if," "when," "just as," "that," "burning," and so on. And so it is with almost all the particles.

VII 50 The third cause is the source of many ambiguities. In the indicative, verbs lack the present, the imperfect, the pluperfect, the future perfect, and other tenses that are very common in other languages. In the imperative and infinitive they lack every tense except the present, and in the subjunctive they lack all tenses altogether. All these gaps in tense and mood could easily, and indeed very elegantly, be filled by fixed rules deduced from the foundations of the language. Yet the most ancient writers entirely neglected such rules. They used the future indiscriminately for the present and the past, and conversely the past for the future. They also used the indicative for the imperative and

the subjunctive, and this caused great ambiguity in their sentences.

VII 51 Besides these three causes of ambiguity in the Hebrew language, two others remain to be noted, each of far greater importance. The first is that the Hebrews have no vowel letters. The second is that they did not usually divide their sentences with any marks, or mark how they were to be expressed or stressed. VII 52 These two things, vowels and marks, are usually supplied by points and accents, but we cannot rely on them. They were invented and introduced by people of a later age, whose authority ought to carry no weight with us. The ancients wrote without points, that is, without vowels and accents, as many testimonies make clear. Later generations added both, according to how they saw fit to interpret the Bible. So the accents and points we now have are merely the interpretations of more recent people. They deserve no more credence or authority than the other explanations of commentators. VII 53 Those who do not know this cannot see how to excuse the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 11:21 he interpreted Genesis 47:31 very differently from the pointed Hebrew text, as if the apostle had been obliged to learn the meaning of Scripture from the punctuators! To me, certainly, it is rather the punctuators who seem to be at fault. So that everyone may see this, and see also that the discrepancy arises solely from the lack of vowels, I will set out both interpretations here. VII 54 The punctuators, by means of their points, interpreted the verse as *and Israel bowed himself upon*, or (changing ע hgain into א aleph, a letter of the same organ) *toward the head of the bed*. But the author of the epistle has *and Israel bowed himself upon the head of his staff*. He read מטה *mate* where the others read מטה *mita*, a difference that arises solely from the vowels.[6] That narrative deals only with Jacob's old age, not with his illness, as the following chapter does. So it seems more likely that the historian meant

6 The punctuators (*punctistae*) are the Masoretes, Jewish scholars of roughly the 7th–10th centuries AD who added vowel points and accents to the consonantal Hebrew text.

that Jacob bowed himself upon the head of his staff, not of his bed, since very old people need a staff to support themselves. This is all the more likely because this reading requires us to assume no substitution of letters. VII 55 With this example I wanted not only to reconcile that passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews with the text of Genesis. Above all, I wanted to show how little trust should be placed in the modern points and accents. Anyone who wants to interpret Scripture without prejudice is therefore bound to doubt them and examine them afresh.

VII 56 To return to our subject, anyone can easily infer from this structure and nature of the Hebrew language that it must give rise to so many ambiguities that no method could settle them all. We have shown that comparing passages with one another is the only way to draw out the true meaning from the many meanings each passage can bear according to the usage of the language. But there is no reason to hope that such comparison could settle them completely. First, comparing passages can shed light on a passage only by chance, since no prophet wrote with the express aim of explaining another prophet's words or his own. Second, we cannot infer the mind of one prophet, apostle, and so on, from the mind of another, except in matters concerning the conduct of life, as we have already clearly shown. We cannot do so when they speak about speculative matters, or when they narrate miracles or histories. VII 57 I could also show by some examples that the Holy Scriptures contain many passages that cannot be explained. For the present, however, I would rather pass over them. I will go on to note the remaining points: what further difficulties this true method of interpreting Scripture involves, and what it lacks.

VII 58 This method faces a further difficulty: it requires a history of what happened to every book of Scripture, and most of that history is unknown to us. For many books we either do not know the authors (or, if you prefer, the writers) at all, or we are in doubt about them, as I will show at length in what follows. Then again, we do not know on what occasion or at what time the books by these unknown writers were written. Nor do we

know into whose hands all the books fell, or in whose copies so many variant readings were found. Finally, we do not know whether other people possessed many more readings. VII 59 I indicated briefly in its place why it matters to know all this. But there I deliberately left out certain points, which must now be considered here. Suppose we read a book that contains incredible or incomprehensible things, or is written in very obscure terms. If we know neither its author nor when or on what occasion he wrote it, we will try in vain to become certain of its true meaning. VII 60 For while all this remains unknown, we cannot possibly know what the author intended or could have intended. When we do know these things well, we can direct our thoughts so that no prejudice takes hold of us. We will then attribute neither more nor less than is just to the author, or to the person for whom he wrote. We will also think only of what the author could have had in mind, or what the time and occasion required. This, I think, is plain to everyone. VII 61 It very often happens that we read very similar stories in different books and judge them very differently, according to our different opinions of their writers. I remember once reading in a certain book about a man named Orlando Furioso. He used to ride a winged monster through the air and fly over whatever regions he pleased. Single-handed, he slaughtered a huge number of men and giants. The book contained other fantasies of this kind that are entirely incomprehensible to the intellect. VII 62 I had read a very similar story about Perseus in Ovid. I had also read others in the books of Judges and Kings, about Samson, who alone and unarmed slaughtered thousands of men, and about Elijah, who flew through the air and at last went up to heaven with horses and a chariot of fire. These stories, I say, are entirely similar, yet we judge each of them very differently. We decide that the first writer meant to write nothing but trifles, the second political matters, and the third sacred ones. We persuade ourselves of this for no other reason than the opinions we hold

about their writers.[7] VII 63 It is clear, then, that if we want to interpret the writings of authors who wrote about obscure things, or things incomprehensible to the intellect, we must above all know who those authors were. For the same reasons, we need to choose the true readings from among the various readings of obscure stories. To do so, we must know in whose copy these variant readings were found. We must also know whether many other readings were ever found among other people of greater authority. VII 64 Finally, interpreting certain books of Scripture by this method meets one more difficulty: we do not have them in the language in which they were first written. According to common opinion, the Gospel according to Matthew, and no doubt the Epistle to the Hebrews as well, were written in Hebrew, yet those Hebrew texts do not survive. As for the book of Job, it is disputed in what language it was written. Ibn Ezra asserts in his commentaries that it was translated into Hebrew from another language, and that this is the cause of its obscurity. I say nothing of the apocryphal books, since their authority is of a very different kind. VII 65 These, then, are all the difficulties that I had undertaken to set out. They face this method of interpreting Scripture from such history of it as we can have. I consider them so great that I do not hesitate to affirm the following: in very many places we either do not know the true meaning of Scripture, or we can only guess at it without certainty. VII 66 But on the other hand it must be noted again that all these difficulties can only prevent us from attaining the mind of the prophets about incomprehensible things, things we can only imagine. They cannot prevent us from attaining it about things that we can also grasp with the intellect and of which we can easily form a clear

7 Spinoza is recalling Ludovico Ariosto's epic *Orlando Furioso* (1516–1532), with its winged hippogriff, and Ovid's story of Perseus in *Metamorphoses* 4–5.

concept[8]. Things that are by their nature easily perceived can never be expressed so obscurely that they are not easily understood. As the proverb says, a word to the wise is enough. VII 67 Euclid wrote only about very simple and highly intelligible things, and so anyone can easily explain him in any language. To attain his mind and be certain of his true meaning, we do not need a complete knowledge of the language in which he wrote. A very ordinary, almost schoolboy knowledge is enough. Nor do we need to know the author's life, pursuits, and character, or in what language, for whom, or when he wrote. We need not know the fortunes of the book or its various readings, or how, or by whose council, it was accepted. VII 68 What is said here of Euclid must be said of everyone who has written about things that are by their nature comprehensible. So we conclude that we can easily attain the mind of Scripture about moral teachings from such history of it as we can have, and be certain of its true meaning. The teachings of true piety are expressed in the most ordinary words, since they are very common, no less simple, and easy to understand. True salvation and blessedness consist in true contentment of mind, and we are truly content only with what we understand most clearly. VII 69 From this it follows most evidently that we can attain with certainty the mind of Scripture about the things that bring salvation and are necessary for blessedness. So there is no reason for us to be so anxious about the rest. For the most part we cannot embrace those other things with reason and intellect, and so they hold more curiosity than usefulness.

With this I think I have shown the true method of interpreting Scripture and have explained my view of it sufficiently. VII 70 I

do not doubt, moreover, that everyone now sees that this method requires no light other than the natural light itself. For the nature and power of this light consists chiefly in this: it deduces and infers, by legitimate inferences, things that are obscure from things that are known, or are given as known. Our method requires nothing more than this. We grant that the method is not sufficient to investigate with certainty everything that occurs in the Bible. But this does not arise from any defect in the method itself. It arises from the fact that the path it shows to be true and right has never been tended or trodden by anyone, and so, with the passage of time, has become very steep and almost impassable. This, I think, is abundantly clear from the very difficulties I have related.

VII 71 It remains now to examine the views of those who disagree with us. The first to be examined here is the view of those who maintain that the natural light has no power to interpret Scripture, and that what is chiefly required for this is a supernatural light. What this light beyond the natural might be, I leave to them to explain. VII 72 For my part, I can only conjecture that they too wished to confess, in more obscure terms, that they are for the most part uncertain about the true meaning of Scripture. For if we look at their explanations, we shall find that they contain nothing supernatural—indeed, that they are nothing but mere conjectures. Compare them, if you like, with the explanations of those who candidly admit that they have no light but the natural one, and they will be found to be exactly alike: human, that is, long pondered and arrived at with effort. VII 73 Their claim that the natural light is not sufficient for this is plainly false. It is

8 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 8. By comprehensible things I mean not only those that are rigorously demonstrated. I also mean those that we usually accept with moral certainty and hear without astonishment, even though they can by no means be demonstrated. Anyone grasps Euclid's propositions before they are demonstrated. In the same way, some accounts of future and past events do not go beyond what people can believe, and I call these comprehensible and clear. So too are laws, institutions, and customs, even though they cannot be demonstrated mathematically. But I call hieroglyphs incomprehensible, along with accounts that seem to go beyond all belief. Even so, many of these can be investigated by our method, so that we may perceive the author's mind.

false, first, because we have already demonstrated that the difficulty of interpreting Scripture has not arisen from any lack of power in the natural light. It has arisen only from the negligence (not to say malice) of people who neglected the history of Scripture while they could still have put it together. It is false, second, because (as everyone, unless I am mistaken, admits) this supernatural light is a divine gift granted only to the faithful. VII 74 But the prophets and apostles used to preach not only to the faithful but above all to unbelievers and the impious, who were therefore capable of understanding the meaning of the prophets and apostles. Otherwise the prophets and apostles would seem to have been preaching to little boys and infants, not to men endowed with reason. And Moses would have prescribed his laws in vain if they could be understood only by the faithful, who need no law. So those who seek a supernatural light in order to understand the meaning of the prophets and apostles seem truly to be in need of the natural light. I am therefore very far from thinking that such people possess a supernatural divine gift.

AGAINST MAIMONIDES

Maimonides bends Scripture to whatever reason proves, which would leave ordinary readers dependent on philosophers.

VII 75 Maimonides held an entirely different view. He thought that every passage of Scripture admits various, even contrary, meanings, and that we cannot be certain of the true meaning of any passage unless we know that, as we interpret it, it contains nothing that fails to agree with reason or that contradicts it. For if a passage is found, in its literal sense, to contradict reason, then however clear it may seem, he holds that it must nevertheless be interpreted otherwise. He indicates this as clearly as can be in chapter 25 of Part VII 76 II of the book *More Nebuchim* [*The Guide of the Perplexed*]. For he says: Know that it is not on account of the texts in Scripture about the creation of the world that we

shrink from saying that the world has existed from eternity.[9] For the texts that teach that the world was created are no more numerous than those that teach that God is corporeal. Nor are the ways of explaining the texts found on this matter of the world's creation closed to us, or even obstructed. We could have explained them just as we did when we removed corporeality from God. And perhaps this would have been much easier to do: we could have explained them more conveniently and established the eternity of the world than we could when we explained the Scriptures so as to remove the claim that God, blessed be he, is corporeal. But that I do not do this, and do not believe this *(namely, that the world is eternal)*, two reasons move me. First, because it is established by clear demonstration that God is not corporeal, and it is necessary to explain all those passages whose literal sense contradicts the demonstration, for it is certain that, in that case, an explanation *(other than the literal one)* necessarily exists for them. But the eternity of the world is not shown by any demonstration. So it is not necessary to do violence to the Scriptures and explain them away for the sake of a merely plausible opinion, toward the contrary of which we might incline if some reason persuaded us. The second reason is that believing God to be incorporeal does not contradict the fundamentals of the Law, etc. But to believe in the eternity of the world, in the way Aristotle thought of it, destroys the Law from its foundation, etc. VII 77 These are Maimonides' words, and from them what we just said clearly follows. For if it were established for him by reason that the world is eternal, he would not hesitate to twist and explain Scripture until in the end it seemed to teach this very thing. Indeed, he would at once be certain that Scripture, even though it everywhere openly protests against it, had nevertheless meant to teach this eternity of the world. So he cannot be certain of the true meaning of Scripture, however clear it is, as long as he can doubt the truth of the matter, or as long as that truth is not established for him. For as long as the

9 Maimonides' chief philosophical work, written in Arabic around AD 1190 and read by Spinoza in its Hebrew translation, *Moreh Nevukhim*.

truth of a thing is not established, we do not know whether it agrees with reason or contradicts it. Consequently, for just as long, we also do not know whether the literal sense is true or false. VII 78 If this view were true, I would grant without reservation that we need something besides the natural light to interpret Scripture. For almost nothing found in the Scriptures can be deduced from principles known by the natural light (as we have already shown). So nothing about the truth of these things can be established for us by the power of the natural light, and consequently nothing about the true meaning and intention of Scripture either. For this we would necessarily need another light. VII 79 Next, if this view were true, it would follow that the common people, who for the most part know nothing of demonstrations or have no time for them, could accept nothing about Scripture except on the sole authority and testimony of those who philosophize. Consequently, they would have to suppose that philosophers cannot err in interpreting Scripture. That would certainly be a new authority of the Church, and a new kind of priests or pontiffs, which the common people would laugh at rather than revere. VII 80 Our method, it is true, requires a knowledge of the Hebrew language, which the common people likewise have no time to study. But no similar objection can be raised against us. For the common people among the Jews and Gentiles, to whom the prophets and apostles once preached and wrote, understood the language of the prophets and apostles, and through it also grasped the meaning of the prophets. What they did not understand were the reasons for the things the prophets preached—which, on Maimonides' view, they would also have had to know in order to grasp the prophets' meaning. VII 81 So it does not necessarily follow from the nature of our method that the common people must rely on the testimony of interpreters. For I can point to a common people who understood the language of the prophets and apostles. Maimonides, however, will point to no common people who understood the causes of things, from which they could grasp the prophets' meaning. VII 82 As for the common people of today, we have

already shown that everything necessary for salvation, even if its reasons are unknown, can easily be grasped in any language, because it is so ordinary and familiar. It is in this grasp, and not in the testimony of interpreters, that the common people rest content. As for everything else, in these matters they share the same fortune as the learned. VII 83 But let us return to Maimonides' view and examine it more closely. First, he supposes that the prophets agreed with one another in everything and were consummate philosophers and theologians, for he holds that they drew their conclusions from the truth of the matter. But we showed in chapter 2 that this is false. VII 84 Next, he supposes that the meaning of Scripture cannot be established from Scripture itself. For the truth of things is not established from Scripture itself, since Scripture demonstrates nothing and does not teach the things it speaks of through their definitions and first causes. Hence, on Maimonides' view, its true meaning cannot be established from it either, and so must not be sought from it. But the present chapter shows that this too is false. For we have shown, both by reason and by examples, that the meaning of Scripture is established from Scripture alone, and must be sought from it alone, even when it speaks of things known by the natural light. VII 85 Finally, he supposes that we are permitted to explain and twist the words of Scripture according to our preconceived opinions, and to deny the literal sense, however obvious or explicit, and change it into any other sense we please. This license is diametrically opposed to what we have demonstrated in this chapter and in others. Beyond that, everyone can see that it is excessive and reckless. VII 86 But let us grant him this great freedom: what does it achieve in the end? Nothing at all. For the things that cannot be demonstrated, which make up the greater part of Scripture, we shall not be able to investigate in this way, nor to explain or interpret them by this rule. By following our method, on the other hand, we can explain many things of this kind and discuss them with confidence, as we have already shown both by reason and by actually doing it. And as for the things that are by their nature perceptible, their mean-

ing, as we have also shown, is easily drawn from the context of the passages alone. So this method is entirely useless. VII 87 Add to this that it completely takes away all the certainty about the meaning of Scripture that the common people can have from a straightforward reading, and that anyone can have by following another method. We therefore dismiss this view of Maimonides as harmful, useless, and absurd.

AGAINST TRADITION AND THE PONTIFF

Public law needs a public interpreter, but religion belongs to each person's own free judgment.

VII 88 As for the tradition of the Pharisees, we have already said above that it is not consistent with itself. We have also said that the authority of the Roman pontiffs needs clearer evidence, and it is for no other reason that I reject it. For if they could show it to us from Scripture itself as certainly as the high priests of the Jews once could, it would not trouble me at all that heretics and impious men have been found among the Roman pontiffs. Heretics and impious men were also once found among the high priests of the Hebrews, men who obtained the high priesthood by crooked means, and who nevertheless held, by the command of Scripture, the supreme power to interpret the law. See Deuteronomy 17:11–12 and 33:10, and Malachi 2:8. VII 89 But since they show us no such evidence, their authority remains highly suspect. And lest anyone, misled by the example of the high priest of the Hebrews, should think that the catholic religion also needs a pontiff, it should be noted that the laws of Moses were the public law of the country, and so they necessarily required some public authority to preserve them. For if everyone had the freedom to interpret public law at his own discretion, no commonwealth could survive. It would be dissolved at once by that very fact, and public right would become private right. VII 90 But the case of religion is quite different. Since it consists not so much in external actions as in simplicity and sincerity of heart,

it does not fall under any public right or authority.[10] For simplicity and sincerity of heart are not instilled in people by the command of laws or by public authority, and absolutely no one can be compelled by force or by laws to become blessed. What this requires is devout and brotherly counsel, a good upbringing, and above all one's own free judgment. VII 91 The supreme right to think freely, even about religion, belongs to each person, and it is inconceivable that anyone could give up this right. Therefore each person will also have the supreme right and the supreme authority to judge freely about religion, and consequently to explain and interpret it for himself. VII 92 For the supreme authority to interpret the laws, and the supreme judgment on public affairs, rest with the magistrate for no other reason than that they are matters of public right. So for the same reason the supreme authority to explain religion and to judge about it will rest with each individual—namely, because it is a matter of each individual's own right. VII 93 It is therefore very far from being the case that, from the authority of the high priest of the Hebrews to interpret the laws of the country, one could infer the authority of the Roman pontiff to interpret religion. On the contrary, it is far more easily inferred from the former that each person has this authority in the highest degree. VII 94 From this too we can show that our method of interpreting Scripture is the best. For since the greatest authority to interpret Scripture lies with each person, the rule of interpretation must be nothing but the natural light common to all—not any light above nature, nor any external authority. Nor must it be so difficult that only the sharpest philosophers can apply it. It must be suited to the natural and common intelligence and capacity of people, as we have shown ours to be. For we have seen that the difficulties it now has arose from people's negligence, not from the nature of the method.

10 Spinoza uses *catholica* in its root sense of "universal," while plainly glancing at the Roman Church.

CHAPTER 8: WHO WROTE THE PENTATEUCH AND THE HISTORIES

Following hints in Ibn Ezra, Spinoza shows that Moses did not write the Pentateuch.

VIII 1 In the preceding chapter we dealt with the foundations and principles of knowledge of the Scriptures, and showed that they are nothing other than a faithful history of them. We also showed that the ancients nevertheless neglected this history, although it is supremely necessary, or that, if they wrote or handed down any, it has perished through the ravages of time; and that, consequently, a large part of the foundations and principles of this knowledge has been lost. VIII 2 This would still be tolerable if later generations had kept within proper limits and had faithfully handed down to their successors the few things they had received or discovered, instead of hatching new ones out of their own heads. Because they did not, the history of Scripture has remained not only incomplete but also full of errors. That is, the foundations of knowledge of the Scriptures are not only too few for anything complete to be built on them, but also faulty. VIII 3 To correct these, and to remove the common prejudices of theology, is part of my purpose. But I fear that I am undertaking this too late. Things have now almost reached the point where people will not allow themselves to be corrected on this matter, and instead stubbornly defend whatever they have embraced under the guise of religion. No room seems to be left for reason, except among very few (compared with the rest), so widely have these prejudices taken hold of people's minds. Still, I will make the effort and will not stop trying, since there is no reason to despair of this altogether.

VIII 4 To show these things in order, I shall begin with the prejudices about the true writers of the Sacred Books, and first with the writer of the Pentateuch. Almost everyone has believed this writer to be Moses. Indeed, the Pharisees defended this so stubbornly that they regarded anyone who seemed to think otherwise as a heretic. For this reason Ibn Ezra—a man of a rather

free mind and no small learning, and the first of all those I have read to notice this prejudice—did not dare to explain his opinion openly, but only hinted at the matter in rather obscure words. I shall not hesitate to make these words clearer here, and to show the matter itself plainly. VIII 5 The words of Ibn Ezra, found in his commentary on Deuteronomy, are these: Beyond the Jordan, etc. if only you understand the mystery of the twelve, and also "and Moses wrote the law," and "the Canaanite was then in the land," "on the mount of God it will be revealed," and also "behold, his bed was a bed of iron," then you will know the truth. VIII 6 With these few words he indicates, and at the same time shows, that it was not Moses who wrote the Pentateuch but someone else who lived long afterward, and finally that the book Moses wrote was a different one. To show this, I say, he notes, first, the very preface of Deuteronomy, which could not have been written by Moses, since Moses did not cross the Jordan. VIII 7 He notes, second, that the whole book of Moses was written out very distinctly on the circumference of a single altar alone (see Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8: 37, etc.), which, according to the account of the rabbis, consisted of only twelve stones. From this it follows that the book of Moses was far smaller in size than the Pentateuch. This, I say, is what I think this author meant by "the mystery of the twelve." Perhaps, though, he meant the twelve curses found in the chapter of Deuteronomy just mentioned, which he may have believed were not written in the book of the Law. His reason would be that Moses, besides having the law written out, also orders the Levites to recite those curses, so as to bind the people by oath to observe the laws that had been written out. Or perhaps he meant the last chapter of Deuteronomy, on the death of Moses, which consists of twelve verses. But there is no need to examine these guesses, and the others people make, any more closely here. VIII 8 He then notes, third, that it is said in Deuteronomy 31: 9, *and Moses wrote the law*. These words cannot be Moses' own; they must belong to another writer, who is narrating what Moses did and wrote. VIII 9 He notes, fourth, the passage Genesis 12:6, where, in narrating

that Abraham was traveling through the land of the Canaanites, the historian adds that *the Canaanite was then in that land*. By these words he clearly excludes the time at which he was writing. So this must have been written after the death of Moses, when the Canaanites had already been driven out and no longer held those regions. Ibn Ezra indicates the same thing in his commentary on this passage, in these words: *"And the Canaanite was then in that land": it seems that Canaan* (Noah's grandson) *took the land of the Canaanite, which had been held by someone else; and if this is not true, there is a mystery in this matter, and let whoever understands it keep silent*. That is, if Canaan invaded those regions, the sense will be that *the Canaanite was already then in that land*, which excludes, of course, the earlier time when it was inhabited by another nation. But if Canaan was the first to settle those regions (as follows from Genesis 10), then the text excludes the present time, namely the writer's own. So it is not by Moses, since in his time they still held those regions. And this is the mystery he advises us to keep silent about. VIII 10 Fifth, he notes that in Genesis 22:14 Mount Moriah[11] is called the mountain of God. It did not have this name until after it had been dedicated to the building of the temple, and this choice of the mountain had not yet been made in Moses' time. Moses does not point to any place chosen by God. On the contrary, he foretells that God will one day choose some place, which will be given the name of God. VIII 11 Sixth and finally, he notes that in Deuteronomy 3 these words are inserted into the account of Og, king of Bashan: *Only Og king of Bashan remained of the rest of the*[12] *giants; behold, his bed was a bed of iron, that* (bed)*, surely, which is in Rabbah of the children of Ammon, nine cubits long* etc. This parenthesis shows very clearly that the writer of these books lived long after Moses. This way of speaking belongs only to someone who is

11 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 9. That is, by the historian, not by Abraham. For he says that the place which today is called "On the mountain of God it will be revealed" was called by Abraham "God will provide."

12 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note that the Hebrew רפאים *rephaim* means "the condemned." It also seems to be a proper name, from 1 Chronicles 20. So I think it here signifies some family.

narrating very ancient events and who points to their surviving relics in order to win belief. And no doubt this bed was first found in the time of David, who subdued this city, as is narrated in 2 Samuel 12:30. VIII 12 And not only here. A little further on, too, the same historian inserts into Moses' words: *Jair the son of Manasseh took the whole jurisdiction of Argob, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and called those places, together with Bashan, by his own name, the villages of Jair, to this day*. The historian adds this, I say, to explain the words of Moses he had just reported, namely: *and the rest of Gilead and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh, all the jurisdiction of Argob under all Bashan, which is called the land of the giants*. VIII 13 In this writer's time the Hebrews no doubt knew which were the villages of Jair, of the tribe of Judah, but not by the name of the jurisdiction of Argob or of the land of the giants. So he was compelled to explain which places these were that had been so called in ancient times. At the same time he had to give the reason why, in his own day, they bore the name of Jair, who was of the tribe of Judah and not of Manasseh (see 1 Chronicles 2:21–22). VIII 14 With this we have explained Ibn Ezra's view, together with the passages of the Pentateuch he adduces to confirm it. But he did not note all of them, nor the most important. Many more remain to be noted in these books, and of greater weight. VIII 15 First, the writer of these books not only speaks of Moses in the third person but also bears witness to many things about him. For example: *God spoke with Moses. God spoke with Moses face to face. Moses was the humblest of all men* (Numbers 12:3). *Moses was angry with the commanders of the army* (Numbers 31:14). *Moses, the man of God* (Deuteronomy 33:1). *Moses the servant of God died. There never arose a prophet in Israel like Moses* etc. VIII 16 In Deuteronomy, by contrast, where the law that Moses had explained to the people and had written down is set out, Moses speaks and narrates his own deeds in the first person: *God spoke to me* (Deuteronomy 2:1, 17, etc.), *I prayed to God* etc. The exception is the end of the book. There, after reporting Moses' words, the historian again speaks in the third person. He goes on to nar-

rate how Moses delivered this law (the one he had explained) to the people in writing, how he admonished them for the last time, and how at last he ended his life. All of this—the way of speaking, the testimonies, and the very context of the whole history—plainly suggests that these books were composed by someone else, not by Moses himself. VIII 17 Second, we should also note that this history does more than narrate how Moses died, how he was buried, and how he plunged the Hebrews into thirty days of mourning. It also compares him with all the prophets who lived afterward and says that he surpassed them all. *There never arose,* it says, *a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom God knew face to face.* Such testimony surely could not have been given by Moses about himself, nor by someone who came immediately after him. Only someone who lived many centuries later could have given it, especially since the historian speaks of past time: "there never arose a prophet," etc. And he says of the burial that no one has known it to this very day. VIII 18 Third, we should note that certain places are not referred to by the names they bore in Moses' lifetime but by others they were given long afterward. For example, Abraham *pursued* his enemies *as far as Dan* (see Genesis 14:14), a name this city did not receive until long after Joshua's death (see Judges 18:29). VIII 19 Fourth, the histories sometimes extend even beyond the span of Moses' life. Exodus 16:34 narrates that the children of Israel ate manna for forty years, until they came to an inhabited land, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. That is, up to the time spoken of in Joshua 5:12. Again, Genesis 36:31 says: *These are the kings who reigned in Edom before a king reigned over the children of Israel*. There, no doubt, the historian is recording which kings the Idu-

maeans had before David subdued them[13] and set governors over Idumaea itself. VIII 20 (See 2 Samuel 8:14.)

THE BOOKS MOSES REALLY WROTE

Moses wrote the Book of the Wars of God, the book of the covenant and a short book of the law, not the Pentateuch.

From all this, then, it is clearer than the noonday sun that the Pentateuch was written not by Moses but by someone else, who lived many centuries after Moses. But, if you will, let us look further at the books that Moses himself wrote and that are cited in the Pentateuch. Those very books will establish that they were something other than the Pentateuch. VIII 21 First, then, it is established from Exodus 17:14 that Moses, at God's command, wrote down the war against Amalek. In what book, however, that chapter itself does not make clear. But Numbers 21:12 cites a certain book called *The Wars of God*. No doubt this war against Amalek was narrated in it, along with all the encampments (which the author of the Pentateuch also testifies, in Numbers 33:2, were written down by Moses). VIII 22 Exodus 24:4, 7 also attests another book, called ספר הברית[14], *the book of the covenant*, which Moses read before the Israelites when they first entered into the covenant with God. But this book, or letter, contained very little: namely, the laws or commands of God narrated from Exodus 20:22 to chapter 24 of the same book. No one will deny this who has read that chapter with any sound judgment and without partisanship. VIII 23 For it is narrated there that as soon as

13 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 10. From that time until the reign of Jehoram, when they broke away from his rule (2 Kings 8:20), Idumaea had no kings. Instead, governors appointed by the Jews took the place of a king (see 1 Kings 22:48), and that is why the governor of Idumaea is called *king* (2 Kings 3:9). But it may be doubted whether the last of the Idumaean kings began to reign before Saul was made king, or whether Scripture in this chapter of Genesis meant to list only the kings who died unconquered. As for those who want to include Moses in the list of Hebrew kings, they are plainly talking nonsense: by divine command Moses founded a Hebrew state that was wholly averse to monarchy.

14 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note that in Hebrew ספר *sepher* quite often means a letter, or a sheet of writing.

Moses learned the people's mind about entering into a covenant with God, he immediately wrote down God's words and laws. At daybreak, after certain ceremonies had been performed, he read out to the whole assembly the terms of the covenant to be entered into. When these had been read out, and no doubt understood by all the people, the people bound themselves with full consent. So it follows, both from the short time in which this book was written and from the nature of the covenant to be entered into, that it contained nothing beyond the few things I have just mentioned. VIII 24 Finally, it is established that in the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt Moses explained all the laws he had given (see Deuteronomy 1:5) and bound the people to them anew (see Deuteronomy 29:14). At last he wrote a book that contained these laws as explained, together with this new covenant (see Deuteronomy 31:9). This was called *the book of the law of God*. Joshua later added to it an account of the covenant by which the people bound themselves afresh in his time, the third covenant they entered into with God (see Joshua 24:25–26). VIII 25 But we have no book that contains this covenant of Moses together with the covenant of Joshua. So we must necessarily grant that this book has been lost—or else rave along with the Chaldean paraphrast Jonathan and twist the words of Scripture as we please. Troubled by this difficulty, he preferred to corrupt Scripture rather than admit his ignorance. VIII 26 These words of the book of Joshua (see 24:26), *and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God*, he translated into Chaldean as follows: *and Joshua wrote these words and kept them with the book of the law of God*. VIII 27 What can you do with people who see nothing but what they please? What else is this, I ask, than to deny Scripture itself and to forge a new one out of one's own head?[15] We conclude, therefore, that this book of the law of God which Moses wrote was not the Pentateuch but something quite different, which the author of the Pentateuch inserted into his work in its proper place. This follows most evidently both from what has

15 Jonathan is Jonathan ben Uzziel, to whom Jewish tradition ascribed the Aramaic ("Chaldean") paraphrase, or Targum, of the Prophets.

just been said and from what is about to be said. VIII 28 When the passage of Deuteronomy already cited narrates that Moses wrote the book of the law, the historian adds that Moses handed it over to the priests and also ordered them to read it aloud to the whole people at a fixed time. This shows that the book was much smaller than the Pentateuch, since it could be read through in a single assembly in such a way that everyone understood it. VIII 29 Nor should we pass over the fact that, of all the books Moses wrote, this one alone, the book of the second covenant, was the one he ordered to be scrupulously preserved and guarded, together with the song (which he also wrote afterward so that the whole people might learn it by heart). By the first covenant he had bound only those who were present, but by the second he bound all their descendants as well (see Deuteronomy 29:14–15). That is why he ordered the book of this second covenant to be scrupulously preserved for future ages, and also, as we have said, the song, which looks chiefly to future ages. VIII 30 Consider, then, the following. It is not established that Moses wrote any books besides these. He himself commanded nothing else to be scrupulously preserved for posterity except the little book of the law together with the song. And finally, many things occur in the Pentateuch that could not have been written by Moses. It follows that no one can affirm with any foundation, but only wholly against reason, that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch. VIII 31 But here someone may perhaps ask: did Moses not also write down the laws, apart from these, when they were first revealed to him? That is, in the space of forty years did he write down none of the laws he had given, except the few that I said were contained in the book of the first covenant? VIII 32 To this I reply as follows. Even if I granted that it seems reasonable that Moses wrote down the laws at the very time and place at which he happened to communicate them, I still deny that this entitles us to affirm it. For we showed above that in such matters we must assert nothing except what is established from Scripture itself, or what is drawn by legitimate inference from its own foundations alone—not what merely

seems reasonable. VIII 33 Besides, reason itself does not compel us to assert this. Perhaps the senate communicated Moses' edicts to the people in writing, and the historian later collected them and inserted them in their proper order into the history of Moses' life. So much for the five books of Moses. VIII 34 Now it is time to examine the rest as well.

Similar arguments show that the book of Joshua is not an autograph either. It is someone else who testifies of Joshua that his fame spread through the whole earth (see 6:27), that he omitted nothing of what Moses had commanded (see the last verse of chapter 8, and 11:15), that he grew old and called everyone to an assembly, and that at last he breathed his last. VIII 35 Next, the book also narrates certain things that happened after his death: for example, that after his death the Israelites worshiped God for as long as the elders who had known him were alive. And in 16:10 it says that (Ephraim and Manasseh) *did not drive out the Canaanite who lived in Gezer, but* (it adds) *the Canaanite lived among Ephraim to this day, and paid tribute*. VIII 36 This is exactly what is narrated in Judges 1, and the expression *to this very day* also shows that the writer is narrating something long past. Very similar to this is the text of the last verse of chapter 15 about the sons of Judah, and the story of Caleb from verse 13 of the same chapter. VIII 37 The incident narrated in chapter 22, from verse 10 on, about the two and a half tribes who built an altar beyond the Jordan, also seems to have happened after Joshua's death. In that whole story Joshua is never mentioned. The people alone deliberate about going to war, send envoys, await their reply, and finally approve it. VIII 38 Finally, it follows evidently from 10:14 that this book was written many centuries after Joshua. For it testifies: *there was no other day like that one, before or after, on which God* (so) *obeyed anyone* etc. If, then, Joshua ever wrote a book, it was surely the one cited in 10:13, in this very same history. VIII 39 As for the book of Judges, I do not believe anyone in his right mind can persuade himself that it was written by the Judges themselves. The summary of the whole history in chapter 2 clearly shows that all of it was written by a single his-

torian. Moreover, since its writer often remarks that in those times there was no king in Israel, there is no doubt that it was written after kings had come to rule. VIII 40 Nor is there any reason to dwell long on the books of Samuel, since the history extends far beyond his lifetime. I would only like to note that this book too was written many centuries after Samuel. For in 1 Samuel 9:9 the historian remarks in a parenthesis: *formerly in Israel, whenever anyone went to inquire of God, he would say, Come, let us go to the seer; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer*. VIII 41 Finally, the books of Kings, as they themselves make clear, were excerpted from the books of the acts of Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:41), from the chronicles of the kings of Judah (see 14:19–29 of the same book), and from the chronicles of the kings of Israel. VIII 42 We conclude, therefore, that all the books we have reviewed so far are copies, and that the events they contain are narrated as things of the past.

ONE HISTORIAN, PROBABLY EZRA

Genesis through Kings form one connected history, probably compiled by Ezra, who began with Deuteronomy.

If we now attend to the connection and subject matter of all these books, we shall easily gather that they were all written by one and the same historian. He set out to write the antiquities of the Jews from their first origin down to the first destruction of the City. VIII 43 These books are so connected with one another that this alone lets us see that they contain nothing but a single narrative by a single historian. As soon as he stops narrating the life of Moses, he passes to the history of Joshua thus: *And it came to pass, after Moses the servant of God died, that God said to Joshua* etc. And when this history has ended with Joshua's death, he begins the history of the Judges with the same transition and link: *And it came to pass, after Joshua died, that the children of Israel asked of God* etc.[16] VIII 44 To this book he attaches the book of Ruth as a kind of appendix, in this way: *And it came to pass in the days*

16 The City is Jerusalem, destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/586 BC.

when the judges judged, that there was a famine in the land. In the same way he attaches the first book of Samuel to Ruth, and when that is finished he passes on to the second with his usual transition. To this, before the history of David is finished, he joins the first book of Kings, and, continuing to narrate David's history, he at last attaches the second book to it with the same connective. VIII 45 The arrangement and order of the histories also show that there was only one historian, who had set himself a definite aim. He begins by narrating the first origin of the Hebrew nation. Then he tells in order on what occasion and at what times Moses gave laws and made many predictions to them. Next he tells how, in accordance with Moses' predictions, they invaded the promised land (see Deuteronomy 7), and how, once they possessed it, they turned their backs on the laws (Deuteronomy 31: 16), and many evils followed for them as a result (31:17). He then tells how they wanted to choose kings (Deuteronomy 17:14), and how things went well or badly for them according to how far those kings had cared for the laws (Deuteronomy 28:36 and the last verse), until at last he narrates the ruin of the state, just as Moses had foretold it. VIII 46 Everything else, which does nothing to confirm the law, he either passes over entirely in silence or refers the reader to other historians for it. All these books, then, work together toward one end: to teach the sayings and decrees of Moses and to demonstrate them through the outcome of events.

VIII 47 From these three things taken together, then—the simplicity of the subject matter of all these books, their connection, and the fact that they are copies written many centuries after the events—we conclude, as we said just now, that they were all written by a single historian. VIII 48 Who he was I cannot show so clearly. I suspect, however, that it was Ezra himself, and several weighty considerations converge on which I base this conjecture. The historian (whom we now know to have been only one) carries the history down to the release of Jehoiachin, and adds besides that he sat at the king's table all his life (that is, the life either of Jehoiachin or of Nebuchadnezzar's son, for the sense is

quite ambiguous). It follows that he was no one earlier than Ezra. VIII 49 But of no one who flourished at that time does Scripture testify, except Ezra alone (see Ezra 7: 10), that he applied his zeal to seeking out the law of God and setting it forth, and that he was a ready scribe (same chapter, verse 6) in the law of Moses. So I cannot suspect anyone but Ezra of having written these books. VIII 50 Next, in this testimony about Ezra we see that he applied his zeal not only to seeking out the law of God but also to setting it forth. And in Nehemiah 8:9 it is also said that *they read the book of the law of God explained, and applied their understanding, and understood the Scripture*. VIII 51 Now the book of Deuteronomy contains not only the book of the law of Moses, or the greater part of it, but many things are also found inserted in it for fuller explanation. Hence I conjecture that the book of Deuteronomy is that book of the law of God, written, set forth, and explained by Ezra, which they read at that time. VIII 52 That many things are inserted parenthetically in this book of Deuteronomy for fuller explanation we showed with two examples when we were explaining Ibn Ezra's view. Many others of the same kind are found—for example, in 2:12: *And in Seir the Horites dwelt formerly, but the sons of Esau drove them out and destroyed them from before them and dwelt in their place, just as Israel did in the land of its inheritance, which God gave to it*. That is, he is explaining verses 3–4 of the same chapter: the sons of Esau did not take possession of Mount Seir, which had come to them as an inheritance, as an uninhabited land; they invaded it and drove out and destroyed the Horites who had previously lived there, just as the Israelites did to the Canaanites after the death of Moses. VIII 53 Verses 6–9 of chapter 10 are also inserted parenthetically into the words of Moses. For everyone sees that verse 8, which begins *at that time God separated the tribe of Levi*, must necessarily be referred to verse 5, and not to the death of Aaron. Ezra seems to have inserted that death here for no other reason than that Moses, in this narrative of the calf the people had worshiped, had said (see 9:20) that he had prayed to God for Aaron. He then explains that at the time Moses is speaking of here, God

chose the tribe of Levi for himself, in order to show the reason for the choice and why the Levites were not called to a share of the inheritance. Having done this, he goes on following the thread of the history in Moses' words. VIII 54 Add to these the preface of the book and all the passages that speak of Moses in the third person. Besides these, he no doubt added, or expressed in other words, many other things that we can no longer detect, so that they would be more easily grasped by the people of his own age. VIII 55 If, I say, we had Moses' own book of the law, I do not doubt that we would find great differences, both in the wording and in the order and the reasons of the commandments. For when I compare just the Decalogue of this book with the Decalogue of Exodus (where its history is expressly narrated), I see that it differs from it in all these respects. The fourth commandment is not only enjoined in a different way but is also spelled out at much greater length, and the reason given for it is worlds apart from the one offered in the Decalogue of Exodus. Finally, the order in which the tenth commandment is set out here is also different from that in Exodus. VIII 56 These changes, then, both here and elsewhere, as I have already said, I take to have been made by Ezra, because he explained the law of God to the people of his time. I take this, accordingly, to be the book of the law of God set forth and explained by him. And I think this book was the first of all those I have said he wrote. I conjecture this because it contains the laws of the country, which the people most need, and also because this book is not attached to the one before it by any connective, as all the others are, but begins without any link: *These are the words of Moses*, etc. VIII 57 But after he had finished this and taught the people the laws, I believe he then applied himself to writing a complete history of the Hebrew nation, from the creation of the world down to the utter destruction of the City, and inserted this book of Deuteronomy into it in its proper place. Perhaps he called its first five books by the name of Moses because they contain chiefly his life, taking the name from the principal subject. VIII 58 For the same reason too he named the sixth after Joshua, the seventh Judges, the

eighth Ruth, the ninth and perhaps also the tenth Samuel, and finally the eleventh and twelfth Kings. As for whether Ezra put the finishing touches to this work and completed it as he wished, see the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9: EZRA'S UNFINISHED WORK AND THE MARGINAL NOTES

Ezra only gathered the histories from different sources and never put them in order.

IX 1 How much the preceding inquiry into the true writer of these books helps toward understanding them fully is easily gathered from the very passages we have cited to confirm our view on this matter, passages that without it would inevitably seem extremely obscure to anyone. But besides the writer, other things in these books remain to be noticed, which common superstition does not allow the common people to detect. IX 2 The chief of these is that Ezra (I shall take him to be the writer of the books just mentioned until someone shows a more certain one) did not put the finishing touches to the narratives contained in these books. He did nothing more than collect the histories from various writers, sometimes simply copying them out, and he left them to posterity not yet examined or put in order. IX 3 What causes prevented him (unless perhaps an untimely death) from completing this work in every respect, I cannot guess. But the fact itself, although we lack the ancient historians of the Hebrews, is perfectly evident even from the very few fragments of them that we have. IX 4 For the history of Hezekiah from 2 Kings 18:17 on was copied from Isaiah's account, as it was found written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. We read this whole story in the book of Isaiah, which was contained in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (see 2 Chronicles 32, second-to-last verse), told in the same words as here, with only a very few

exceptions[17]. From these, however, nothing can be concluded except that different readings of this narrative of Isaiah were found—unless someone would rather dream up mysteries here too. IX 5 Next, the last chapter of this book is contained in the last chapter of Jeremiah and in chapters 39 and 40. Further, we find 2 Samuel 7 copied in 1 Chronicles 17, but the words are found in various places so remarkably altered[18] that it is very easy to see that these two chapters were taken from two different copies of the history of Nathan. IX 6 Finally, the genealogy of the kings of Edom given in Genesis 36 from verse 31 on is also set out in the same words in 1 Chronicles 1, although it is clear that the author of that book took what he narrates from other historians, and not from these twelve books that we attribute to Ezra. IX 7 So there is no doubt that if we had the historians themselves, the matter would be established directly. But since, as I said, we lack them, all that remains for us is to examine the histories themselves—their order and connection, their various repetitions, and finally the discrepancies in the reckoning of years—so that we can judge about the rest.

17 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 11. For example, in 2 Kings 18:20 we read, in the second person, אמרת *you said, but only with your lips*, etc.; but in Isaiah 36:5, אמרתי *I said, surely they are mere words, that for war there is need of counsel and strength*. Next, in verse 22 we read וכי תאמרון *but perhaps you will say*, in the plural, which in Isaiah's copy is found in the singular. Further, in Isaiah's text these words (from verse 32 of the chapter cited) are not found: ארץ זית יצהר ודבש וחיו ולא תמתו ואל תשמעו אל חזקיהו ["a land of olive oil and of honey, that you may live and not die; and do not listen to Hezekiah"]. And in this way many other variant readings are found, and no one will determine which of them is to be preferred over the rest.

18 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 12. For example, in 2 Samuel 7:6 we read ואהיה מתהלך באהל ובמשכן *and I have continually wandered with a tent and a tabernacle*; but in 1 Chronicles 17:5, ואהיה מאהל אל אהל וממשכן *and I was from tent to tent and from tabernacle*—מתהלך having been changed into מאהל, באהל into אל אהל, and במשכן into ממשכן. Next, in verse 10 of the passage of Samuel cited we read לענותו *to afflict him*, and in verse 9 of the chapter of Chronicles cited, לבלתו *to wear him down*. And in this way anyone who is not completely blind or utterly out of his mind will notice more discrepancies, some of greater importance, once he has read these chapters even once.

STORIES THAT DO NOT FIT

Judah and Tamar, Jacob's family and Saul's reign cannot be fitted into the time the text allows.

IX 8 Let us weigh these, then, or at least the principal ones. First, the story of Judah and Tamar, which the historian begins to narrate in Genesis 38 as follows: *And it came to pass at that time that Judah went away from his brothers*. This time must necessarily be referred to some other time[19] of which he had just been speaking; but it cannot possibly be referred to the one dealt with immediately before in Genesis. For from that time, namely when Joseph was taken into Egypt, until the patriarch Jacob also set out there with his whole family, we can count no more than twenty-two years. IX 9 Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold by his brothers, and thirty when Pharaoh ordered him to be summoned from prison. If we add to these the seven years of plenty and two of famine, they make twenty-two years altogether. IX 10 But no one will be able to conceive that so many things could have happened in this interval: that Judah had three children, one after another, by the one wife he married at that time; that the eldest of them, as soon as he was old enough, married Tamar; that after his death the second took her in marriage, and he died too; and that long after all this had happened, Judah himself unknowingly had relations with his own daughter-in-law Tamar, by whom he again had two children, though at a single birth, one of whom also became a father within the time just mentioned. IX 11 Since, then, all these things cannot be

19 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 13. That this text refers to no other time than the one at which Joseph was sold is clear not only from the context of the passage itself but can also be inferred from Judah's own age, who at that time was at most in his twenty-second year, if we may base the calculation on his earlier history. For it appears from the last verse of Genesis 29 that Judah was born in the tenth year after the patriarch Jacob began to serve Laban, and Joseph in the fourteenth. Since Joseph himself was in his seventeenth year when he was sold, Judah was then twenty-one years old, no more. Those, then, who believe that this long absence of Judah from home took place before Joseph was sold are flattering themselves, and are more anxious about the divinity of Scripture than certain of it.

referred to the time dealt with in Genesis, the passage must necessarily be referred to another time, one that was being dealt with immediately before in another book. Consequently Ezra simply copied this history too and inserted it among the rest without having examined it. IX 12 But it must necessarily be admitted that not only this chapter but the whole history of Joseph and Jacob was excerpted and copied from different historians, so little do we see it agree with itself. Genesis 47 relates that Jacob, when Joseph first brought him to greet Pharaoh, was 130 years old. If from these we subtract the twenty-two years he spent in grief because of Joseph's absence, then the seventeen years of Joseph's age when he was sold, and finally the seven years he served for Rachel, he will be found to have been of very advanced age—eighty-four years old—when he married Leah. Dinah, on the other hand, will have been barely seven years old[20] when she was violated by Shechem, and Simeon and Levi

20 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 14. The view some hold, that Jacob spent eight or ten years traveling between Mesopotamia and Bethel, smacks of foolishness—if I may say so with all respect to Ibn Ezra. For he hurried as much as he could, not only because of the longing he no doubt felt to see his parents, who were of very advanced age, but also and chiefly in order to fulfill the vow he had made when he fled from his brother (see Genesis 28:10, 31:13, and 35:1). God also reminded him to fulfill it (Genesis 31:3 and 13) and promised him his help in bringing him back to his homeland. But if these seem conjectures rather than reasons, very well: let us grant that Jacob spent eight or ten years—or more, if you like—on this short journey, dogged by a worse fate than Ulysses. This much, at least, they cannot deny: Benjamin was born in the last year of this journey. That is, on their own view and hypothesis, he was born in the fifteenth or sixteenth year after Joseph's birth, or thereabouts, for Jacob took leave of Laban in the seventh year after Joseph's birth. But from Joseph's seventeenth year to the year in which the patriarch himself went to live in Egypt, no more than twenty-two years are counted, as we have shown in this very chapter. So at the time when he set out for Egypt, Benjamin was at most twenty-three or twenty-four years old. Yet it is established that in this flower of youth he already had grandchildren (see Genesis 46:21, and compare it with Numbers 26:38–40 and with 1 Chronicles 8:1ff.). For Bela, Benjamin's firstborn, had already fathered two sons, Ard and Naaman. This is surely no less unreasonable than to maintain that Dinah suffered violence at the age of seven, along with the other things we have deduced from the sequence of this story. And so it is plain that unskilled people, in trying to untie knots, fall into others, and only tangle the matter further and tear it to pieces.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Ulysses (Odysseus), hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, took ten years to make his way home from Troy.

barely twelve and eleven when they plundered that whole city and put all its citizens to the sword. IX 13 Nor do I need to review the whole Pentateuch here. If one only attends to the fact that in these five books everything—commandments and histories alike—is narrated indiscriminately and without order, that no account is taken of chronology, and that one and the same story is often repeated, sometimes in different ways, one will easily recognize that all these things were collected and heaped together indiscriminately so that they could later be more easily examined and put in order. IX 14 And not only the material in the five books, but also the remaining histories down to the destruction of the city, contained in the other seven books, were collected in the same way. For who does not see that in Judges 2, from verse 6 on, a new historian is brought in (one who had also written about the deeds of Joshua) and that his words are simply copied out? For our historian had related in the last chapter of Joshua that Joshua died and was buried, and in the first chapter of this book had promised to narrate what happened after his death. How, then, if he wanted to follow the thread of his own history, could he have attached to what preceded the things he here begins to narrate about Joshua himself? IX 15 So too chapters 17, 18, etc. of 1 Samuel were taken from another historian, who thought that the reason David began to frequent Saul's court was very different from the one narrated in chapter 16 of the same book. IX 16 For he did not think that David went to Saul because Saul had summoned him on the advice of his servants (as is narrated in chapter 16), but that, having been sent by chance by his father to his brothers in the camp, he first became known to Saul on the occasion of his victory over Goliath the Philistine, and was then kept at court. I suspect the same of chapter 26 of the same book: namely, that the historian there seems to narrate the same story found in chapter 24, following another writer's version. But I set this aside and go on to examine the reckoning of years. In 1 Kings 6 it is said that Solomon built the temple in the 480th year after the exodus from Egypt; but from the histories themselves we arrive at a much larger number. IX 17 For

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUDGES

Adding up the years from the exodus to the temple shows that the books' own figures do not agree.

Years

Moses governed the people in the wilderness: 40

To Joshua, who lived a hundred and ten years, no more are assigned, on the view of Josephus and others, than: 26

Cushan-rishathaim held the people in subjection: 8

Othniel son of Kenaz judged[21]: 40
Eglon king of Moab held rule over the people: 18
Ehud and Shamgar judged them: 80
Jabin king of Canaan again held the people in subjection: 20
Afterward the people had rest: 40
Then they were subject to Midian: 7
In Gideon's time they lived in freedom: 40
Under the rule of Abimelech: 3
Tola son of Puah judged: 23

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21 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 16. Gersonides and others believe that these forty years, which Scripture says were spent in freedom, nevertheless begin from the death of Joshua. On this view they also include the preceding eight years, in which the people were subject to Cushan-rishathaim. The following eighteen years must likewise be brought into the count of the eighty years during which Ehud and Shamgar judged. In this way, they believe, the remaining years of servitude are always included within those that Scripture testifies were spent in freedom. But Scripture expressly counts how many years the Hebrews spent in servitude and how many in freedom, and in Judges 2:18 it expressly relates that the affairs of the Hebrews always flourished while the judges were alive. So it is entirely plain that this rabbi, an otherwise very learned man, and the others who follow in his footsteps, in trying to untie such knots, correct Scripture rather than explain it. The same is done by those who maintain that in that general reckoning of years Scripture meant to indicate only the periods of the Jewish polity. On their view, it could not bring the periods of anarchy and servitude into the general count of years, because these were unhappy times and, as it were, gaps in the rule. Scripture does indeed pass over periods of anarchy in silence. But it records years of servitude no less than years of freedom, and it is not in the habit of striking them from the annals, as these people dream. That Ezra, in 1 Kings, meant to include absolutely all the years from the exodus from Egypt in that general number is so obvious that no one versed in Scripture has ever doubted it. To say nothing now of the words of the text itself, David's genealogy, given at the end of the book of Ruth and in 1 Chronicles 2, hardly allows so large a sum of years. For Nahshon was prince of the tribe of Judah in the second year after the exodus from Egypt (see Numbers 7:11–12), and so he died in the wilderness, and his son Salmon crossed the Jordan with Joshua. But according to that genealogy of David, this Salmon was David's great-great-grandfather. Take away from this sum of 480 years the 4 years of Solomon's reign, the 70 of David's life and the 40 spent in the wilderness. We shall find that David was born in the 366th year after the crossing of the Jordan. So his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather would each have had to father children at the age of 90.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Gersonides (Levi ben Gershom, 1288–1344) was a Jewish philosopher, astronomer and biblical commentator in Provence.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The Latin printed here reads 900; the arithmetic and the standard editions require 90.

And Jair: 22

The people were again subject to the Philistines and the Ammonites: 18

Jephthah judged: 6

Ibzan of Bethlehem: 7

Elon the Zebulunite: 10

Abdon the Pirathonite: 8

The people were again subject to the Philistines: 40

Samson judged[22]: 20

And Eli: 40

The people were again subject to the Philistines, before they were freed by Samuel: 20

David reigned: 40

Solomon, before he built the temple: 4

All these added together make a total of years: 580

IX 18 To these must then be added the years of the age during which, after Joshua's death, the Hebrew commonwealth flourished, until it was subjugated by Cushan-rishathaim. I believe their number was large. I cannot persuade myself that immediately after Joshua's death everyone who had seen his wonders perished in a single moment. Nor can I believe that their successors bade farewell to the laws at one stroke and fell from the height of virtue into the depths of wickedness and sloth, or, finally, that Cushan-rishathaim subjugated them no sooner said than done. IX 19 Each of these things requires something like a lifetime. There is therefore no doubt that in Judges 2:7, 9 and 10 Scripture has compressed the history of many years, which it passed over in silence. Besides these, we must add the years in which Samuel was judge, whose number is likewise not given in Scripture. IX 20 Then we must add the years of Saul's reign. I left them out of the reckoning above because it is not sufficiently clear from his history how many years he reigned. It is indeed said in 1 Samuel 13:1 that he reigned two years, but that text is mutilated, and from the history itself we infer a larger number.

22 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 17. Samson was born after the Philistines had subjugated the Hebrews.

IX 21 That the text is mutilated no one who has so much as greeted the Hebrew language from its threshold can doubt. For it begins thus: *Saul was a year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel*. Who, I ask, does not see that the number of years of Saul's age when he obtained the kingdom has been left out? IX 22 And I believe no one doubts, either, that the history itself points to a larger number. For in chapter 27, verse 7 of the same book we read that David stayed for a year and four months among the Philistines, to whom he had fled because of Saul. By this reckoning, then, everything else would have had to happen within eight months, which I think no one believes. Josephus, at least, at the end of the sixth book of the *Antiquities*, corrected the text thus: *So Saul reigned eighteen years while Samuel was alive, and two more after his death*. IX 23 Indeed, this whole story in chapter 13 in no way fits with what comes before it. At the end of chapter 7 it is related that the Philistines were so thoroughly defeated by the Hebrews that they did not dare to enter the borders of Israel while Samuel lived. But here we are told that the Hebrews (while Samuel was alive) are invaded by the Philistines, who had reduced them to such misery and poverty that they had no weapons to defend themselves with, nor even the means of making them. IX 24 I would certainly have my work cut out for me if I tried to reconcile all the stories in this first book of Samuel so that they all seemed to have been written down and arranged by a single historian. But I return to my purpose. The years of Saul's reign, then, must be added to the reckoning above. IX 25 Finally, I have also not counted the years of the Hebrews' anarchy, because they are not established from Scripture itself. It is not clear to me, I mean, when the events narrated from chapter 17 to the end of the book of Judges took place. IX 26 From all this it follows most clearly that the true reckoning of the years cannot be established from the histories themselves, and that the histories do not agree on one and the same reckoning but presuppose very different ones. We must therefore admit that these histories were collected from different writers and have never yet been put in order or examined. IX 27 Nor does there seem to have been

any less discrepancy over the reckoning of years between the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel recorded that Jehoram son of Ahab began to reign in the second year of the reign of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat (see 2 Kings 1:17). But the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah recorded that Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat began to reign in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoram son of Ahab (see 8:16 of the same book). IX 28 Anyone who goes on to compare the histories in Chronicles with those in the books of Kings will find many similar discrepancies. I need not list them here, and still less the inventions by which commentators try to reconcile these histories. The rabbis simply rave. The commentators I have read dream, invent, and in the end utterly corrupt the language itself. IX 29 For example, when in 2 Chronicles it is said, *Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign*, some invent the idea that these years are counted from the reign of Omri, not from Ahaziah's birth. If they could show that this was what the author of Chronicles intended, I would not hesitate to say that he did not know how to speak. And in this way they invent many other things. If these were true, I would say outright that the ancient Hebrews were completely ignorant both of their own language and of how to order a narrative. I would then recognize no method or rule for interpreting Scripture, and anyone would be free to invent anything at will. IX 30 If anyone, however, thinks that I am speaking here too generally and without sufficient grounds, I ask him to take up the task himself. Let him show us some definite order in these histories that historians could follow in their chronologies without error. And while he interprets the histories and tries to reconcile them, let him observe the phrases and idioms, and the ways of arranging and connecting sentences, so strictly, and explain them in such a way, that we too could imitate them in our own writing by following his explanation[23]. If he manages this, I will surrender to him at once, and he shall be my great

23 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 18. Otherwise they correct the words of Scripture rather than explain them.

Apollo. IX 31 For I confess that, though I have searched for a long time, I have never been able to find anything of the kind. Indeed, I add that I write nothing here that I have not long and carefully pondered. And although from boyhood I was steeped in the common opinions about Scripture, in the end I could not help admitting these things.[24] But there is no reason to detain the reader long over these matters, or to challenge him to a hopeless task. Still, it was necessary to set out the matter itself in order to explain my meaning more clearly. IX 32 I therefore pass on to the other points I undertook to note concerning the fortunes of these books. Besides what we have just shown, it should be noted that later generations did not preserve these books so carefully that no errors crept in. The older scribes noticed a number of doubtful readings, and also some mutilated passages, though not all of them. Whether these errors are of such a kind as to cause the reader great difficulty I will not now dispute. I believe, however, that they are of rather slight importance, at least to those who read the Scriptures with a freer judgment. And this I can affirm with certainty: I have noticed no error and no variant reading concerning moral teachings that could make them obscure or doubtful. IX 33 Most people, however, will not concede that any fault has crept in even in the rest. They maintain that God, by a special providence, has preserved the whole Bible uncorrupted. The variant readings, they say, are signs of the deepest mysteries. They argue the same about the asterisms found in twenty-eight places in the middle of a paragraph. Indeed, they claim that great secrets are contained in the very tips of the letters. IX 34 Whether they have said these things out of foolishness and credulous devotion, or out of arrogance and malice, so as to be thought the sole possessors of God's secrets, I do not know. This much at least I know: in their writings I have read nothing that smacks of a secret, only childish notions. I have also read, and moreover known personally, some Kabbalist triflers, whose madness I could never wonder at

24 An echo of Virgil, *Eclogues* 3.104, where a shepherd promises to hail as "great Apollo" whoever can solve his riddle.

enough. IX 35 That errors have crept in, as we said, I do not think anyone of sound judgment can doubt who reads that text about Saul (which we have already cited from 1 Samuel 13, verse[25] 1) and also 2 Samuel 6:2, namely: *and David arose and went, with all the people who were with him, from Judah, to carry away the ark of God from there*. Here too no one can fail to see that the place they had gone to in order to carry the ark away, namely Kiriath-jearim[26], has been left out. IX 36 Nor can we deny that verse 37 IX 37 of 2 Samuel 13 is garbled and mutilated, namely: *and Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur, and he mourned his son all the days; and Absalom fled and went to Geshur and stayed there three years*. And I know that I have noted other things of this kind before, which do not come to mind at present.

THE MARGINAL READINGS

The Masoretic marginal notes are doubtful readings or polite substitutions, not hidden mysteries.

That the marginal notes found throughout the Hebrew manuscripts were doubtful readings no one can doubt either, if he notices that most of them arose from the great similarity of certain Hebrew letters to one another: the similarity of כ *kaf* to ב *bet*, of י *yod* to ו *vav*, of ד *dalet* to ר *resh*, and so on. For example, where 2 Samuel 5:24 has בשמעך, *and at the* (time) *when you hear*, the margin has כשמעך, *when you hear*. And in Judges 21:22, where the text reads *and when their fathers or brothers come to us in great numbers* (that is, often), etc., the margin has לריב, *to quarrel*. In the same

25 The "asterisms" are the Masoretic gaps (*pisqa*) left in the middle of a verse at some twenty-eight places in the Hebrew text.

26 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 19. Kiriath-jearim is also called Baal of Judah. Hence Kimhi and others think that Baale-judah, which I have here translated *from the people of Judah*, is the name of a town. But they are mistaken, because בעלי *bahgale* is plural. Then, if this text of Samuel is compared with the one in 1 Chronicles, we shall see that David did not rise and go out from Baal, but went there. If the author of 2 Samuel had meant at least to indicate the place from which David carried away the ark, then, to speak proper Hebrew, he would have said: *and David arose and set out, etc., from Baal of Judah, and from there carried away the ark of God*.

way very many IX 38 others arose from the use of the letters called quiescents, whose pronunciation is very often not heard at all, so that one is used indiscriminately for another. For example, Leviticus 25:30 has *and the house that is in a city that has no wall shall be confirmed*, but the margin has אשר לו חומה, *that has a wall*, etc.

IX 39 Although these things are clear enough in themselves, I should like to answer the arguments of certain Pharisees, by which they try to persuade us that the marginal notes were added or indicated by the writers of the sacred books themselves to signify some mystery. The first argument, which in fact troubles me little, they take from the practice of reading the Scriptures. If, they say, these notes were added because of variant readings that later generations could not decide between, why did the custom prevail of keeping the marginal sense everywhere? Why, they ask, did they note in the margin the sense they wanted to keep? On the contrary, they ought to have written the scrolls themselves as they wanted them read, and not noted in the margin the sense and reading they most approved. IX 40 The second argument, which does seem to have some plausibility, is taken from the very nature of the matter. It runs like this. Errors crept into the manuscripts not on purpose but by chance, and what happens by chance happens in varying ways. Yet in the five books the noun נערה, *girl*, is always written defectively, against the rule of grammar, without the letter ה *he*, with only a single exception; in the margin, however, it is written correctly, according to the universal rule of grammar. Could this, too, have happened because the copyist's hand slipped? By what fate could the pen have hurried every single time this noun occurred? Besides, they could easily, and without any scruple, have supplied and corrected this defect from the rules of grammar. IX 41 Since, therefore, these readings did not arise by chance, and the scribes did not correct such obvious faults, they conclude that these things were done deliberately by the original writers, in order to signify something by them. But we can easily answer these arguments. What they argue from the practice

that prevailed among them does not trouble me. IX 42 I do not know what superstition may have prompted. Perhaps it came about because they judged both readings equally good, or at least tolerable, and so, lest either be neglected, they wanted one to be written and the other read. They were afraid, that is, to settle their judgment in so weighty a matter, lest in their uncertainty they choose the false reading instead of the true. So they did not want to prefer either one to the other, which is exactly what they would have done had they ordered only one to be written and read—especially since marginal notes are not written in the sacred scrolls. IX 43 Or perhaps it came about because there were some passages which, though correctly copied, they nevertheless wanted read differently, namely as they had noted in the margin. And so they laid down as a universal rule that the Bible should be read according to the marginal notes. IX 44 I will now explain what moved the scribes to mark certain words in the margin expressly to be read. Not all the marginal notes are doubtful readings: the scribes also marked things that had fallen out of use, namely obsolete words and words that the accepted manners of their time did not allow to be read in a public assembly. IX 45 The ancient writers were free of malice, and they used no courtly circumlocutions but called things by their proper names. But once malice and luxury came to reign, things the ancients had said without any obscenity began to be counted as obscene. This was no reason to change Scripture itself. Yet, to make allowance for the weakness of the people, the scribes introduced the practice of reading the words for intercourse and excrement more decently in public, namely as they had marked them in the margin. IX 46 Finally, whatever the reason custom led them to read and interpret the Scriptures according to the marginal readings, it was at least not that the true interpretation must follow them. The rabbis themselves in the Talmud often depart from the Masoretes and had other readings that they approved, as I will show shortly. Beyond that, some marginal readings seem less well supported by the usage of the language. IX 47 For example, 2 Samuel 14:22 has *because the*

king has acted according to the counsel of his servant. The construction is perfectly regular and agrees with that of verse 15 of the same chapter. The marginal reading, עבדך *of your servant*, does not agree with the person of the verb. IX 48 So too in the last verse of chapter 16 of the same book the text reads *as when one consults* (that is, as when there is consultation of) *the word of God*, and in the margin איש *someone* is added as the subject of the verb. This does not seem to have been done with enough care. As grammarians know very well, the common usage of this language is to express impersonal verbs by the third person singular of the active verb. Many notes of this kind are found that can in no way be preferred to the written reading. IX 49 As for the Pharisees' second argument, it too is easily answered from what I have just said: besides doubtful readings, the scribes also marked obsolete words. There is no doubt that in Hebrew, as in other languages, later usage made many words obsolete and antiquated. The last scribes found these in the Bible and, as I said, marked them all, so that they might be read before the people according to the usage then accepted. IX 50 This is why the noun נער *nahgar* is found marked everywhere. In ancient times it was of common gender and meant the same as the Latin *juvenis*, "young person." Similarly, the ancients used to call the Hebrews' capital ירושלם *Jerusalem*, not ירושלים *Jerusalaim*. I think the same about the pronoun הוא, *he* and *she*. Later writers changed the ו *vau* into a י *jod* (a frequent change in Hebrew) when they wanted to signify the feminine gender, whereas the ancients used to distinguish the feminine of this pronoun from the masculine only by the vowels. IX 51 Likewise, the irregularities of certain verbs were of one kind among the earlier writers and of another among the later ones. And finally, the ancients used the paragogic letters האמנתיו with an elegance peculiar to their own time. I could illustrate all this here with many examples, but I do not want to detain the reader with tedious reading. IX 52 But if someone asks how I know these things, I answer that I have often found them in the most ancient writers, that is, in the Bible, and that later writers chose not to imitate them. This is the only way obsolete words are

recognized in other languages too, even those that are now dead.

IX 53 But perhaps someone will press further. Since I have held that most of these notes are doubtful readings, why are no more than two readings ever found for a single passage? Why not sometimes three or more? Again, some things in the written text are so plainly contrary to grammar, and so correctly marked in the margin, that it is not at all credible that the scribes could have hesitated and doubted which was right. IX 54 These points too are easily answered. To the first I say that there were more readings than those we find marked in our manuscripts. The Talmud records many that the Masoretes neglected, and it departs from them so openly in many places that the superstitious corrector of the Bomberg Bible was finally forced to admit in his preface that he did not know how to reconcile them. *Here we do not know how to answer*, he says, *except as we answered above*, namely, *that it is the habit of the Talmud to contradict the Masoretes*. So we have no sufficient grounds for holding that there were never more than two readings of a single passage. IX 55 Nevertheless I readily grant, and indeed I believe, that no more than two readings of a single passage were ever found, and I have two reasons. First, the cause from which, as I have shown, this variety of readings arose cannot allow more than two. I showed that the variants arose chiefly from the similarity of certain letters.[27] IX 56 So the doubt almost always came down in the end to which of two letters should be written: ב *Bet* or כ *Kaf*, י *Jod* or ו *Vau*, ד *Dalet* or ר *Res*, and so on. These letters are used very often, so it could often happen that either one gave a tolerable sense. Or else the doubt was whether a syllable was long or short, since its quantity is determined by the letters I have called quiescent. Add to this that not all the notes are doubtful readings. As I said, many were added for decency's sake, and also to explain obsolete and antiquated words. IX 57 The second reason I am persuaded that no more than two readings of a

27 The Rabbinic Bible printed by Daniel Bomberg at Venice in 1524–25, edited by Jacob ben Hayyim, whose preface is quoted here.

single passage are found is that I believe the scribes found very few copies, perhaps no more than two or three. In the tractate of the Scribes, סופרים *Soferim*, chapter 6,[28] only three are mentioned. They make up a story that these were found in Ezra's time, because they would have us believe that Ezra himself added these notes. IX 58 Be that as it may, if the scribes had three copies, we can easily conceive that two always agreed at any given place. Indeed, anyone might well have been surprised if three different readings of one and the same passage had been found in only three copies. Anyone who has read even chapter 1 of 1 Maccabees, or Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 12, chapter 5, will stop wondering how there came to be such a scarcity of copies after Ezra. It seems almost a miracle that they were able to keep even those few after so great and so long a persecution. No one, I think, who has read that history with even moderate attention will doubt this. IX 59 So we see the reasons why nowhere are there more than two doubtful readings.[29] It is therefore far from true that, because there are never more than two, one can conclude that the Bible was deliberately miswritten at the marked places in order to signify mysteries. IX 60 As for the second point, that some passages are written so wrongly that the scribes could not have doubted they went against the usage of writing in every age, and so ought to have corrected them outright rather than noting them in the margin: this hardly troubles me. I am not obliged to know what scruple kept them from doing so. IX 61 Perhaps they acted out of sincerity. They wanted to hand the Bible on to posterity just as they had found it in the few originals, and to note the discrepancies among those originals as variant readings, not as doubtful ones. And I have called them doubtful only because I really do find almost all of them such that I cannot tell at all which should be preferred to the other. IX 62 Finally, besides these doubtful readings, the scribes also marked a number of

28 *Soferim* ("Scribes") is a minor tractate appended to the Talmud, setting out rules for copying the scrolls of Scripture.

29 1 Maccabees 1 describes the persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c. 167 BC), when the books of the law were torn up and burned.

mutilated passages by leaving a blank space in the middle of paragraphs. The Masoretes record their number: they count twenty-eight places where a blank space is left in the middle of a paragraph. I do not know whether they believe some mystery lies hidden in the number as well. The Pharisees, moreover, religiously observe a fixed size for the space. IX 63 An example of these (to give just one) is found in Genesis 4:8, which is written thus: And Cain said to Abel his brother . . . and it came to pass, while they were in the field, that Cain etc. Here a blank space is left at the very point where we expected to learn what Cain had said to his brother. In this way the scribes left twenty-eight such places (besides those we have already noted). Yet many of them would not look mutilated if the space had not been inserted. But enough of this.

CHAPTER 10: THE OTHER BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Chronicles, Psalms and Proverbs were collected late, and the rabbis nearly excluded some books.

X 1 I pass on to the remaining books of the Old Testament. About the two books of Chronicles I have nothing certain or worth noting, except that they were written long after Ezra, and perhaps

after Judas Maccabeus restored the temple[30]. In 1 Chronicles 9 the historian relates *which families first* (that is, in Ezra's time) *lived in Jerusalem*. Then in verse 17 he names the *gatekeepers*, two of whom are also named in Nehemiah 2:19. This shows that these books were written long after the city was rebuilt. X 2 For the rest, I know nothing for certain about their true author, or about their authority, usefulness, and teaching.[31] Indeed, I cannot wonder enough that they were received among the sacred books by the very people who struck the book of Wisdom, Tobit, and the other books called apocryphal out of the canon of sacred books. I do not intend, however, to belittle their authority. Since they are accepted by everyone, I leave them as they are.

X 3 The Psalms too were collected and divided into five books in the time of the second temple. According to the testimony of Philo the Jew, Psalm 88 was published while King Jehoiachin was still held in prison in Babylon, and Psalm 89 when the same king gained his freedom. I do not believe Philo would ever have said this unless it was the accepted opinion of his time, or he had received it from others worthy of trust. X 4 I believe that the Proverbs of Solomon were also collected at the same time, or at

30 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 21. The suspicion arises here (if what is certain can be called a suspicion) from the genealogy of King Jeconiah, which is given in 1 Chronicles 3 and carried down to the sons of Elioenai, who were thirteenth in descent from him. Note too that this Jeconiah had no children when he was put in chains. He seems to have fathered children in prison, so far as one can guess from the names he gave them. But he seems to have had grandchildren after he was freed from prison, as one can again guess from their names. Thus פדיה *Pedaiah* (which means *God has freed*), who in this chapter is said to be the father of Zerubbabel, was born in the thirty-seventh or thirty-eighth year of Jeconiah's captivity, that is, thirty-three years before King Cyrus gave the Jews leave. Consequently Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus had set over the Jews, seems to have been thirteen or fourteen years old at most. But I have preferred to pass over these matters in silence, for reasons that the gravity of the times does not permit me to explain. For the prudent it is enough to point the matter out. If they will go through this whole line of Jeconiah's descendants, given in 1 Chronicles 3 from verse 17 to the end of the chapter, with some attention, and compare the Hebrew text with the version called the Septuagint, they will easily see that these books were restored after the second restoration of the city by Judas Maccabeus, at a time when Jeconiah's descendants had lost their rule, and not before.

31 Judas Maccabeus led the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid kings and rededicated the temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC.

least in the time of King Josiah. The last verse of chapter 24 says, *These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah transcribed*. X 5 But here I cannot pass over in silence the audacity of the rabbis. They wanted this book, together with Ecclesiastes, excluded from the canon of sacred books and stored away with the others that we now lack. They would have done it outright had they not found certain passages where the law of Moses is commended.[32] It is lamentable indeed that sacred and excellent things depended on these men's choice. Still, I congratulate them for having been willing to share even these books with us. But I cannot help doubting whether they handed them down in good faith, a question I do not wish to subject to strict examination here.

THE PROPHETS SURVIVE IN FRAGMENTS

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the rest were gathered from other books, out of order and incomplete.

X 6 I go on, then, to the books of the prophets. When I look at them, I see that the prophecies they contain were collected from other books. They are not always set down in the order in which the prophets themselves spoke or wrote them. Nor are all the prophecies included, only those the compilers could find here and there. So these books are only fragments of the prophets. X 7 Isaiah began to prophesy in the reign of Uzziah, as the copyist himself testifies in the first verse. But he did not only prophesy at that time; he also wrote an account of all this king's deeds (see 2 Chronicles 26:22), a book we now lack. What we do have was copied, as I have shown, from the chronicles of the kings of Judah and Israel. X 8 Add to this that the rabbis hold that this prophet also prophesied in the reign of Manasseh, who finally put him to death. Although they seem to be telling a fable, they nevertheless seem to have believed that not all his prophecies survive. X 9 Next, the prophecies of Jeremiah that are told as his-

32 Spinoza is citing the *Breviarium de temporibus* attributed to Philo of Alexandria, a forgery published by Annius of Viterbo in 1498.

tory were excerpted and collected from various chroniclers. They are heaped together in confusion, with no regard for chronology, and the same story is also repeated in different versions. In chapter 21 the book gives the cause of Jeremiah's arrest: he foretold the destruction of the city to Zedekiah when the king consulted him. Then it breaks off this story and passes, in chapter 22, to his denunciation of Jehoiachin, who reigned before Zedekiah, and his prediction of that king's captivity. Then in chapter 25 it describes what was revealed to the prophet before these events, namely in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. Next, it describes what was revealed in the first year of this king, [X 10] and so on. It goes on heaping up prophecies with no chronological order observed, until at last in chapter 38 (as if these fifteen chapters had been a parenthesis) it returns to what it began to relate in chapter 21. The conjunction with which that chapter begins refers back to verses 8, 9, and 10 of chapter 21. Then it describes Jeremiah's last arrest quite differently, and gives a quite different reason for his long detention in the court of the guard from the one related in chapter 37. So you can clearly see that all this was collected from different historians and can be excused in no other way. [X 11] The remaining prophecies, contained in the remaining chapters where Jeremiah speaks in the first person, seem to have been copied from the scroll that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's own dictation. That scroll (as chapter 36, verse 2 shows) contained only what had been revealed to this prophet from the time of Josiah to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which is also the point at which this book begins. What we have from 45:2 to 51:59 also seems to have been copied from the same scroll. [X 12] That the book of Ezekiel is likewise only a fragment, its first verses indicate very clearly. Who does not see that the conjunction with which the book begins refers to other things already said and connects what follows with them? And not only the conjunction but the whole context of the passage presupposes other writings. [X 13] The thirtieth year, with which this book begins, shows that the prophet is continuing his narrative, not beginning it. The writer himself also notes this in a parenthesis

in verse 3, where he says, *the word of God had often come to Ezekiel the son of Buzi, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans*, etc. It is as if he were saying that the words of Ezekiel he had transcribed up to this point refer to other things revealed to him before this thirtieth year. Further, Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 10, chapter 7, relates that Ezekiel foretold that Zedekiah would not see Babylon. We do not read this in the book of his that we have. On the contrary, chapter 17 says that he would be led captive to Babylon[33]. X 14 Of Hosea we cannot say for certain that he wrote more than is contained in the book that bears his name. Yet I am surprised that we do not have more from a man who, on the writer's testimony, prophesied for more than eighty-four years. X 15 This much at least we know in general: the writers of these books did not collect the prophecies of all the prophets, nor all the prophecies of the prophets we have. Of the prophets who prophesied in the reign of Manasseh, mentioned in general terms in 2 Chronicles 33:10, 18, 19, we have no prophecies at all. Nor do we have all the prophecies of these twelve prophets. Of Jonah, only the prophecies about the Ninevites are recorded, though he also prophesied to the Israelites; on this see 2 Kings 14:25.

JOB, DANIEL AND THE LATER HISTORIES

Job may be a translated Gentile work; Daniel, Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah come from one later historian.

X 16 There has been much controversy among writers about the book of Job and about Job himself. Some think that Moses wrote it and that the whole story is nothing but a parable. Some of the rabbis in the Talmud teach this, and Maimonides too favors them in his *Guide of the Perplexed* (*More Nebuchim*). Others have believed the story to be true, and some of them thought that this Job lived in the time of Jacob and married his daughter Dinah.

33 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 22. And so no one could have suspected that his prophecy contradicted Jeremiah's prediction. Yet from Josephus's account everyone did suspect it, until they learned from the outcome that both had foretold the truth.

X 17 But Ibn Ezra, as I said above, affirms in his commentary on this book that it was translated into Hebrew from another language. I wish he had shown us this more clearly, for we could then conclude that the Gentiles too had sacred books. So I leave the matter in doubt. But I conjecture that Job was a Gentile, a man of the greatest steadfastness, whose fortunes were first prosperous, then utterly adverse, and finally most happy. For Ezekiel 14:14 names him among others. X 18 I believe that Job's changing fortune and his steadfastness of mind gave many people occasion to argue about God's providence, or at least gave the author of this book occasion to compose a dialogue. For its contents, like its style, seem to belong not to a man sitting wretchedly sick among the ashes, but to one meditating at leisure in his study. Here I would agree with Ibn Ezra that this book was translated from another language, since it seems to imitate the poetry of the Gentiles. For the Father of the gods twice calls a council, and Momus, who is here called Satan, criticizes God's words with the greatest freedom, and so on. But these are mere conjectures, and not firm enough.[34]

X 19 I pass to the book of Daniel. From chapter 8 on, it undoubtedly contains the writings of Daniel himself. But where the first seven chapters were copied from, I do not know. Since all of them except the first are written in Chaldean, we may suspect that they came from the chronicles of the Chaldeans. X 20 If this were clearly established, it would be the most striking evidence that Scripture is sacred only insofar as through it we understand the things it signifies, and not insofar as we understand the words, or the language and sentences, by which those things are signified. It would also prove that books which teach and narrate the best things are equally sacred, in whatever language and by whatever nation they were written. This much, at least, we can note: these chapters were written in Chaldean, and are nonetheless just as sacred as the rest of the Bible.[35] X 21 To this

34 Momus was the Greek personification of mockery and fault-finding, who criticized the works of the gods.

35 By "Chaldean" Spinoza means Aramaic.

book of Daniel the first book of Ezra is attached in such a way that one can easily recognize the same writer, who goes on to narrate the affairs of the Jews in order from the first captivity. And I have no doubt that the book of Esther is attached to this one, for the conjunction with which that book begins cannot refer to any other. Nor should we believe that it is the same book that Mordecai wrote. X 22 For in Esther 9:20–22 someone else relates of Mordecai himself that he wrote letters, and what they contained. Then, in verse 31 of the same chapter, he relates that Queen Esther confirmed by edict the matters relating to the Feast of Lots (Purim), and that it was written in the book—that is (as the Hebrew means), in a book known to everyone at that time (namely, when these things were written). Ibn Ezra admits, and everyone is bound to admit, that this book perished along with others. Finally, the historian refers the rest of Mordecai's deeds to the chronicles of the kings of Persia. X 23 So there can be no doubt that this book too was written by the same historian who narrated the affairs of Daniel and Ezra; and the book of Nehemiah[36] as well, since it is called the second book of Ezra. We therefore affirm that these four books—Daniel, Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah—were written by one and the same historian. But who he was, I cannot even guess. X 24 Now, in order to know where this historian, whoever he was, got his knowledge of these histories, and perhaps even copied the greater part of them, we should note the following. The governors or princes of the Jews under the second Temple, like their kings under the first, had scribes or historiographers who wrote their annals, or chronology, year after year. The chronologies or annals of the kings are cited here and there in the books of Kings, while those of the princes and priests of the second Temple are cited first in Nehemiah 12:23 and then in 1 Maccabees 16:24. X 25 And this is without doubt the book (see Esther 9:31) we spoke of just now, in

36 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 23. The historian himself testifies, in 1:1, that most of this book was taken from the book Nehemiah himself wrote. But what is narrated from chapter 8 to 12:26, and also the last two verses of chapter 12, which are inserted parenthetically among Nehemiah's words, were beyond doubt added by the historian himself, who lived after Nehemiah.

which Esther's edict and those writings of Mordecai were recorded, and which, as we said with Ibn Ezra, has perished. From this book, then, everything contained in these four seems to have been taken or copied. For their writer cites no other, nor do we know of any other of public authority. X 26 That these books were written neither by Ezra nor by Nehemiah is clear from the fact that in Nehemiah 12:10–11 the genealogy of the high priest Jeshua is carried down to Jaddua. Jaddua was the sixth high priest, the one who went out to meet Alexander the Great when the Persian empire had already been almost subdued (see Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 11, chapter 8), or, as Philo Judaeus says in his book on chronology, the sixth and last high priest under the Persians. X 27 Indeed, in this same chapter of Nehemiah, namely in verse 22, this very point is clearly indicated. *The Levites*, says the historian, *in the time of Eliashib, Joiada, Jonathan and Jaddua*[37] *were recorded above the reign of Darius the Persian*—namely, in the chronicles. I do not think anyone believes that Ezra[38] or Nehemiah lived so long that they outlived fourteen kings of Persia. Cyrus, the first of them all, granted the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple, and from that time down to Darius, the fourteenth and last king of the Persians, more than 230 years are counted. X 28 So I have no doubt that these books were written long after Judas Maccabeus restored wor-

37 SPINOZA'S NOTE. N.B. Unless it means *beyond*, this was the mistake of a copyist, who wrote על *above* instead of עד *up to*.

38 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 24. Ezra was the uncle of the first high priest, Joshua (see Ezra 7:1 and 1 Chronicles 6:13–15), and he set out together with Zerubbabel from Babylon for Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 12:1). But it seems that when he saw the affairs of the Jews thrown into disorder, he went back to Babylonia, as others also did, as is clear from Nehemiah 1:2. He seems to have remained there until the reign of Artaxerxes, when, having obtained what he wanted, he went to Jerusalem a second time. Nehemiah too went to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in the time of Cyrus: see Ezra 2:2 and 63, and compare it with Nehemiah 10:2 and 12:1. For when the translators render התרשתא *Hatirschata* as "envoy," they support this with no example. On the contrary, it is certain that Jews who had to frequent the court were given new names. Thus Daniel was called Belteshazzar and Zerubbabel Sheshbazzar (see Daniel 1:7; Ezra 1:8 and 5:14), and Nehemiah was called Hatirschata. But by virtue of his office he used to be addressed as פחה, "governor" or "prefect"; see Nehemiah 5:14 and 12:26.

ship in the Temple. They were written because at that time false books of Daniel, Ezra and Esther were being published by certain ill-disposed people, who were undoubtedly of the sect of the Sadducees; for the Pharisees never accepted those books, so far as I know. And although certain fables are found in the book called the fourth of Ezra which we also read in the Talmud, these books are not for that reason to be attributed to the Pharisees. For apart from the very dullest of them, there is none who does not believe that those fables were added by some trifler. I also believe that some people did this in order to make their traditions a laughingstock for everyone. X 29 Or perhaps these books were copied out and published at that time to show the people that Daniel's prophecies had been fulfilled, and in this way to strengthen them in religion, so that amid such great calamities they would not despair of better times and of future salvation. X 30 But although these books are so recent and new, many errors have nevertheless crept into them, owing, unless I am mistaken, to the haste of the copyists. For in these, as in the rest, there are a good many marginal notes of the kind we discussed in the previous chapter,[39] and, besides, certain passages which cannot be excused in any other way, as I shall now show. But first I want to note something about their marginal readings. If we must grant the Pharisees that these readings are as old as the writers of these books themselves, then we will necessarily have to say that the writers themselves (if there were perhaps several) noted them because they found that the very chronicles from which they copied were not written accurately enough; and that, although certain errors were obvious, they still did not dare to correct the writings of the ancients and their forebears. I have no need to deal with this again at greater length here. X 31 I pass on, then, to point out the errors that are not noted in the margin. First, I do not know how many I should say have crept into chapter 2 of Ezra. For in verse 64 the grand total is given of all those who are counted group by group throughout the chapter,

39 The apocalypse called 4 Ezra in the appendix to the Latin Vulgate, known as 2 Esdras in English Bibles.

and they are said to have numbered 42,360 altogether. And yet if you add up the partial sums, you will find no more than 29,818. So the error here lies either in the total or in the partial sums. But the total seems to deserve belief as correctly transmitted, since everyone no doubt kept it in memory as something memorable, whereas this was not so with the partial sums. So if an error had slipped into the total, it would have been obvious to everyone at once and easily corrected. X 32 This is fully confirmed by the fact that in Nehemiah 7, where this chapter of Ezra (which is called the Letter of Genealogy) is copied out, as is expressly stated in verse 5 of that same chapter of Nehemiah, the grand total agrees exactly with the one in the book of Ezra, but the partial sums differ greatly. You will find some larger and some smaller than in Ezra, and all of them together come to 31,089. So there is no doubt that many errors have crept into the partial sums alone, in the book of Ezra as well as in Nehemiah. X 33 As for the commentators who try to reconcile these evident contradictions, each of them invents whatever he can, as far as his ingenuity allows. And meanwhile, while they adore the letters and words of Scripture, they do nothing else, as we have already pointed out, but expose the writers of the Bible to contempt, so that they would seem not to have known how to speak or how to set in order what they had to say. Indeed, they do nothing but thoroughly obscure the clarity of Scripture. For if it were permissible to interpret Scripture everywhere in their manner, there would truly be no statement whose true sense we could not doubt. X 34 But there is no reason for me to dwell long on these matters. For I am convinced that if some historian wanted to imitate everything that they devoutly allow the writers of the Bible, they themselves would ridicule him in many ways. And if they think that anyone who says Scripture is faulty in some place is a blasphemer, what name, I ask, shall I give them, who attribute to Scripture whatever they please? Who so degrade the sacred historians that they are believed to stammer and confuse everything? Who, finally, deny the plain and most evident meanings of Scripture? X 35 For what in Scrip-

ture is clearer than that Ezra and his companions, in the Letter of Genealogy recorded in chapter 2 of the book called his, set down group by group the number of all those who set out for Jerusalem? After all, that letter gives the number not only of those who could show their genealogy but also of those who could not. What, I say, is clearer, from Nehemiah 7:5, than that Nehemiah simply copied this same letter? X 36 Those who explain these things otherwise, therefore, do nothing but deny the true sense of Scripture, and consequently Scripture itself. As for their thinking it pious to adjust some passages of Scripture to others—a ridiculous piety indeed, which adjusts clear passages to obscure ones and correct ones to faulty ones, and corrupts the sound with the rotten. Far be it from me, however, to call them blasphemers, since they have no intention of speaking ill; to err is, after all, human. But I return to my subject. X 37 Besides the errors that must be granted in the sums of the Letter of Genealogy, in Ezra as well as in Nehemiah, many others are noted in the very names of the families, many more in the genealogies themselves and in the histories, and, I fear, even in the prophecies themselves. For certainly Jeremiah's prophecy in chapter 22 concerning Jeconiah seems in no way to agree with his history (see the end of 2 Kings, and Jeremiah, and 1 Chronicles 3:17–19), and especially the words of the last verse of that chapter. X 38 Nor do I see how Jeremiah could say of Zedekiah, whose eyes were put out as soon as he had seen his sons killed, "you shall die in peace," and so on (see Jeremiah 34:5). If prophecies are to be interpreted by their outcome, these names would have to be exchanged: Jeconiah would seem to be meant in place of Zedekiah, and conversely Zedekiah in place of Jeconiah. But this is too paradoxical, and so I prefer to leave the matter as beyond understanding, especially since, if there is some error here, it must be attributed to the historian and not to faulty manuscripts. X 39 As for the other errors I mentioned, I do not think I should point them out here, since I could not do so without greatly wearying the reader, especially as they have already been noticed by others. X 40 For Rashi, because of the glaring con-

tradictions he observed in the genealogies recorded, was driven to burst out in these words (see his commentary on 1 Chronicles 8): *that Ezra* (whom he takes to have written the books of Chronicles) calls the sons of Benjamin by other names, and traces his genealogy differently from the way we have it in the book of Genesis, and finally that he lists most of the Levites' cities differently from Joshua, comes from the fact that he found originals that disagreed. *And a little further on:* that the genealogy of Gibeon and others is recorded twice, and in different ways, is because Ezra found several different letters for each genealogy, and in copying them followed the greater number of copies; but when the number of disagreeing genealogies was equal, he copied the copies of both. X 41 In this way he concedes outright that these books were copied from originals that were neither sufficiently corrected nor sufficiently certain. Indeed, the commentators themselves very often do nothing more, while they strive to reconcile passages, than point out the causes of the errors. Finally, I do not think anyone of sound judgment believes that the sacred historians deliberately chose to write in such a way that they would seem to contradict themselves at every turn. X 42 But perhaps someone will say that in this way I completely overturn Scripture, since in this way anyone may suspect that it is faulty everywhere. On the contrary, I have shown that in this way I am safeguarding Scripture, so that its clear and pure passages are not adjusted to faulty ones and corrupted. Nor, because some passages are corrupt, may we suspect the same of all of them; for no book has ever been found without errors. Has anyone, I ask, ever suspected on that account that books are faulty everywhere? Certainly no one, especially when the language is clear and the author's meaning is plainly grasped.

HOW THE CANON WAS FORMED

The Pharisees chose the sacred books after the Maccabees, so each book's authority must be shown separately.

X 43 With this I have finished what I wanted to note concerning the history of the books of the Old Testament. From it we easily gather that before the time of the Maccabees there was no canon of the sacred books.[40] The books we now have were selected in preference to many others by the Pharisees of the second Temple, who also instituted the forms of prayer, and they were accepted solely by the Pharisees' decree. X 44 Those who want to demonstrate the authority of Holy Scripture, therefore, are bound to show the authority of each book; it is not enough to prove the divinity of one in order to conclude the same of all. Otherwise it would have to be maintained that the council of the Pharisees could not have erred in this selection of books, which no one will ever demonstrate. X 45 Now the reason that compels me to maintain that the Pharisees alone chose the books of the Old Testament and placed them in the canon of sacred books is,

40 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 25. The so-called Great Synagogue had its beginning only after Asia had been subdued by the Macedonians. As for what Maimonides, Rabbi Abraham ben David and others maintain—that the presidents of this council were Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and so on—it is a ridiculous fiction. They rely on no other foundation than the tradition of the rabbis, who hand down that the kingdom of the Persians lasted thirty-four years and no longer. Nor can they prove in any other way that the decrees of that Great Synagogue or synod, which was held by the Pharisees alone, were received from the prophets, who had received them from other prophets, and so on back to Moses, who received them from God himself and handed them down to posterity by word of mouth, not in writing. But let the Pharisees believe these things with their usual obstinacy. Prudent people, however, who know the reasons why councils and synods are called, and also the controversies between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, will easily be able to guess the reasons for convening that Great Synagogue or council. This much is certain: no prophets took part in that council, and the decrees of the Pharisees, which they call traditions, received their authority from that same council.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The Great Synagogue (Great Assembly) is the body that rabbinic tradition credits with governing the Jews after the return from exile. Abraham ben David is probably Abraham ibn Daud (c. 1110–1180), whose *Book of Tradition* traces the chain of rabbinic teaching.

first, that in the last chapter of Daniel, verse 2, the resurrection of the dead is foretold, which the Sadducees denied; and second, that the Pharisees themselves clearly indicate it in the Talmud. For in the tractate Shabbat, chapter 2, folio 30, side 2, it is said: *Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rab: The sages sought to hide away the book of Ecclesiastes, because its words contradict the words of the law* (N.B. the book of the law of Moses). *Why, then, did they not hide it away? Because it begins in accordance with the law and ends in accordance with the law.* X 46 And a little further on: *and they also sought to hide away the book of Proverbs*, and so on. And finally, in chapter 1 of the same tractate, folio 13, side 2: *Truly, name that man with kindness, whose name was Hananiah son of Hezekiah; for had it not been for him, the book of Ezekiel would have been hidden away, because its words contradicted the words of the law*, and so on. X 47 From this it follows very clearly that the experts in the law held a council to decide which books should be accepted as sacred and which excluded. Whoever wants to be certain of the authority of all of them, therefore, should hold the council over again and demand the reason for each one.

X 48 Now it would be time to examine the books of the New Testament in the same way. But I hear that this has been done by men highly expert in the sciences and above all in languages. Besides, my knowledge of Greek is not so exact that I would dare to undertake this task. And finally, we lack the original copies of the books that were written in Hebrew. For these reasons I prefer to refrain from this undertaking. Nevertheless, I intend to note the points most relevant to my purpose, which I shall do in what follows.

Chapters 11–15

Faith and reason
The apostles, the true word of God, the few dogmas of faith, and why theology and philosophy must stay apart.

CHAPTER 11: THE APOSTLES WROTE AS TEACHERS

The apostles' letters argue and advise like teachers rather than prophets, each in his own way.

XI 1 No one who reads the New Testament can doubt that the apostles were prophets. But prophets did not always speak from revelation. On the contrary, they did so very rarely, as we showed at the end of chapter 1. So we may ask whether the apostles wrote their epistles as prophets, from revelation and by express command, like Moses, Jeremiah, and others, or rather as private individuals, or as teachers. The question is all the more pressing because in 1 Corinthians 14:6 Paul points to two kinds of preaching, one from revelation, the other from knowledge. That is why, I say, we must ask whether in the epistles they are prophesying or teaching. XI 2 But if we are willing to look at their style, we shall find it utterly unlike the style of prophecy. For the prophets made a constant practice of declaring at every turn that they spoke by God's decree: *thus says God*, *says the God of hosts*, *the decree of God*, and so on. This seems to have held not only in the prophets' public addresses but also in letters that contained revelations, as is clear from the letter Elijah wrote to Jehoram (see 2 Chronicles 21:12), which likewise begins *Thus says God*. XI 3 But in the apostles' epistles we read nothing of the kind. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 7:40 Paul speaks according to his own opinion. Indeed, in a great many places we meet expres-

sions of a hesitant and uncertain mind, such as *therefore we judge*[1] (Romans 3:28), *for I judge* (8:18), and many more of this sort. Besides these, we find other expressions that are far removed from prophetic authority: *But I say this as one who is weak, and not by command* (see 1 Corinthians 7:6), and *I give my advice as a man who, by God's grace, is faithful* (see 7:25), and many others like them. It should also be noted that when, in that same chapter, he says he does or does not have a precept or command of God, he does not mean a precept or command revealed to him by God. He means only the teachings of Christ, which Christ taught his disciples on the mount. XI 4 Furthermore, if we also consider the manner in which the apostles hand down the gospel teaching in these epistles, we shall see that it too differs greatly from the manner of the prophets. For the apostles reason everywhere, so that they seem not to be prophesying but arguing. Prophecies, by contrast, contain nothing but bare doctrines and decrees. In them God is presented as speaking, as it were, and God does not reason but decrees by the absolute command of his nature. Moreover, a prophet's authority does not allow of reasoning: whoever wants to confirm his doctrines by reason thereby submits them to the free judgment of each and every person. Paul, because he reasons, seems to have done just this, when he says in 1 Corinthians 10:15, *I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say*. Finally, prophecies contain no reasoning because the prophets did not perceive the things

1 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 26. The interpreters of this passage translate λογίζομαι [I reckon] as *I conclude*, and contend that Paul uses it, somehow or other, in place of συλλογίζομαι [I infer]. Yet among the Greeks λογίζομαι means the same as חשב among the Hebrews: *to count, to think, to judge*. In that sense it fits perfectly with the Syriac text. For the Syriac version renders this text of Paul as ܡܚܫܒܝܢ ܡܚܬܟܝܡ *methrahgenan hachil*, which Tremellius very aptly translates *arbitramur igitur* [therefore we judge]. (It may be doubted whether it is a version at all, since we know neither the translator nor the time when it was published, and the apostles' native language was none other than Syriac.) For the noun ܪܚܝܡ *rehgjono*, formed from this verb, means *judgment*; indeed ܪܥܘܬܐ *rehgjono* is in Hebrew רעוא *rehgutha, will*. So ܚܬܟܝܡ means *we will*, or *we judge*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. By "Syriac" Spinoza means Aramaic. The Syriac version is the Peshitta, which the Hebraist Immanuel Tremellius (1510–1580) published with a Latin translation in 1569.

revealed to them by virtue of the natural light—that is, not by reasoning—as we showed in chapter 1. XI 5 And although in the Five Books too some things seem to be concluded by inference, anyone who looks at them closely will see that they can in no way be taken as conclusive arguments. For example, when Moses said to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 31:27, *If you have been rebels against God while I have lived among you, how much more after I am dead*. This must in no way be understood to mean that Moses wants to convince the Israelites by reason that after his death they will necessarily turn aside from the true worship of God. For the argument would be false, as could be shown from Scripture itself: the Israelites persevered steadfastly while Joshua and the elders lived, and afterward too, while Samuel, David, Solomon, and others lived. XI 6 So those words of Moses are only a moral manner of speaking, by which he foretells the people's future defection rhetorically, in the way he had been able to imagine it most vividly. The reason I do not say that Moses said this on his own account, to make his prediction plausible to the people, rather than as a prophet from revelation, is that in verse 21 of the same chapter we are told that God revealed this very thing to Moses in other words. Moses certainly did not need to be convinced of this prediction and decree of God by plausible reasons. What was necessary was that it be vividly represented in his imagination, as we showed in chapter 1. And this could be done in no better way than by imagining the people's present obstinacy, which he had often experienced, as future. XI 7 All of Moses' arguments found in the Five Books must be understood in this way: they are not drawn from the storehouse of reason, but are only ways of speaking by which he expressed God's decrees more effectively and imagined them vividly. Still, I do not want to deny absolutely that the prophets could argue from revelation. I affirm only this: the more legitimately the prophets argue, the closer their knowledge of the thing revealed comes to natural knowledge. And the prophets are recognized as having knowledge above the natural chiefly from the fact that they speak pure doctrines, or decrees, or pro-

nouncements. That is why Moses, the greatest of the prophets, made no legitimate argument. Conversely, I by no means grant that Paul's long deductions and argumentations, such as are found in the Epistle to the Romans, were written from supernatural revelation. XI 8 Thus both the apostles' ways of speaking and their ways of arguing in the epistles show very clearly that the epistles were written not from revelation and divine command, but only from the apostles' own natural judgment. They contain nothing but brotherly admonitions mixed with courtesy, something prophetic authority entirely shuns. An example is Paul's apology in Romans 15:15: *I have written to you rather boldly, brothers*. We can also conclude the same thing from the fact that we nowhere read that the apostles were ordered to write, but only to preach wherever they went and to confirm their words with signs. For their presence and their signs were absolutely required to convert the nations to religion and to confirm them in it, as Paul himself states expressly in Romans 1:11: *For I greatly long*, he says, *to see you, so that I may impart to you the gift of the Spirit, that you may be strengthened*. XI 9 But here it might be objected that by the same reasoning we could conclude that the apostles did not preach as prophets either. For when they went off to preach here or there, they did not do so by express command, as the prophets once did. In the Old Testament we read that Jonah went to preach at Nineveh, and at the same time that he was expressly sent there and that what he was to preach there was revealed to him. So too we are told at length that Moses set out for Egypt as God's envoy, and at the same time what he was to say to the people of Israel and to King Pharaoh, and what signs he was bound to perform before them to win their belief. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are expressly commanded to preach to the Israelites. And finally, the prophets preached nothing that Scripture does not attest they had received from God. XI 10 But about the apostles, when they went here or there to preach, we read nothing of the kind in the New Testament, except very rarely. On the contrary, we shall find some passages that expressly show that the apostles chose the

places to preach by their own decision—for instance, the dispute between Paul and Barnabas that went as far as a split (see Acts 15:37–38, etc.). We also find that they often tried in vain to go somewhere, as the same Paul testifies in Romans 1:13: *I have wanted to come to you many times, and have been prevented*; and in 15:22: *For this reason I have been hindered many times from coming to you*; and finally in 1 Corinthians 16:12: *Now as for our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers, and he was quite unwilling to come to you; but when he has the opportunity*, etc. XI 11 So from these ways of speaking and from the apostles' dispute, as well as from the fact that Scripture does not attest, as it does of the ancient prophets, that they went by God's command when they went somewhere to preach, it seems I ought to conclude that the apostles also preached as teachers and not as prophets. But we shall easily resolve this question if only we attend to the difference between the calling of the apostles and that of the Old Testament prophets. The prophets were called to preach and prophesy not to all nations but only to certain particular ones, and so they required an express and specific command for each. The apostles, however, were called to preach to absolutely everyone and to convert all to religion. Wherever they went, therefore, they were carrying out Christ's command, and they had no need to have the things to be preached revealed to them before they went. They were, after all, the disciples of Christ, to whom he himself had said, *But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you will speak; for what you are to say will be given you in that hour*, etc. (see Matthew 10:19–20). XI 12 We conclude, therefore, that the apostles had from special revelation only what they preached by word of mouth and at the same time confirmed by signs (see what we showed at the beginning of chapter 2). What they taught simply, in writing or by word of mouth, without calling on any signs as witnesses, they spoke or wrote from knowledge—natural knowledge, that is. On this see 1 Corinthians 14:6. Nor are we held up here by the fact that all the epistles begin with a confirmation of apostleship. For, as I shall show shortly, the apostles were granted not

only the power to prophesy but also the authority to teach. XI 13 In this sense we grant that they wrote their epistles as apostles, and that this is why each began with a confirmation of his apostleship. Or perhaps, to win the reader's goodwill more easily and rouse his attention, they wanted above all to testify that they were the very men who had become known to all the faithful through their preaching, and who had then shown by clear testimonies that they taught the true religion and the way of salvation. For whatever I see said in these epistles about the apostles' calling, and about the Holy and divine Spirit they had, I see referred to the preaching they had done. The only exceptions are those passages in which "the Spirit of God" and "the Holy Spirit" are taken to mean a mind that is sound, blessed, devoted to God, and so on (we discussed these in chapter 1). For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:40 Paul says, *But she is blessed if she remains as she is, in my opinion; and I think that the Spirit of God is in me too*. Here by *the Spirit of God* he means his own mind, as the very context of the passage shows. For what he means is this: "I judge a widow who does not want to marry a second husband to be blessed, in my opinion—I who have decided to live unmarried, and consider myself blessed." Other passages of this sort can be found, but I judge it superfluous to cite them here. XI 14 Since, then, we must hold that the apostles' epistles were dictated by the natural light alone, we must now see how the apostles could teach, from natural knowledge alone, things that do not fall within its scope. But if we attend to what we said about the interpretation of Scripture in chapter 7 of this treatise, there will be no difficulty here. For although the things contained in the Bible for the most part surpass our grasp, we can still safely discuss them, provided we admit no principles other than those drawn from Scripture itself. In just the same way the apostles could conclude and draw out many things from what they had seen, what they had heard, and finally what they had from revelation, and could teach these things to people if they so pleased. XI 15 Next, although religion as the apostles preached it—namely, by narrating the simple story of Christ—does not fall

within the scope of reason, its sum, which consists chiefly of moral teachings, as does the whole of Christ's doctrine, can easily be grasped by everyone through the natural light. Finally, the apostles did not need supernatural light to adapt religion, which they had previously confirmed by signs, to people's common understanding, so that everyone might readily accept it from the heart. Nor did they need it to admonish people about that religion. XI 16 And this is the aim of the epistles: to teach and admonish people in the way each of the apostles judged best for confirming them in religion. Here we should note what we said a little earlier: the apostles had received not only the power to preach the story of Christ as prophets, by confirming it with signs, but also the authority to teach and admonish in whatever way each judged best. Paul clearly indicates both these gifts in 2 Timothy 1:11, in these words: *for which I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the nations*. And in 1 Timothy 2:7: *of which I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I speak the truth through Christ, I am not lying), a teacher of the nations in faith* (NB) *and truth*. XI 17 In these words, I say, he clearly indicates both confirmations, that of apostleship and that of teaching. And he signifies his authority to admonish anyone at all, whenever he wished, in Philemon 8, in these words: *Although I have much freedom in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet*, etc. Here it should be noted that if Paul had received from God, as a prophet, what he needed to command Philemon, and had been obliged to command it as a prophet, then he certainly would not have been permitted to turn God's command into entreaties. So we must necessarily understand him to be speaking of the freedom to admonish that was his as a teacher, and not as a prophet.

DIFFERENT FOUNDATIONS, ONE RELIGION

Each apostle built on his own foundation; Paul and James differ, and the Church's quarrels began there.

XI 18 Still, it does not yet follow clearly enough that the apostles could choose whatever way of teaching each judged better. It fol-

lows only that, by the office of apostleship, they were not only prophets but also teachers—unless we want to call on reason for help, which plainly teaches that whoever has the authority to teach also has the authority to choose the way he wishes. XI 19 But it will be better to demonstrate the whole matter from Scripture alone. For it is clear from Scripture itself that each of the apostles chose his own particular way, as these words of Paul in Romans 15:20 show: *Taking care to preach not where the name of Christ had been invoked, so that I would not build on another's foundation*. XI 20 Surely, if they all had the same way of teaching, and all had built the Christian religion on the same foundation, Paul could in no way have called another apostle's foundations "another's," since they would have been his own as well. But since he does call them another's, we must necessarily conclude that each built religion on a different foundation. In their teaching, then, the apostles experienced what happens to other teachers who have their own particular method of teaching: they always prefer to teach those who are wholly untaught and have not begun to learn languages or sciences—even mathematics, whose truth no one doubts—from anyone else. XI 21 Next, if we run through the epistles themselves with some attention, we shall see that the apostles agree, indeed, on religion itself, but differ greatly on its foundations. For Paul, in order to confirm people in religion and show them that salvation depends on God's grace alone, taught that no one can boast of works, but only of faith, and that no one is justified by works (see Romans 3:27–28); and, further, the whole doctrine of predestination. James, on the other hand, teaches in his epistle that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (see James 2:24), and, setting aside all those disputations of Paul, sums up the whole doctrine of religion in very few words. XI 22 Finally, there is no doubt that from this—from the apostles' having built religion on different foundations—arose the many disputes and schisms by which the church has been troubled without cease ever since the apostles' times. And it will surely be troubled forever, until at last religion is separated from philosophical speculations and

reduced to the very few and very simple doctrines that Christ taught his followers. XI 23 This was impossible for the apostles, because the gospel was unknown to people. So, lest the novelty of its teaching offend their ears too much, they adapted it, as far as they could, to the mentality of the people of their time (see 1 Corinthians 9:19–20, etc.), and built it on the foundations best known and most widely accepted at that time. XI 24 That is why none of the apostles philosophized more than Paul, who was called to preach to the nations. The others, however, who preached to the Jews—people, that is, who despised philosophy—likewise adapted themselves to their mentality (on this see Galatians 2:11 ff.) and taught religion stripped of philosophical speculations. Our own age would truly be fortunate if we saw religion freed from all superstition as well.

CHAPTER 12: THE TRUE ORIGINAL OF THE DIVINE LAW

The word of God is not a set of books but a simple command to love God and neighbor, and this has reached us uncorrupted.

XII 1 Those who regard the Bible, just as it is, as a letter from God sent down from heaven to humankind will no doubt cry out that I have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. For I have maintained that the word of God is faulty, mutilated, corrupted and inconsistent with itself; that we have only fragments of it; and finally that the original document of the covenant God made with the Jews has perished. XII 2 But I have no doubt that, if they are willing to weigh the matter itself, they will at once stop crying out. For both reason itself and the pronouncements of the prophets and apostles plainly cry out that God's eternal word and covenant, and true religion, are inscribed by God in human hearts, that is, in the human mind; and that this is the true original document of God, which he himself has sealed with his own seal, namely the idea of himself, as an image of his divinity. XII 3 To the first Jews religion was handed down as a written law, no doubt because at that time they were regarded as children.

But later on Moses (Deuteronomy[2] 30:6) and Jeremiah (31:33) proclaim to them a time to come when God will write his law on their hearts. So it was once fitting only for the Jews, and above all for the Sadducees, to fight for a law written on tablets, but not at all for those who have it inscribed on their minds. XII 4 Anyone, then, who is willing to attend to this will find nothing in what has been said above that conflicts with the word of God, that is, with true religion and faith, or that could weaken it. On the contrary, he will find that we confirm it, as we also showed toward the end of chapter 10. Were this not so, I would have resolved to say nothing at all about these matters. Indeed, to escape every difficulty, I would gladly have granted that the deepest mysteries lie hidden in Scripture. But an intolerable superstition has arisen from this belief, along with other most pernicious harms, which I spoke of in the preface to chapter 7;[3] so I judged that I must by no means pass over these matters—especially since religion needs no superstitious ornaments; on the contrary, its splendor is diminished when it is adorned with such fictions. XII 5 But they will say that, although the divine law is written in hearts, Scripture is nonetheless the word of God, and so it is no more permissible to say of Scripture than of the word of God that it is mutilated and corrupted. I, on the contrary, fear that they are too eager to be holy and are turning religion into superstition—indeed, that they are beginning to worship likenesses and images, that is, paper and ink, in place of the word of God. XII 6 This much I know: I have said nothing unworthy of Scripture or of the word of God, since I have maintained nothing that I have not demonstrated to be true by the most evident reasons. For this reason I can also affirm with certainty that I have said nothing impious, nothing that smacks of impiety. I admit that some profane people, for whom religion is a burden, could take from this a license to sin, and, with no

2 The sin against the Holy Spirit is the one sin Jesus calls unforgivable (Matthew 12:31–32).

3 The Sadducees were a Jewish party of the Second Temple period who, as Spinoza understood them, held to the written law alone and rejected oral tradition.

reason at all but merely to give in to their pleasures, conclude that Scripture is faulty and falsified throughout, and consequently has no authority either. XII 7 But there is no remedy against such people. As the familiar saying goes, nothing can be said so rightly that it cannot be twisted by bad interpretation. Those who want to indulge their pleasures can easily find any excuse whatever. Nor were the people of old, who had the originals themselves, the ark of the covenant, indeed the prophets and apostles in person, any better or more obedient. All of them, Jews and Gentiles alike, were always the same, and in every age virtue has been very rare. XII 8 Nevertheless, to remove every scruple, I must show here in what sense Scripture, and any other mute thing, ought to be called sacred and divine; then what the word of God really is, and that it is not contained in a fixed number of books; and finally that Scripture, insofar as it teaches what is necessary for obedience and salvation, could not have been corrupted. From this anyone will easily be able to judge that we have said nothing against the word of God and have given no room to impiety.

XII 9 Whatever is set apart for the practice of piety and religion is called sacred and divine, and it will remain sacred only as long as people use it religiously. If they cease to be pious, it too will at the same time cease to be sacred; and if they devote it to committing impious deeds, then the very thing that was sacred before will be made unclean and profane. XII 10 For example, the patriarch Jacob called a certain place בית אל, *house of God*, because there he worshiped the God who had been revealed to him. But the prophets called that same place בית און, *house of iniquity* (see Amos 5:5 and Hosea 10:5), because the Israelites, following the practice instituted by Jeroboam, used to sacrifice to idols there. XII 11 Here is another example, which shows the point most clearly.[4] Words have a definite meaning only from usage. If, in accordance with that usage, they are so arranged as

4 The place is Bethel (Genesis 28:19); the prophets' "Beth-aven" is a scornful play on its name. Jeroboam I, first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, set up a golden calf there (1 Kings 12:28–29).

to move those who read them to devotion, then those words will be sacred, and so will a book written with such an arrangement of words. But if the usage later dies out, so that the words have no meaning, or if the book is wholly neglected, whether out of malice or because people no longer need it, then both the words and the book will be of no use and no holiness. Finally, if the same words are arranged differently, or if usage has come to take them in the opposite sense, then both the words and the book, which were sacred before, will be impure and profane. XII 12 It follows that nothing is sacred, profane or impure absolutely, outside the mind, but only in relation to it. This is also most evident from many passages of Scripture. Jeremiah (to cite one or two) says in 7:4 that the Jews of his time wrongly called Solomon's temple the temple of God. For, as he goes on to say in the same chapter, the name of God could be in that temple only as long as it was frequented by people who worship him and defend justice; if it were frequented by murderers, thieves, idolaters and other wicked people, it would rather be a den of transgressors. XII 13 What became of the ark of the covenant Scripture does not tell us at all, which has often surprised me. This much is certain, though: it perished, or was burned along with the temple, even though nothing was more sacred or held in greater reverence among the Hebrews. In this way, then, Scripture too is sacred, and its words divine, only as long as it moves people to devotion toward God. But if they wholly neglect it, as the Jews once did, it is nothing but paper and ink; it is utterly profaned by them and left exposed to corruption. So if it is then corrupted or perishes, it is wrong to say that the word of God is corrupted or perishes—just as in Jeremiah's time it would have been wrong to say that the temple, which was then the temple of God, had perished in the flames. XII 14 Jeremiah says the same about the law itself. For this is how he rebukes the impious people of his time: How can you say, "We are wise, and the law of God is with us"? Surely it was adorned in vain; the pen of the scribes *(was made)* in vain—that is, you are wrong to say that you have the law of God, even though Scripture is in your hands,

after you have made it void. XII 15 So too, when Moses broke the first tablets, it was by no means the word of God that he hurled from his hands in anger and broke (for who could suspect such a thing of Moses and of the word of God?), but only stones. These had been sacred before, because on them was inscribed the covenant under which the Jews had bound themselves to obey God. Yet since the Jews had afterward made that covenant void by worshiping the calf, the stones then had no holiness at all. For the same reason the second tablets, too, could perish along with the ark. XII 16 It is not surprising, then, if the first originals of Moses no longer survive, or if what we described above has happened to the books we have, since the true original of the divine covenant, the holiest thing of all, could perish entirely. So let them stop accusing us of impiety. We have said nothing against the word of God, nor have we defiled it. Let them rather turn their anger, if they can have any just anger, against the ancients, whose malice profaned the ark of God, the temple, the law and everything sacred, and subjected them to corruption. XII 17 Further, if, as the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 3:3, they have within them the letter of God, written not with ink but with the Spirit of God, not on tablets of stone but on fleshly tablets of the heart, let them stop worshiping the letter and being so anxious about it.

WHAT "THE WORD OF GOD" MEANS

Scripture is called God's word because it teaches true religion, not because God wrote a fixed number of books.

With this I think I have sufficiently explained in what sense Scripture should be regarded as sacred and divine. XII 18 We must now see what is properly to be understood by דבר יהוה *debar Jehova* (the word of God). דבר *dabar* means *word, speech, edict* and *thing*. In chapter 1 we showed for what reasons something is said in Hebrew to be of God and is referred to God; and from these it is easy to understand what Scripture means by the word, speech, edict and thing of God. So there is no need to repeat

everything here, nor what we showed in the third place in chapter 6, concerning miracles. XII 19 It is enough just to indicate the matter, so that what we want to say about these things here may be better understood. Namely, when "the word of God" is predicated of some subject that is not God himself, it properly means that divine law which we discussed in chapter 4: that is, the religion that is universal to the whole human race, or catholic. On this see Isaiah 1:10 ff., where he teaches the true way of living, which consists not in ceremonies but in charity and a sincere heart, and calls it indifferently the law and the word of God. XII 20 Next, the phrase is used metaphorically for the order of nature itself and for fate (since this in fact depends on and follows from the eternal decree of the divine nature), and especially for what the prophets had foreseen of this order. This is because they did not perceive future things through natural causes, but as God's decisions or decrees. XII 21 It is also used for every pronouncement of any prophet, insofar as he had perceived it by his own singular power, or prophetic gift, and not by the common natural light. This is chiefly because the prophets did in fact usually perceive God as a lawgiver, as we showed in chapter 4. XII 22 For these three reasons, then, Scripture is called the word of God: first, because it teaches true religion, of which God is the eternal author; second, because it relates predictions of future things as decrees of God; and finally, because those who were really its authors mostly taught not by the common natural light but by a light peculiar to themselves, and introduced God as saying these things. And although Scripture contains much besides these that is merely historical and perceived by natural light, the name is taken from the more important part. XII 23 From this we easily see in what sense God is to be understood as the author of the Bible: namely, because of the true religion taught in it, and not because he wanted to communicate a fixed number of books to human beings. XII 24 From this we can also know why the Bible is divided into the books of the Old and New Testaments. It is because before the coming of Christ the prophets used to preach religion as the law of their

country, binding by virtue of the covenant entered into in the time of Moses; after the coming of Christ, however, the apostles preached the same religion to all as a universal law, binding solely by virtue of Christ's passion. It is not that the books differ in doctrine, nor that they were written as documents of a covenant, nor, finally, that the universal religion, which is supremely natural, was new—except in relation to people who had not known it. *He was in the world,* says John the Evangelist (1:10), *and the world did not know him.* XII 25 So even if we had fewer books of the Old and New Testaments, we would still not be deprived of the word of God (by which, as we have already said, true religion is properly meant). In the same way, we do not think ourselves deprived of it now, although we lack many other excellent writings—such as the book of the Law, which was religiously kept in the temple as the document of the covenant, and also the books of the Wars, the Chronicles and very many others, from which the books of the Old Testament that we have were excerpted and compiled. XII 26 This is confirmed, moreover, by many other reasons. First, because the books of both Testaments were not written by express command at one and the same time for all ages, but by chance, by certain individuals, as their time and particular circumstances required. This is plainly shown by the callings of the prophets (who were called to warn the impious people of their own time), and also by the letters of the apostles. XII 27 Second,[5] because it is one thing to understand Scripture and the mind of the prophets, and another to understand the mind of God, that is, the very truth of the matter, as follows from what we showed about the prophets in chapter 2. We showed in chapter 6 that this also holds for the histories and miracles. But this can by no means be said of the passages that deal with true religion and true virtue. XII 28 Third, because the books of the Old Testament were chosen from many and finally collected and approved by a council of Pharisees, as we showed in chapter 10. The books of the New Testament, too, were admit-

5 The Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers 21:14) and the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah cited in Kings are lost sources named in the Bible itself.

ted into the canon by the decrees of certain councils, and by their decrees as well many other books, which many people held to be sacred, were rejected as spurious. But the members of these councils (Pharisaic as well as Christian) were not prophets, only teachers and learned men; and yet it must necessarily be admitted that in making this choice they took the word of God as their standard. So before approving all the books, they must necessarily have had knowledge of the word of God. XII 29 Fourth, because the apostles wrote not as prophets but (as we said in the previous chapter) as teachers, and chose the way of teaching they judged would be easier for the disciples they then wished to teach. It follows (as we also concluded at the end of that chapter) that their writings contain much that we can now do without as far as religion is concerned. XII 30 Fifth and last, because there are four evangelists in the New Testament—and who will believe that God wanted to tell the story of Christ four times and communicate it to human beings in writing? And although some things are contained in one that are not found in another, and one often helps in understanding another, it should not be concluded from this that everything narrated in these four was necessary to know, and that God chose them to write so that the story of Christ might be better understood. XII 31 For each preached his gospel in a different place, and each wrote down what he had preached, simply in order to tell the story of Christ clearly, not to explain the others. If they are sometimes understood more easily and better by comparing them with one another, that happens by chance and only in a few passages; even if these passages were unknown, the story would be just as clear, and people no less blessed.

WHY THE DIVINE LAW IS UNCORRUPTED

Copies may err, but the sum of Scripture—love God and your neighbor —could not have been corrupted.

XII 32 With this we have shown that Scripture is properly called the word of God only with respect to religion, that is, with

respect to the universal divine law. It remains now to show that, insofar as it is properly so called, it is not faulty, corrupted or mutilated. Here I call faulty, corrupted and mutilated whatever is so wrongly written and constructed that the meaning of the passage cannot be worked out from the usage of the language or drawn from Scripture alone. XII 33 For I do not want to claim that Scripture, insofar as it contains the divine law, has always preserved the same marks, the same letters and, in short, the same words (this I leave to the Masoretes, and to those who superstitiously worship the letter, to demonstrate). I claim only that the meaning—by reason of which alone any utterance can be called divine—has come down to us uncorrupted, even if the words in which it was first expressed are supposed to have been changed quite often.[6] For this, as we have said, takes nothing away from the divinity of Scripture; Scripture would be just as divine if it had been written in other words or in another language. XII 34 So no one can doubt that we have received the divine law uncorrupted in this sense. For from Scripture itself we perceive without any difficulty or ambiguity that its sum is to love God above all things, and one's neighbor as oneself. And this cannot be a forgery, nor written by a hasty and erring pen. For if Scripture ever taught anything else, it must necessarily have taught everything else differently too, since this is the foundation of all religion; remove it, and the whole structure collapses at a stroke. XII 35 Such a Scripture, therefore, would not be the same one we are speaking of here, but an altogether different book. It stands unshaken, then, that Scripture has always taught this. Consequently, no error capable of corrupting the meaning could have crept in here without being noticed at once by everyone, nor could anyone have corrupted it without his malice being immediately exposed. XII 36 Since this foundation must therefore be held to be uncorrupted, the same must necessarily be admitted of the other things that follow from it beyond any dispute and are also fundamental: that God exists, that he provides for

6 The Masoretes were the medieval Jewish scholars who fixed the vowel points, accents and marginal notes of the Hebrew Bible.

all, that he is omnipotent, that by his decree it goes well with the pious and badly with the wicked, and that our salvation depends on his grace alone. For Scripture everywhere plainly teaches all these things, and must always have taught them; otherwise everything else would be empty and without foundation. XII 37 No less must the rest of the moral teachings be held uncorrupted, since they follow most evidently from this universal foundation. Namely, to defend justice, to help the needy, to kill no one, to covet nothing that belongs to another, and so on. None of these, I say, could human malice corrupt or time erase. Whatever of them had been erased, their universal foundation would immediately have dictated again, and above all the teaching of charity, which is commended in the highest terms everywhere in both Testaments. XII 38 Add to this that no abominable crime can be devised that someone has not committed, yet no one tries to erase the laws to excuse his crimes, or to introduce something impious as an eternal and saving teaching. For we see that human nature is so constituted that everyone, whether king or subject, who has done something shameful tries to dress up his deed with such circumstances that he may be believed to have done nothing contrary to what is just and proper. We conclude, therefore, without qualification, that the whole universal divine law which Scripture teaches has reached our hands uncorrupted. XII 39 Besides these there are still other things that, we cannot doubt, have been handed down to us in good faith: namely, the main substance of the histories of Scripture, because these were very well known to everyone. The common people of the Jews used in former times to sing the antiquities of their nation in psalms. The main substance of what Christ did, and his passion, were also spread at once throughout the whole Roman Empire. So we should by no means believe that later generations handed down the chief part of these histories otherwise than they had received it from the first, unless the greater part of mankind had agreed in doing so—which is incredible. XII 40 Whatever is adulterated or faulty, then, could have occurred only in the rest: in one or another detail of a history or a prophecy, to stir the people to

greater devotion; or in one or another miracle, to vex the philosophers; or finally in speculative matters, after schismatics began to introduce these into religion, so that each might prop up his own inventions by abusing divine authority. But it matters little for salvation whether such things have been corrupted or not. I will show this expressly in the next chapter, although I think it is already clear from what has been said, and especially from chapter 2.

CHAPTER 13: SCRIPTURE TEACHES ONLY SIMPLE THINGS

Scripture asks only obedience, and of God it teaches only what people can imitate: his justice and charity.

XIII 1 In chapter 2 of this treatise we showed that the prophets had a singular power of imagining, but not of understanding. God revealed to them no secrets of philosophy, only the simplest things, and he accommodated himself to their preconceived opinions. XIII 2 Next, in chapter 5, we showed that Scripture conveys and teaches things in the way that everyone can most easily grasp them. It does not deduce things from axioms and definitions and link them together. It simply states them, and to win belief it confirms what it says by experience alone, that is, by miracles and histories. These, too, are narrated in a style and in phrases that can most move the minds of the people. On this see chapter 6, on what is demonstrated under the third head. XIII 3 Finally, in chapter 7 we showed that the difficulty of understanding Scripture lies solely in the language, and not in the loftiness of its subject matter. Add to this that the prophets preached not to the learned but to all Jews without exception, while the apostles used to teach the gospel doctrine in churches, where all assembled in common. XIII 4 From all this it follows that the teaching of Scripture contains no lofty speculations and no philosophical matters, but only the simplest things, which even the slowest mind can grasp. I cannot wonder enough, then, at the ingenuity of those I spoke of above. They see in Scripture mysteries so profound that no human language can explain

them, and they have then introduced into religion so many matters of philosophical speculation that the Church looks like an Academy, and religion like a science, or rather a quarrel. XIII 5 But why should I wonder if men who boast of having a light above nature refuse to yield in knowledge to philosophers, who have nothing but what is natural? I would indeed wonder at it if they taught anything new, anything purely speculative, that had not long been a commonplace among the Gentile philosophers (whom they nevertheless call blind). For if you ask what mysteries they see hidden in Scripture, you will find nothing at all but the fictions of Aristotle or Plato or someone like them—things any unlettered person could often dream up more easily than the most learned man could dig them out of Scripture. XIII 6 We do not wish to assert absolutely that nothing purely speculative belongs to the teaching of Scripture; in the previous chapter we cited some things of this kind as fundamentals of Scripture. I mean only that such things are very few and very simple. XIII 7 What these are, and how they are determined, I have resolved to show here. This will now be easy for us, since we know that it was not the aim of Scripture to teach the sciences. From this we can easily judge that Scripture demands nothing from men but obedience, and condemns only obstinacy, not ignorance. XIII 8 Next, since obedience toward God consists solely in love of one's neighbor (for whoever loves his neighbor with the aim of obeying God has, as Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans 13:8, fulfilled the law), it follows that Scripture commends no knowledge other than what all men need in order to obey God according to this precept—knowledge without which men must necessarily be obstinate, or at least lack the discipline of obedience. All other speculations, which do not lead directly to this end, whether they concern the knowledge of God or of natural things, do not touch Scripture, and must therefore be separated from revealed religion.

XIII 9 Although everyone, as we have said, can now easily see this, nevertheless, because the verdict on the whole of religion depends on it, I want to show the whole matter more precisely

and explain it more clearly. To do so, we must first of all show that intellectual, or precise, knowledge of God is not a gift common to all the faithful, as obedience is. Next, we must show that the knowledge which God has asked of everyone universally through the prophets, and which everyone is bound to have, is nothing other than the knowledge of his divine justice and charity. Both points are easily demonstrated from Scripture itself. XIII 10 For, first, this follows most evidently from Exodus 6:3, where God, to show Moses the singular grace granted to him, says: *and I was revealed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Sadai, but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them*. To explain this better, note that El Sadai in Hebrew means "God who suffices," because he gives each person what suffices for him; and although Sadai is often used on its own for God, there is no doubt that the name El, "God," is everywhere to be understood. XIII 11 Next, note that in Scripture no name except Jehovah is found that indicates the absolute essence of God, without relation to created things.[7] That is why the Hebrews maintain that this alone is God's proper name, while the others are common nouns. XIII 12 And indeed the other names of God, whether substantives or adjectives, are attributes that belong to God insofar as he is considered in relation to created things, or is manifested through them. Such is אל *El*, or, with the paragogic letter ה *He*, אלה *Eloah*, which, as is well known, means simply "powerful one." It applies to God only by way of eminence, as when we call Paul "the Apostle." Otherwise the particular virtues of his power are spelled out, as in El (powerful) great, awesome, just, merciful, and so on; or, to include them all at once, this name is used in the plural with a singular meaning, which is very frequent in Scripture.[8] XIII 13 Now since God tells Moses that he was not known to the fathers by the name Jehovah, it follows that they knew no attribute of God that expresses his absolute essence, but only his effects and promises, that is, his power insofar as it is manifested through visible things. XIII 14 Yet God does not tell

7 Spinoza's *El Sadai* is the name usually transliterated *El Shaddai*.
8 The plural form is *Elohim*.

Moses this to accuse them of unbelief, but on the contrary to extol their trust and faith. Although they did not have as singular a knowledge of God as Moses, they nevertheless believed God's promises to be fixed and sure. Not so Moses: though he had loftier thoughts about God, he still doubted the divine promises, and complained to God that instead of the promised salvation he had changed the Jews' situation for the worse. XIII 15 Since, then, the fathers did not know God's singular name, and God tells Moses this to praise their simplicity of heart and their faith, and at the same time to recall the singular grace granted to Moses, it follows most evidently—as we stated in the first place—that men are not bound by command to know God's attributes, and that this is a special gift granted only to some of the faithful. Nor is it worth showing this with further testimonies from Scripture. XIII 16 For who does not see that knowledge of God has not been equal among all the faithful? And that no one can be wise by command, any more than he can live and exist by command? Men, women, children—all can equally obey by command, but not be wise. XIII 17 If anyone says that there is indeed no need to understand God's attributes, but only to believe them quite simply, without demonstration, he is surely talking nonsense. For invisible things, which are objects of the mind alone, can be seen with no other eyes than demonstrations. Those who lack demonstrations therefore see nothing of these things at all. Whatever they repeat of what they have heard about such matters touches or reveals their mind no more than the words of a parrot or an automaton, which speak without mind or sense. XIII 18 But before I go further, I must explain why Genesis often says that the patriarchs preached in the name of Jehovah, which seems plainly to contradict what has just been said. If we attend to what we showed in chapter 8, we can easily reconcile these things. For in that chapter we showed that the writer of the Pentateuch does not designate things and places by exactly the names they had at the time he is speaking of, but by those by which they were better known in the writer's own time. XIII 19 So in Genesis God is said to have been

preached by the patriarchs under the name Jehovah, not because the fathers knew him by this name, but because this name was held in the highest reverence among the Jews. This, I say, must necessarily be said, since our text of Exodus states expressly that God was not known by this name to the patriarchs, and also because in Exodus 3:13 Moses wishes to know God's name; had it been known before, it would at least have been known to him too. We must conclude, then, as we wished: the faithful patriarchs did not know this name of God, and knowledge of God is a gift of God, not a command.

XIII 20 It is time, then, to pass to the second point: to show that God, through the prophets, asks of men no other knowledge of himself than the knowledge of his divine justice and charity, that is, of such attributes of God as men can imitate by a certain way of living. Jeremiah teaches this in the most explicit words. XIII 21 For in 22:15–16, speaking of King Josiah, he says: *Your father indeed ate and drank, and did judgment and justice; then it* (was) *well with him; he judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it* (was) *well with him; for* (NB) *this is to know me, said Jehovah*. XIII 22 No less clear are the words of 9:23, namely: *but in this alone let everyone glory, that he understands and knows me, that I, Jehovah, practice charity, judgment, and justice on the earth; for in these I delight, says Jehovah*. The same is also gathered from Exodus 34:6–7, where God, when Moses desired to see and know him, reveals no attributes other than those that express divine justice and charity. Finally, the passage of John, which we will discuss later as well, deserves particular notice here: since no one has seen God, John explains God through charity alone, and concludes that whoever has charity truly has and knows God.[9] XIII 23 We see, then, that Jeremiah, Moses, and John sum up in a few words the knowledge of God that everyone is bound to have, and place it, as we wished, in this alone: that God is supremely just and supremely merciful, that is, the one model of the true life. XIII 24 Add to this that Scripture nowhere expressly gives a definition of God, does not prescribe that any attributes of God be

9 See 1 John 4:7–16.

embraced other than those just mentioned, and does not expressly commend any others as it does these. From all this we conclude that intellectual knowledge of God—which considers his nature as it is in itself, a nature that men cannot imitate by a certain way of living, or take as an example for establishing a true way of living—in no way pertains to faith and revealed religion. Consequently, men can be utterly mistaken about it without any wickedness. XIII 25 It is no wonder at all, then, that God accommodated himself to the imaginations and preconceived opinions of the prophets, or that the faithful have held different views about God, as we showed with many examples in chapter 2. XIII 26 Again, it is no wonder at all that the sacred books everywhere speak so improperly of God. They attribute to him hands, feet, eyes, ears, a mind, and local motion, and emotions as well, such as being jealous, merciful, and so on; and finally they depict him as a judge, sitting in the heavens as on a royal throne, with Christ at his right hand. They speak, of course, according to the understanding of the common people, whom Scripture strives to make not learned but obedient. XIII 27 Yet the ordinary run of theologians have maintained that whatever of these things they could see by the natural light to be inconsistent with the divine nature must be interpreted metaphorically, and whatever escaped their understanding must be taken literally. But if everything of this kind found in Scripture had necessarily to be interpreted and understood metaphorically, then Scripture would have been written not for the people at large and the unlearned common people, but only for the most expert, and above all for philosophers. XIII 28 Indeed, if it were impious to believe these things we have just recounted about God piously and in simplicity of heart, the prophets would surely have had to take the greatest care, at least because of the weakness of the common people, to avoid such phrases. On the contrary, they would have had to teach first of all, expressly and clearly, God's attributes as everyone is bound to embrace them—which is done nowhere. XIII 29 So we must by no means believe that opinions, considered absolutely and without regard to

works, contain anything of piety or impiety. A man should be said to believe something piously or impiously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, or he takes from them license to sin or to rebel. Thus if someone becomes obstinate by believing what is true, his faith is in fact impious; and if, on the contrary, he becomes obedient by believing what is false, his faith is pious. For we have shown that true knowledge of God is not a command but a divine gift, and that God has asked of men no knowledge other than that of his divine justice and charity—knowledge necessary not for the sciences but only for obedience.

CHAPTER 14: WHAT FAITH IS

Faith is believing what obedience requires, and the faithful are known by their works, not their opinions.

XIV 1 For a true understanding of faith it is above all necessary to know that Scripture was accommodated not only to the understanding of the prophets but also to that of the varied and fickle common people of the Jews. No one who pays even slight attention can be unaware of this. For whoever embraces indiscriminately everything contained in Scripture as a universal and absolute teaching about God, without having carefully recognized what was accommodated to the understanding of the common people, cannot help confusing the opinions of the common people with divine teaching, peddling human inventions and preferences as divine teachings, and abusing the authority of Scripture. XIV 2 Who, I say, does not see that this is the main reason why sectarians teach so many and such contrary opinions as doctrines of faith, and confirm them with many examples from Scripture? Hence among the Dutch it long ago became a proverb: *geen ketter sonder letter* [no heretic without a text]. For the sacred books were written not by one man alone, nor for the common people of a single age, but by very many men of different temperaments and different periods; if we wished to reckon the span of them all, it would come to almost

two thousand years, and perhaps much longer. XIV 3 Yet we do not wish to accuse these sectarians of impiety merely because they accommodate the words of Scripture to their own opinions. For just as Scripture itself was once accommodated to the understanding of the common people, so everyone may also accommodate it to his own opinions, if he sees that in this way he can obey God, in matters of justice and charity, with fuller consent of mind. XIV 4 We accuse them, rather, because they refuse to grant this same freedom to others. All who do not think as they do, however honest and devoted to true virtue they may be, they persecute as enemies of God; while those who flatter them, however lacking in self-control, they love as God's elect. Nothing more wicked, surely, or more harmful to the commonwealth can be imagined. XIV 5 To establish, then, how far each person's freedom to think what he wishes extends with respect to faith, and whom we are bound to regard as faithful even though they think differently, we must determine faith and its fundamentals. This I have resolved to do in this chapter, and at the same time to separate faith from philosophy, which was the chief aim of the whole work. To show these things in order, let us recall the highest aim of the whole of Scripture, for this will show us the true standard for determining faith. XIV 6 We said in the previous chapter that the aim of Scripture is only to teach obedience. No one can deny this. For who does not see that both Testaments are nothing but a training in obedience, and that neither aims at anything other than that men should obey with a sincere heart? XIV 7 For, to pass over what I showed in the previous chapter, Moses did not try to convince the Israelites by reason. He tried instead to bind them by a covenant, by oaths, and by benefits. He then threatened the people with punishment if they did not obey the laws, and urged them to obey with rewards. All these are means not to knowledge but to obedience alone. XIV 8 The teaching of the Gospel, for its part, contains nothing but simple faith: to believe in God and to revere him, or, what is the same thing, to obey God. So I have no need, in demonstrating so obvious a point, to heap up the texts of Scripture that commend

obedience, of which a great many are found in both Testaments. XIV 9 Next, Scripture itself also teaches very clearly, in many places, what each person must do in order to obey God: the whole law consists in this alone, namely love of one's neighbor. Hence no one can deny that whoever loves his neighbor as himself, by God's command, is truly obedient and blessed according to the law. Nor can anyone deny that whoever, on the contrary, hates or neglects his neighbor is rebellious and obstinate. XIV 10 Finally, everyone agrees that Scripture was written and published not for the learned alone but for people of every age and kind. From these points alone it follows most evidently that, by Scripture's command, we are bound to believe nothing except what is absolutely necessary for carrying out this commandment. Therefore this very commandment is the sole standard of the whole catholic faith. By it alone must all the dogmas of faith be determined—those, that is, which everyone is bound to embrace. XIV 11 Since this is perfectly obvious, and since everything can be legitimately deduced from this foundation alone, or by reason alone, let everyone judge how it could have happened that so many dissensions have arisen in the Church. Could there have been any causes other than those stated at the beginning of chapter 7? XIV 12 It is these very causes, then, that compel me to show here the manner and method of determining the dogmas of faith from the foundation we have found. For unless I do this, and settle the matter by definite rules, I shall rightly be thought to have made little progress so far. Anyone will be able to bring in whatever he likes under this very pretext—that it is a necessary means to obedience—especially when the question concerns the divine attributes.[10]

XIV 13 To set out the whole matter in order, then, I shall begin with the definition of faith. Given this foundation, faith must be defined as follows: it is nothing other than to think such things about God that, if they are unknown, obedience to God is destroyed, and that, if this obedience is posited, are necessarily

10 Spinoza uses "catholic" in its literal sense of "universal," as he makes explicit a little further on.

posited with it. This definition is so clear, and follows so plainly from what has just been demonstrated, that it needs no explanation. XIV 14 What follows from it I shall now show briefly. First, faith brings salvation not by itself but only by reason of obedience; or, as James says in 2:17, faith by itself, without works, is dead. On this, see the whole of that chapter of the Apostle. Second, it follows that whoever is truly obedient necessarily has true and saving faith. XIV 15 For we said that if obedience is posited, faith is necessarily posited as well. The same Apostle says this expressly in 2:18, in these words: *Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* And John, in his First Epistle, 4:7–8: *Whoever loves* (that is, his neighbor) *is born of God and knows God; whoever does not love does not know God, for God is charity.* XIV 16 From this it follows, again, that we can judge no one faithful or unfaithful except by his works. If his works are good, he is faithful, even though he differs from other faithful people in his dogmas. Conversely, if they are bad, he is unfaithful, even though he agrees with them in words. For if obedience is posited, faith is necessarily posited, and faith without works is dead. XIV 17 The same John also teaches this expressly in verse 13[11] of the same chapter. *By this,* he says, *we know that we abide in him and he abides in us, because he has given us of his Spirit*—namely, charity. For he had said earlier that God is charity. From this (that is, from the principles accepted in his day) he concludes that whoever has charity truly has the Spirit of God. Indeed, because no one has seen God, he concludes that no one perceives or is aware of God except through charity toward one's neighbor alone. And so no one can know any attribute of God other than this charity, insofar as we share in it. XIV 18 Even if these arguments are not conclusive, they explain John's meaning clearly enough. But the passage in 2:3–4 of the same Epistle explains it far more clearly, for there he teaches in the most explicit words what we are claiming here. *And by this,* he says, *we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a*

11 The Latin text here reads "chapter 1," but the quotation is from James 2:18.

liar, and the truth is not in him. XIV 19 From this it follows, again, that those who persecute honest people who love justice, because these people disagree with them and do not defend the same dogmas of faith, are truly Antichrists. For we know that those who love justice and charity are faithful by this alone, and whoever persecutes the faithful is an Antichrist. XIV 20 It follows, finally, that faith requires not so much true dogmas as pious ones, that is, dogmas that move the mind to obedience. Many of them may not have even a shadow of truth, provided that whoever embraces them does not know them to be false. Otherwise he would necessarily be a rebel. For how could someone who strives to love justice and to obey God worship as divine what he knows to be foreign to the divine nature? XIV 21 But people can err through simplicity of mind, and Scripture, as we have already shown, condemns not ignorance but only obstinacy. Indeed, this follows necessarily from the definition of faith alone. All the parts of that definition must be drawn from the universal foundation already shown and from the single aim of the whole of Scripture, unless we choose to mix in our own preferences. And that definition does not expressly require true dogmas. It requires dogmas that are necessary to obedience—those, namely, that strengthen the mind in love of one's neighbor. Only by reason of this love is each person in God (to speak with John), and God in each person. XIV 22 Each person's faith, then, is to be judged pious or impious only by reason of obedience or obstinacy, and not by reason of truth or falsity. No one doubts, moreover, that the common character of human beings is highly varied, that not everyone is equally content with everything, and that opinions govern people in different ways: the very opinions that move one person to devotion move another to laughter and contempt. It follows that no dogmas over which honest people can disagree belong to the catholic, or universal, faith. XIV 23 For dogmas of that kind can be pious with respect to one person and impious with respect to another, since they are to be judged by works alone. To the catholic faith, therefore, belong only those dogmas that obedience to God absolutely pos-

its, and without knowledge of which obedience is absolutely impossible. As for the rest, each person, since he knows himself best, should think whatever he sees is best for him for strengthening himself in the love of justice. XIV 24 In this way, I think, no room is left for controversies in the Church.

THE DOGMAS OF THE UNIVERSAL FAITH

Spinoza lists the seven beliefs that obedience needs and leaves everything else to each person's judgment.

Nor shall I now hesitate to list the dogmas of the universal faith, that is, the fundamentals of the aim of the whole of Scripture. All of them (as follows most evidently from what we have shown in these two chapters) must tend to this: that there is a supreme being who loves justice and charity, whom all are bound to obey in order to be saved, and whom they must worship by the practice of justice and by charity toward their neighbor. From this everything is easily determined, and so there are no dogmas besides these. XIV 25 They are as follows. First, that God, that is, a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, or the model of true life, exists. For whoever does not know or does not believe that he exists cannot obey him or know him as Judge. Second, that he is one. For no one can doubt that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration, and love toward God. For devotion, admiration, and love arise solely from the excellence of one above all the rest. XIV 26 Third, that he is present everywhere, or that all things are open to him. If things were believed to be hidden from him, or if people did not know that he sees all things, they would doubt the fairness of the justice by which he directs all things, or would be ignorant of it. Fourth, that he has supreme right and dominion over all things, and does nothing because he is compelled by right, but acts from his absolute good pleasure and singular grace. For all are bound to obey him absolutely, but he obeys no one. XIV 27 Fifth, that the worship of God and obedience to him consist solely in justice and charity, or love of one's neighbor. Sixth, that only those who

obey God by this way of life are saved, while the rest, who live under the rule of pleasures, are lost. If people did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than their pleasures. XIV 28 Seventh, and finally, that God forgives the sins of those who repent. For there is no one who does not sin. So if this were not laid down, everyone would despair of their salvation, and there would be no reason to believe God merciful. But whoever firmly believes this—that God forgives people's sins out of the mercy and grace by which he directs all things—and is on this account more kindled in the love of God, truly knows Christ according to the Spirit, and Christ is in him. XIV 29 No one can fail to see that all these things must above all be known if people, without exception, are to be able to obey God as the law explained above prescribes. For if any one of them is taken away, obedience too is taken away. XIV 30 But what God, or that model of true life, is—whether, say, he is fire, spirit, light, thought, and so on—has nothing to do with faith. Nor does the question of how he is the model of true life: whether, say, because he has a just and merciful mind, or because all things exist and act through him, so that we too understand through him, and through him see what is true, fair, and good. It makes no difference what anyone decides about these things. XIV 31 Again, it has nothing to do with faith whether one believes that God is everywhere in essence or in power; that he directs things freely or by necessity of nature; that he prescribes laws as a prince or teaches them as eternal truths; that a human being obeys God from freedom of the will or from the necessity of God's decree; and finally, that the reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked are natural or supernatural. XIV 32 It makes no difference, I say, as far as faith is concerned, how anyone understands these and similar things, provided he draws no conclusion from them with the aim of taking greater license to sin, or of becoming less obedient to God. On the contrary, as we said above, each person is bound to adapt these dogmas of faith to his own understanding. He is bound to interpret them for himself in whatever way makes it easier for

him to embrace them without any hesitation and with the full assent of his mind, so that he may consequently obey God with the full assent of his mind. XIV 33 For, as we have also already pointed out, faith was once revealed and written down in accordance with the understanding and opinions of the prophets and of the common people of that time. In the same way, each person is now bound to adapt it to his own opinions, so that he may embrace it without any resistance of mind and without any hesitation. For we have shown that faith requires not so much truth as piety, and that it is pious and saving only by reason of obedience. Consequently, no one is faithful except by reason of obedience. So it is not the one who displays the best arguments who necessarily displays the best faith, but the one who displays the best works of justice and charity. XIV 34 How salutary this doctrine is, and how necessary in a commonwealth if people are to live in peace and harmony—how many and how great the causes of disturbance and crime, I say, it cuts off—I leave everyone to judge. XIV 35 Here, before I go further, it should be noted that from what has just been shown we can easily answer the objections we raised in chapter 1, when we discussed God speaking with the Israelites from Mount Sinai. XIV 36 The voice the Israelites heard could not give those people any philosophical or mathematical certainty of God's existence. Even so, it was enough to carry them away in admiration of God, as they had known him before, and to stir them to obedience. That was the purpose of that spectacle. For God did not wish to teach the Israelites the absolute attributes of his essence (he revealed none at that time). He wished to break their obstinate spirit and draw them to obedience. That is why he assailed them not with arguments but with the blare of trumpets, with thunder, and with lightning. XIV 37 (See Exodus 20:20.)

It remains for me, finally, to show that between faith, or theology, and philosophy there are no dealings and no kinship. No one can fail to see this now who knows the aim and the foundation of these two disciplines, which are worlds apart. XIV 38 For the aim of philosophy is nothing but truth. The aim of faith, as

we have abundantly shown, is nothing but obedience and piety. Further, the foundations of philosophy are common notions, and philosophy must be drawn from Nature alone. The foundations of faith are histories and language, and faith must be drawn from Scripture and revelation alone, as we showed in chapter 7. XIV 39 Faith therefore grants everyone the greatest freedom to philosophize, so that each may think whatever he likes about any matter whatever without committing a crime. It condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach opinions that urge obstinacy, hatred, strife, and anger. Conversely, it regards as faithful only those who urge justice and charity as far as their reason and abilities allow. XIV 40 Finally, since what I have shown here is the chief thing I intend in this treatise, I wish, before I go further, to ask the reader most earnestly to be kind enough to read these two chapters with special attention and to weigh them again and again. And let him be persuaded that we wrote not with the intention of introducing novelties, but of correcting what has been corrupted, which we hope to see corrected at last one day.

CHAPTER 15: NEITHER HANDMAID TO THE OTHER

Theology and reason each rule their own domain; Spinoza rejects both Maimonides and Alfakhar.

XV 1 Those who do not know how to separate philosophy from theology debate whether Scripture should be the handmaid of reason, or reason the handmaid of Scripture. That is, they debate whether the meaning of Scripture should be adapted to reason, or reason to Scripture. The latter view is defended by the skeptics, who deny the certainty of reason; the former by the dogmatists. XV 2 But it is clear from what has been said that both are utterly wrong. For whichever view we follow, we must corrupt either reason or Scripture. We have shown that Scripture teaches not philosophical matters but piety alone, and that everything it contains was adapted to the understanding and preconceived opinions of the common people. XV 3 Whoever

wants to adapt it to philosophy, then, will certainly ascribe to the prophets many things they never dreamed of, and will misinterpret their meaning. But whoever, on the other hand, makes reason and philosophy the handmaid of theology is bound to accept the prejudices of the common people of antiquity as divine things, and to fill and blind his mind with them. So both will be mad—the latter without reason, the former with it. XV 4 The first among the Pharisees to state openly that Scripture must be adapted to reason was Maimonides (we reviewed his view in chapter 7 and refuted it with many arguments). Although this author had great authority among them, most of them part company with him on this point and go over to the view of a certain Rabbi Judah Alfakhar. Wishing to avoid the error of Maimonides, Alfakhar fell into the opposite one.[12] XV 5 He held, namely,[13] that reason must be the handmaid of Scripture and wholly subject to it. He thought that nothing in Scripture should be explained metaphorically because its literal sense contradicts reason, but only because it contradicts Scripture itself, that is, its clear dogmas. From this he formed a universal rule: whatever Scripture teaches dogmatically[14] and affirms in express words must be accepted as absolutely true on its authority alone. Nor, he held, will any other dogma be found in the Bible that directly contradicts such a teaching. There will be contradiction only by implication, because Scripture's ways of speaking often seem to presuppose something contrary to what it has expressly taught, and only for this reason are those passages to be explained metaphorically. XV 6 For example, Scripture

12 Judah ibn Alfakhar (d. 1235), a physician of Toledo, opposed the rationalism of Maimonides in the controversy over his works in the 1230s.

13 SPINOZA'S NOTE. NB. I recall having once read this in a letter against Maimonides, which is found among the letters attributed to Maimonides.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Judah Alfakhar's letter to David Kimhi (c. AD 1232), written during the controversy over Maimonides' works, was printed in collections of Maimonides' correspondence.

14 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 28. See *Interpreter of Scripture*, p. 75.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Probably *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* (*Philosophy, the Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, 1666), published anonymously by Spinoza's friend Lodewijk Meyer.

clearly teaches that God is one (see Deuteronomy 6:4) and no other passage is found anywhere that directly affirms that there are several gods. There are, to be sure, many passages where God speaks of himself, and the prophets speak of God, in the plural. But this way of speaking only presupposes that there are several gods; it does not indicate that this is what the statement itself intends. All these passages must therefore be explained metaphorically—not because it contradicts reason that there should be several gods, but because Scripture itself directly affirms that God is one. XV 7 So too, because Scripture in Deuteronomy 4:15 directly affirms (as he thinks) that God is incorporeal, we are bound to believe that God has no body on the authority of this passage alone, and not of reason. Consequently, on the authority of Scripture alone, we are bound to explain metaphorically all the passages that attribute hands, feet, and so on to God, whose way of speaking alone seems to presuppose a corporeal God. XV 8 This is that author's view. Insofar as he wants to explain Scripture by Scripture, I commend him; but I am amazed that a man endowed with reason should strive to destroy it. It is true, of course, that Scripture must be explained by Scripture so long as we are working out only the meaning of its statements and the mind of the prophets. But once we have dug out the true meaning, we must necessarily use judgment and reason in order to give it our assent. XV 9 And if reason, even when it protests against Scripture, must nonetheless be wholly subjected to it, I ask: are we to do this with reason, or without reason, like the blind? If the latter, we certainly act foolishly and without judgment. If the former, then we embrace Scripture solely at reason's command, and so we would not embrace it if it contradicted reason. XV 10 And I ask, who can embrace anything in his mind while reason protests? For what else is it to deny something in the mind than for reason to protest against it? Truly, I cannot wonder enough that they want to subject reason, the greatest gift and a divine light, to dead letters, which human malice could have corrupted. They think it no crime to speak contemptuously of the mind, the true original document of the

word of God, and to declare it corrupt, blind, and lost; yet they hold it the greatest crime to think such things of the letter, the idol of the word of God. XV 11 They think it pious to trust nothing to reason and their own judgment, but impious to doubt the reliability of those who handed down the sacred books to us. This is sheer folly, not piety. But I ask, what troubles them? What do they fear? Can religion and faith not be defended unless people deliberately remain ignorant of everything and bid reason farewell altogether? Surely, if that is what they believe, they fear Scripture more than they trust it. XV 12 But far be it that religion and piety should want reason as their handmaid, or reason want religion as its handmaid, or that each should be unable to hold its own realm in the greatest harmony. I will speak of this shortly; for here, before anything else, I want to examine this rabbi's rule. XV 13 As we said, he holds, first, that we are bound to embrace as true, or reject as false, everything that Scripture affirms or denies; and second, that Scripture never expressly affirms or denies anything contrary to what it has affirmed or denied in another place. No one can fail to see how rashly both these claims are made. XV 14 I will pass over the fact that he did not notice that Scripture consists of different books, written at different times, by different people, and finally by different authors. I will also pass over a second point: that he lays these things down on his own authority, while neither reason nor Scripture says anything of the kind. For he ought to have shown that all the passages which conflict with others only by implication can be readily explained metaphorically from the nature of the language and the context of the passage, and further that Scripture has come into our hands uncorrupted. XV 15 But let us examine the matter in order. Regarding the first claim, I ask: if reason protests, are we nevertheless bound to embrace as true, or reject as false, whatever Scripture affirms or denies? Perhaps he will add that nothing is found in Scripture that conflicts with reason. But I press the point: Scripture expressly affirms and teaches that God is jealous (in the Decalogue itself, in Exodus 4: 14, in Deuteronomy 4:24, and in many other places). Yet this con-

flicts with reason; and still it must be posited as true. Indeed, if there were passages in Scripture presupposing that God is not jealous, they would necessarily have to be explained metaphorically, so that they would not seem to presuppose any such thing. XV 16 Likewise, Scripture expressly says that God came down onto Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:20, etc.), and it attributes other movements from place to place to him, and nowhere does it expressly teach that God does not move. So this too would have to be accepted as true by everyone. And what Solomon says, that God is not contained in any place (see 1 Kings 8:27), would necessarily have to be explained so that it does not seem to deny God motion from place to place, since Solomon does not expressly state that God does not move; it merely follows from what he says. XV 17 In the same way, the heavens would have to be taken as God's dwelling place and throne, because Scripture expressly affirms it. And so with a great many things said in accordance with the opinions of the prophets and of the common people, which reason and philosophy alone, not Scripture, teach to be false. Yet on this author's view all of them would have to be assumed true, since in these matters reason is not consulted. XV 18 Next, he falsely asserts that one passage conflicts with another only by implication, never directly. For Moses directly affirms that *God is fire* (see Deuteronomy 4:24), and directly denies that God has any likeness to visible things (see Deuteronomy 4: 12). And if he retorts that this second passage denies that God is fire not directly but only by implication, and so must be adapted to the first so as not to seem to deny it, very well: let us grant that God is fire. Or rather, so as not to go mad along with him, let us drop the matter and bring forward another example. XV 19 Samuel[15] directly denies that God repents of his decision (see 1 Samuel 15:29), while Jeremiah, on the contrary, affirms that God repents of the good and the evil he had decreed (see Jeremiah 18:8, 10). What then? Are these not directly opposed to each other? Which of the two, then, does he want to explain metaphorically? Both statements are universal, and

15 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 29. *Interpreter of Scripture*, p. 76.

each is the contrary of the other: what one directly affirms, the other directly denies. So by his own rule he is bound to embrace this very thing as true and at the same time reject it as false. XV 20 Further, what does it matter that a passage conflicts with another not directly but only by implication, if the implication is clear and the context and nature of the passage do not allow metaphorical explanations? A great many such cases are found in the Bible. On these, see chapter 2 (where we showed that the prophets held different and contrary opinions), and above all, all those contradictions we showed to exist in the historical books (in chapters 9 and 10). XV 21 I need not review them all here, since what has been said is enough to show the absurdities that follow from this view and rule, as well as its falsity and the author's haste. So we reject both this view and that of Maimonides, and we lay it down as unshakable that neither is theology bound to be the handmaid of reason, nor reason of theology, but each holds its own realm. As we said, reason has the realm of truth and wisdom, theology that of piety and obedience. XV 22 For the power of reason, as we have already shown, does not extend so far as to be able to determine that people can be blessed through obedience alone, without understanding things. Theology, on the other hand, dictates nothing but this and commands nothing but obedience, and it neither wants nor is able to do anything against reason. XV 23 For it determines the dogmas of faith (as we showed in the preceding chapter) only so far as suffices for obedience. How exactly they are to be understood with respect to truth, it leaves for reason to determine; and reason is truly the light of the mind, without which the mind sees nothing but dreams and fictions. XV 24 By theology here I mean precisely revelation insofar as it indicates the aim that we said Scripture has in view (namely, the method and manner of obeying, or the dogmas of true piety and faith)—that is, what is properly called the word of God, which does not consist in a fixed number of books (on this see chapter 12). For you will find that theology so understood agrees with reason if you consider its precepts or teachings for life, and conflicts with it in nothing

if you consider its intent and end; and for that reason it is universal to all. XV 25 As for Scripture as a whole, we have also already shown in chapter 7 that its meaning must be determined solely from its own history, and not from the universal history of Nature, which is the foundation of philosophy alone. Nor should it hold us back if, after investigating its true meaning in this way, we find that here and there it conflicts with reason. For whatever of this kind is found in the Bible, or whatever people can be ignorant of without harm to charity, we know for certain does not touch theology, or the word of God; and consequently everyone may think whatever he likes about such things without wrongdoing. We therefore conclude absolutely that neither must Scripture be accommodated to reason, nor reason to Scripture.

MORAL CERTAINTY

Reason cannot prove that obedience alone saves, but sound judgment can accept it with moral certainty.

XV 26 But since we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of theology—namely, that people are saved by obedience alone—is true or false, the objection can be raised against us too: why, then, do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, like the blind, then we too act foolishly and without judgment. XV 27 But if, on the contrary, we choose to maintain that this foundation can be demonstrated by reason, then theology will be a part of philosophy and should not be separated from it. To this I reply that I maintain absolutely that this fundamental dogma of theology cannot be discovered by the natural light, or at least that no one has ever demonstrated it, and that revelation was therefore supremely necessary. Nevertheless, we can use our judgment so as to embrace, at least with moral certainty, what has already been revealed. XV 28 I say moral certainty, for there is no reason to expect that we can be more certain of it than the prophets themselves, to whom it was first revealed, and whose certainty was nonetheless only moral, as we showed in

chapter 2 of this treatise. XV 29 Those, then, who try to establish the authority of Scripture by mathematical demonstrations are entirely on the wrong track. For the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the prophets, and so it cannot be demonstrated by any stronger arguments than those by which the prophets once used to convince the people of their own authority. Indeed, our certainty about it can rest on no other foundation than the one on which the prophets based their certainty and authority. XV 30 For we showed that the whole certainty of the prophets consisted in these three things: first, a distinct and vivid imagination; second, a sign; third and most important, a mind inclined to what is right and good. They rested on no other grounds, and so they could not demonstrate their authority on any other grounds either to the people, whom they once addressed in person, or to us, whom they address in writing. XV 31 But the first, that they imagined things vividly, could be evident only to the prophets themselves. So all our certainty about revelation can and must be founded on the other two alone, namely the sign and the teaching. Moses, too, expressly teaches this. XV 32 For in Deuteronomy 18 he commands the people to obey the prophet who has given a true sign in the name of God, but to condemn to death a prophet who has predicted something falsely, even in the name of God; and likewise anyone who has tried to lead the people away from the true religion, even if he confirmed his authority by signs and wonders (on this see Deuteronomy 13). XV 33 From this it follows that a true prophet is distinguished from a false one by his teaching and by miracle together. Such a prophet Moses declares to be true, and he commands the people to believe him without any fear of deception. And he says that those are false and deserve death who have predicted something falsely, even in the name of God, or who have taught false gods, even if they performed true miracles. XV 34 Therefore we too are bound to believe Scripture, that is, the prophets themselves, for this reason alone: because of their teaching confirmed by signs. For since we see that the prophets commend charity and justice above all things and aim at noth-

ing else, we conclude that they taught sincerely, without intent to deceive, that people become blessed through obedience and faith. And because they also confirmed this by signs, we are persuaded that they did not say it rashly and were not raving when they prophesied. XV 35 We are confirmed in this still further when we note that they taught nothing moral that does not agree most plainly with reason; for it is no accident that the word of God in the prophets agrees entirely with the very word of God speaking within us. And these things, I say, we conclude from the Bible with the same certainty with which the Jews of old concluded them from the living voice of the prophets. XV 36 For above, at the end of chapter 12, we showed that Scripture has come down to us uncorrupted as regards its teaching and its principal narratives. Therefore, although this foundation of all theology and Scripture cannot be shown by mathematical demonstration, we nonetheless embrace it with sound judgment. XV 37 For it is surely ignorance to refuse to accept something that is confirmed by the testimony of so many prophets, that gives great comfort to those not strongly endowed with reason, that brings no small benefit to the commonwealth, and that we can believe absolutely without risk or harm—and to refuse it for this reason alone, that it cannot be demonstrated mathematically. As if, in order to live wisely, we should admit as true nothing that can be called into doubt by any reason for doubting; or as if most of our actions were not highly uncertain and full of chance. XV 38 I grant, indeed, that those who think philosophy and theology contradict each other—and therefore believe that one or the other must be driven from its realm, and that we must bid farewell to one or the other—are not without reason in striving to lay firm foundations for theology and in trying to demonstrate it mathematically. For who but someone desperate and mad would want to bid reason a rash farewell, despise the arts and sciences, and deny the certainty of reason? XV 39 Yet we cannot excuse them entirely, since they want to call on reason for help in order to drive reason away, and try by sure reasoning to make reason unsure. Indeed, while they strive to show the truth and authority of

theology by mathematical demonstrations, and to strip reason and the natural light of authority, they are doing nothing but dragging theology itself under the rule of reason. They plainly seem to presuppose that theology's authority has no luster unless it is illuminated by the natural light of reason. XV 40 And if, on the other hand, they boast that they rest entirely on the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, and call on reason for help only for the sake of unbelievers—to convince them, that is—even so, no credence should be given to what they say. For we can easily show that they say this either from their affects or from vainglory. XV 41 It follows most evidently from the preceding chapter that the Holy Spirit bears witness only to good works, which is why Paul, too, in Galatians 5:22, calls them the fruits of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit itself is in fact nothing other than the contentment of mind that arises in the mind from good actions. XV 42 But to the truth and certainty of things that are purely matters of speculation, no Spirit bears witness except reason, which alone, as we have shown, has claimed for itself the realm of truth. So if they claim to have some other Spirit besides this one, which makes them certain of the truth, their boast is false and they speak only from the prejudice of their affects; or else, in great fear of being defeated by philosophers and exposed to public ridicule, they take refuge in sacred things. But in vain: for what altar can someone prepare for himself who offends against the majesty of reason? XV 43 But I leave them aside, since I think I have done what my case requires. I have shown how philosophy is to be separated from theology, what each chiefly consists in, and that neither is the handmaid of the other, but each holds its own realm without any opposition from the other. Finally, wherever the occasion arose, I have also shown the absurdities, disadvantages, and harms that have resulted from people's confusing these two faculties with each other in remarkable ways, and not knowing how to distinguish accurately between them and separate one from the other. XV 44 Now, before I go on to other matters, I want to state expressly here[16] (although it has already

16 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 30. *Interpreter of Scripture*, p. 115.

been said), regarding the usefulness and necessity of Holy Scripture, or revelation, that I hold it to be very great. For since we cannot perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation[17], and only revelation teaches that this comes about by a singular grace of God that we cannot grasp by reason, it follows that Scripture has brought very great comfort to mortals. XV 45 Absolutely everyone can obey, whereas there are only very few, compared with the whole human race, who acquire the habit of virtue under the guidance of reason alone. So if we did not have this testimony of Scripture, we would doubt the salvation of nearly everyone.

17 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 31. That is, that it is enough for salvation, or blessedness, to embrace the divine decrees as laws or commands, and that there is no need to conceive them as eternal truths—this, not reason but revelation can teach, as is clear from what was demonstrated in chapter 4.

Chapters 16–20

The state and free thought
Natural right and the social contract, the Hebrew commonwealth, religion under the sovereign, and freedom of speech.

CHAPTER 16: THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE STATE

Natural right extends as far as power, and by nature big fish eat small ones.

XVI 1 Up to this point we have taken care to separate philosophy from theology and to show the freedom to philosophize that theology grants to everyone. It is therefore time to inquire how far this freedom to think, and to say what one thinks, extends in the best commonwealth. To examine this in an orderly way, we must discuss the foundations of the commonwealth, and first the natural right of each individual, without yet attending to the commonwealth and religion.

XVI 2 By the right and established order of nature I understand nothing other than the rules of the nature of each individual thing, according to which we conceive each thing as naturally determined to exist and to act in a certain way. For example, fish are determined by nature to swim, and the large ones to eat the smaller. So fish possess the water, and the large eat the small, by the supreme right of nature. XVI 3 For it is certain that nature, considered absolutely, has the supreme right to everything it can do. That is, the right of nature extends as far as its power extends, for the power of nature is the very power of God, who has the supreme right to everything. XVI 4 But the universal power of the whole of nature is nothing but the power of all

individuals taken together. It follows that each individual has the supreme right to everything it can do, or that the right of each extends as far as its determinate power extends. And the highest law of nature is that each thing strives, as far as it can by its own power, to persevere in its own state, and does so with regard not to anything else but only to itself. It follows that each individual has the supreme right to this—that is (as I said), to exist and to act as it is naturally determined to do. XVI 5 Here we recognize no difference between human beings and the other individuals of nature. Nor do we distinguish between human beings endowed with reason and others who do not know true reason, or between the foolish, the delirious, and the sane. For whatever each thing does by the laws of its own nature, it does by supreme right, simply because it acts as it is determined by nature and can do nothing else. XVI 6 So among human beings, as long as they are considered as living under the rule of nature alone, the one who does not yet know reason, or does not yet have the habit of virtue, lives by supreme right by the laws of appetite alone, just as much as the one who directs his life by the laws of reason. That is, the wise man has the supreme right to everything that reason dictates, or to living by the laws of reason. In the same way the ignorant person, who lacks mastery of himself, has the supreme right to everything that appetite urges, or to living by the laws of appetite. And this is just what Paul teaches: he acknowledges no sin before the law—that is, as long as human beings are considered as living under the rule of nature.[1]

XVI 7 The natural right of each human being, then, is determined not by sound reason but by desire and power. For not all are naturally determined to act according to the rules and laws of reason. On the contrary, all are born ignorant of everything, and a great part of their life passes before they can know the true way of living and acquire the habit of virtue, even if they have been well brought up. Meanwhile they are nonetheless bound to live and to preserve themselves as far as they can,

1 See Romans 4:15 and 5:13.

namely by the impulse of appetite alone. Nature has given them nothing else, and has denied them the actual power of living by sound reason. So they are no more bound to live by the laws of a sound mind than a cat is bound to live by the laws of a lion's nature. XVI 8 Whatever, therefore, anyone considered as under the rule of nature alone judges useful to himself, whether by the guidance of sound reason or by the impulse of his affects, he may seek by the supreme right of nature. He may take it by any means—by force, by deceit, by entreaty, or by whatever way he can most easily manage. And consequently he may regard as an enemy anyone who wants to stop him from having his way.

XVI 9 From this it follows that the right and established order of nature, under which all are born and for the most part live, prohibits nothing except what no one desires and what no one can do. It does not frown on quarrels, hatreds, anger, deceit, or absolutely anything that appetite urges. XVI 10 No wonder. For nature is not confined by the laws of human reason, which aim only at the true advantage and preservation of human beings, but by infinitely many others, which concern the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which man is a small part. By the necessity of this order alone all individuals are determined to exist and to act in a certain way. XVI 11 Whatever in nature seems to us ridiculous, absurd, or evil, then, comes from the fact that we know things only in part and are for the most part ignorant of the order and coherence of the whole of nature, and from the fact that we want everything to be directed in the way that suits our reason. Yet what reason declares evil is not evil with respect to the order and laws of universal nature, but only with respect to the laws of our own nature.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

To live securely, people transfer their right to the community, which then holds supreme right.

XVI 12 But no one can doubt how much more useful it is for human beings to live according to the laws and sure dictates of our

reason, which, as we have said, aim only at the true advantage of human beings. Moreover, there is no one who does not desire to live securely and free of fear, as far as possible. Yet this cannot possibly happen as long as each person may do whatever he pleases, and no more right is granted to reason than to hatred and anger. XVI 13 For there is no one who does not live anxiously amid enmities, hatreds, anger, and deceit, and who does not therefore strive, as far as he can, to avoid them. And if we also consider that without mutual help human beings live most wretchedly, and necessarily without the cultivation of reason, as we showed in chapter 5, we will see very clearly that, in order to live securely and as well as possible, human beings necessarily had to unite into one body. They thus brought it about that they held collectively the right each had by nature to everything, and that this right was no longer determined by the force and appetite of each individual but by the power and will of all together. XVI 14 Yet they would have attempted this in vain if they had wanted to follow only what appetite urges, for by the laws of appetite each person is pulled in a different direction. So they had to resolve most firmly, and agree by pact, to direct everything by the dictate of reason alone (which no one dares to oppose openly, lest he seem to have lost his mind). They had to restrain appetite insofar as it urges anything to another's harm, to do to no one what they would not want done to themselves, and finally to defend another's right as their own. XVI 15 But how this pact must be entered into so that it may be valid and stable, we must now consider. For it is a universal law of human nature that no one neglects anything he judges to be good except in the hope of a greater good or out of fear of a greater harm, and that no one endures any evil except to avoid a greater one or in the hope of a greater good. That is, of two goods each will choose the one he himself judges greater, and of two evils the one that seems lesser to him. I say expressly "what seems greater or lesser to the one choosing," not that the thing is necessarily as he judges it. XVI 16 And this law is so firmly inscribed in human nature that it must be counted among the eternal truths, which

no one can fail to know. From it, however, it necessarily follows that no one will promise without deceit[2] to give up the right he has to everything, and that absolutely no one will keep his promises except out of fear of a greater evil or hope of a greater good. XVI 17 To understand this better, suppose a robber forces me to promise to give him my goods whenever he wants. Now, as I have already shown, my natural right is determined by my power alone. So it is certain that if I can free myself from this robber by deceit, promising him whatever he wants, I am permitted by natural right to do so—that is, to agree deceitfully to whatever he wants. XVI 18 Or suppose I have promised someone in good faith that for twenty days I will not taste food or any nourishment, and afterward I see that I promised foolishly and cannot keep the promise without the greatest harm. Since by natural right I am bound to choose the lesser of two evils, I can break faith with such a pact by supreme right, and treat what was said as unsaid. XVI 19 And this, I say, is permitted by natural right whether I see by true and certain reasoning that I promised badly, or merely seem, in my opinion, to see it. For whether I see it truly or falsely, I will fear the greatest evil, and I will therefore strive by every means to avoid it, as the established order of nature directs. XVI 20 From this we conclude that a pact can have no force except by reason of its utility. When that is removed, the pact is removed with it and is left void. It is therefore foolish for anyone to demand another's faith forever unless he also tries to ensure that breaking the pact to be made will bring the one who breaks it more harm than advantage. This principle should carry the greatest weight in founding a commonwealth. XVI 21 If all human beings could easily be led by the

2 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 32. In the civil state, where it is decided by common right what is good and what is evil, deceit is rightly divided into good and bad. But in the natural state, where each is his own judge and has the supreme right to prescribe laws for himself and to interpret them, and even to repeal them as he judges more useful to himself, it certainly cannot be conceived that anyone acts with bad deceit.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. *Dolus malus*, "bad deceit," is the Roman-law term for fraud, as opposed to *dolus bonus*, permissible cunning.

guidance of reason alone and recognize the supreme utility and necessity of the commonwealth, there would be no one who did not utterly detest deceit. All would keep their pacts completely and in perfect good faith, out of desire for this highest good, namely the preservation of the commonwealth. They would maintain good faith, the chief safeguard of the commonwealth, above everything. XVI 22 But it is far from true that all can always easily be led by the guidance of reason alone. For each is drawn by his own pleasure, and the mind is very often so taken up with greed, desire for glory, envy, anger, and the like that no room is left for reason. XVI 23 So although people promise with sure signs of sincerity, and agree to keep faith, no one can be certain of another's good faith unless something is added to the promise. For by the right of nature each person can act deceitfully, and is not bound to keep pacts except in the hope of a greater good or from fear of a greater evil. XVI 24 But we have already shown that natural right is determined by each person's power alone. It follows that, however much of the power he has a person transfers to another, whether by force or voluntarily, so much of his right he necessarily yields to the other as well. It also follows that whoever has supreme power, by which he can compel all by force and restrain them by fear of the ultimate penalty, which everyone universally fears, has supreme right over all. He will retain this right, however, only as long as he preserves this power of carrying out whatever he wishes. Otherwise his rule will be precarious, and no one stronger than he will be bound to obey him unless he wishes to.

DEMOCRACY AND THE SOVEREIGN'S RIGHT

Democracy is the most natural state; subjects obey the sovereign without becoming slaves.

XVI 25 In this way, then, a society can be formed without any conflict with natural right, and every pact can always be kept in perfect good faith. This happens if each person transfers all the power he has to society, which will therefore alone retain the

supreme right of nature to everything, that is, supreme sovereignty. Each person will be bound to obey it, either freely or from fear of the ultimate penalty. XVI 26 The right of such a society is called democracy, which is therefore defined as a general assembly of human beings that holds, as a body, supreme right to everything in its power. From this it follows that the sovereign is bound by no law, and that all must obey it in everything. For all must have agreed to this, tacitly or expressly, when they transferred to it all their power of defending themselves, that is, all their right. XVI 27 For if they wanted to keep anything for themselves, they ought at the same time to have secured a means of defending it safely. But they did not do this, and could not have done it without dividing, and consequently destroying, the state. By that very fact they submitted themselves absolutely to the will of the sovereign. And they did this absolutely, and (as we have already shown) both under the compulsion of necessity and at the urging of reason itself. It follows that, unless we want to be enemies of the state and to act against reason, which urges us to defend the state with all our strength, we are bound to carry out absolutely all the commands of the sovereign, even if it commands the most absurd things. For reason bids us carry out even such commands, so that we may choose the lesser of two evils. XVI 28 Add to this that each person could easily run this risk of submitting himself absolutely to another's rule and will. For, as we have shown, sovereign powers have this right of commanding whatever they wish only as long as they actually hold supreme power. If they lose that power, they lose at the same time the right of commanding everything, and it passes to the one or ones who have acquired it and can keep it. XVI 29 It can therefore very rarely happen that sovereign powers command the most absurd things. For it is very much their own concern, in order to look out for themselves and retain power, to consult the common good and direct everything by the dictate of reason; for, as Seneca says, no one has held violent rule for long. XVI 30 Moreover, absurd commands are less to be feared in a

democratic state.[3] For it is almost impossible for the majority of a single assembly, if it is large, to agree on one absurdity. Second, there is the foundation and end of democracy, which, as we have also shown, is nothing other than to avoid the absurdities of appetite and to keep human beings, as far as possible, within the bounds of reason, so that they may live in harmony and peace. If this foundation is removed, the whole structure will easily collapse. XVI 31 To provide for these things, then, is the concern of the sovereign alone. The subjects' part, as we have said, is to carry out its commands and to recognize no right other than what the sovereign declares to be right. XVI 32 But perhaps someone will think that in this way we make subjects into slaves, since people think that a slave is one who acts on command and a free man is one who does as he pleases. This is not absolutely true. For in fact the one who is so drawn by his own pleasure that he can neither see nor do anything useful to himself is the greatest slave, and only he is free who lives wholeheartedly by the guidance of reason alone. XVI 33 Action on command, that is, obedience, does indeed take away freedom in some way, but it does not of itself make a person a slave; the reason for the action does. If the end of the action is the advantage not of the agent himself but of the one commanding, then the agent is a slave and useless to himself. XVI 34 But in a commonwealth and state where the welfare of the whole people, not of the ruler, is the supreme law, the one who obeys the sovereign in everything should be called not a slave useless to himself but a subject. And so that commonwealth is most free whose laws are founded on sound reason, for there each person can be free

3 Seneca, *Trojan Women* 258: "No one has held violent rule for long; moderate rule endures."

whenever he wishes[4], that is, can live wholeheartedly by the guidance of reason. XVI 35 So too children, though bound to obey all their parents' commands, are nevertheless not slaves, for the parents' commands look above all to the children's advantage. We recognize, then, a great difference between a slave, a son, and a subject, who are accordingly defined as follows. A slave is one who is bound to obey the commands of a master, which look only to the advantage of the one commanding. A son is one who does what is useful to himself at the command of a parent. A subject, finally, is one who does what is useful to the community, and consequently to himself as well, at the command of the sovereign. XVI 36 With this I think I have shown the foundations of the democratic state clearly enough. I have preferred to treat it above all others because it seemed the most natural, and the closest to the freedom that nature grants to each person. For in it no one transfers his natural right to another so completely that he has no say thereafter; he transfers it to the majority of the whole society, of which he is one part. In this way all remain equal, as they were before in the state of nature. XVI 37 Second, I chose to treat this form of state alone expressly because it best serves my purpose, since I had set out to discuss the benefit of freedom in the commonwealth. I therefore pass over the foundations of the other forms of power. Nor do we need to know, in order to understand their right, where they arose from and often still arise; for that is more than clear from what has just been shown. XVI 38 For whoever holds supreme power, whether it is one person, a few, or finally all, it is certain that the supreme right of commanding whatever it wishes belongs to that holder. Moreover, whoever has transferred to another his power of

4 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 33. In whatever state a person lives, he can be free. For a person is certainly free to the extent that he is led by reason. But (note: Hobbes holds otherwise) reason urges peace above all, and peace cannot be obtained unless the common laws of the state are kept inviolate. Therefore, the more a person is led by reason, that is, the freer he is, the more steadily he will keep the laws of the state and carry out the commands of the sovereign whose subject he is.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), English political philosopher, author of *De Cive* and *Leviathan*.

defending himself, whether voluntarily or compelled by force, has wholly given up his natural right, and has consequently resolved to obey that other absolutely in everything. And he is altogether bound to do so as long as the king, or the nobles, or the people preserve the supreme power they received, which was the basis of the transfer of right. There is no need to add more to this.

CIVIL RIGHT, WRONGS AND TREASON

Spinoza defines private right, wrong, justice, allies, enemies and treason in the civil state.

XVI 39 Now that the foundations and right of the state have been shown, it will be easy to determine what private civil right is, what a wrong is, and what justice and injustice are in the civil state; and next, who is an ally, who is an enemy, and finally what the crime of treason is. XVI 40 For by private civil right we can understand nothing other than each person's freedom to preserve himself in his own state, a freedom determined by the edicts of the sovereign and defended by its authority alone. For once each person has transferred to another his right of living as he pleases, which was determined by his own power alone—that is, his freedom and power of defending himself—he is now bound to live by that other's reason alone and to defend himself by that other's protection alone. XVI 41 A wrong occurs when a citizen or subject is compelled to suffer some harm from another contrary to civil right, that is, contrary to an edict of the sovereign. A wrong can be conceived only in the civil state. Nor can any wrong be done to subjects by the sovereign powers, to whom everything is permitted by right. So it can take place only between private persons, who are bound by right not to harm one another. XVI 42 Justice is a steadfast disposition of mind to render to each person what belongs to him by civil right. Injustice, by contrast, is taking from someone, under a show of right, what belongs to him by the true interpretation of the laws. These are also called equity and inequity, because those appoin-

ted to settle lawsuits are bound to show no favor to persons but to treat all as equal, and to defend each person's right equally, neither envying the rich nor despising the poor.[5] XVI 43 Allies are the people of two states who contract with each other not to harm one another, and on the contrary to help one another when necessity compels. They do so to avoid the danger that comes with the hazards of war, or for some other advantage, and each state retains its own sovereignty. XVI 44 This contract will remain valid as long as its foundation, namely the consideration of danger or of advantage, is present. For no one makes a contract, or is bound to stand by a pact, except in hope of some good or fear of some evil. If this foundation is removed, the pact falls of itself—as experience teaches more than enough. XVI 45 For although different states contract with each other not to harm one another, they nonetheless try as hard as they can to prevent either from growing more powerful. Nor do they put any trust in words unless they have seen clearly enough the purpose and advantage each has in making the contract. Otherwise they fear deceit, and not without reason. For who will rely on the words and promises of one who retains sovereign power and the right to do anything at all, and for whom the safety and advantage of his own state must be the supreme law? Who, unless a fool ignorant of the right of sovereign powers? XVI 46 And if we also consider piety and religion, we shall see in addition that no one who holds power can keep his promises to the harm of his state without committing a crime. For whatever he has promised that he sees turning to his state's harm, he cannot perform without breaking the faith he has pledged to his subjects. He is bound by that faith above all, and rulers commonly promise most solemnly to keep it. XVI 47 Further, an enemy is anyone who lives outside the state in such a way that he acknowledges its sovereignty neither as an ally nor as a subject. For it is not hatred but right that makes someone an enemy of the state. The right of the state against one who does not acknowledge its sovereignty by any

5 The definition of justice echoes the opening of Justinian's *Institutes*: "the constant and perpetual will to render to each his own right."

kind of contract is the same as its right against one who has done it harm: it may rightfully compel him, by whatever means it can, either to surrender or to enter an alliance. XVI 48 Lastly, the crime of treason applies only to subjects or citizens, who by a tacit or express pact have transferred all their right to the state. A subject is said to have committed this crime when he has attempted, by any means whatever, to seize the right of the sovereign or to transfer it to another. XVI 49 I say "has attempted," because if people could be condemned only after the deed was done, the state would usually be acting too late, once its right had already been seized or transferred to another. I say, further, without qualification, "whoever attempts by any means to seize the right of the sovereign." That is, I recognize no difference whether harm or growth for the whole commonwealth would most clearly follow from it.[6] XVI 50 For whatever means he used in the attempt, he has injured the sovereign's majesty and is rightly condemned. In war, everyone admits that this is done with the fullest right. Suppose someone does not keep his post but goes against the enemy without his commander's knowledge. Even if he undertook the action with good intent, though on his own counsel, and defeated the enemy, he is still rightly condemned to death, because he has violated his oath and his commander's right. XVI 51 Not everyone sees as clearly that all citizens without exception are always bound by this same right. Yet the reasoning is exactly the same. For the commonwealth must be preserved and directed by the counsel of the sovereign alone, and people have agreed without qualification that this right belongs to it alone. If anyone, then, has undertaken on his own judgment alone, without the knowledge of the supreme council, to carry out some piece of public business —even if, as we said, growth for the state would certainly follow from it—he has nonetheless violated the right of the sovereign and injured its majesty, and he is rightly and deservedly condemned.

6 The Latin term is *crimen laesae majestatis*, literally "the crime of injured majesty."

NATURAL RIGHT AND DIVINE LAW

Divine law binds only after revelation and pact, and the sovereign decides what religion requires.

XVI 52 To remove every scruple, it remains to answer one question. We affirmed above that anyone who lacks the use of reason lives in the state of nature by the laws of appetite, with the supreme right of nature. Does this not plainly conflict with revealed divine law? For all people without exception, whether they have the use of reason or not, are equally bound by the divine command to love their neighbor as themselves. So it seems that we cannot harm another and live by the laws of appetite alone without doing wrong. XVI 53 If we consider only the state of nature, we can easily answer this objection, for that state is prior to religion both by nature and in time. No one knows by nature[7] that he owes any obedience to God. Indeed, he cannot arrive at this by any reasoning; each person can have it only from revelation confirmed by signs. XVI 54 Therefore before

7 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 34. When Paul says that people are without excuse, he is speaking in a human way. In chapter 9 of the same Epistle he teaches expressly that God has mercy on whom he will and hardens whom he will. People are inexcusable for no other reason than that they are in God's power as clay is in the power of the potter, who from the same lump makes vessels, one for honor and another for dishonor. It is not because they have been forewarned. As for the divine natural law, whose highest precept we said is to love God, I have called it a law in the sense in which philosophers call the common rules of nature, according to which all things happen, laws. For the love of God is not obedience but a virtue, necessarily present in anyone who knows God rightly. Obedience, however, looks to the will of the one who commands, not to the necessity and truth of the thing. We do not know the nature of God's will, and we know for certain that whatever happens happens by God's power alone. So we can know only from revelation whether God wishes to be worshiped by people with some honor, as a prince is. Add that we have shown that divine laws appear to us as laws, or ordinances, only as long as we do not know their cause. Once their cause is known, they at once cease to be laws, and we embrace them as eternal truths, not as laws. That is, obedience at once passes into love, which arises from true knowledge as necessarily as light from the sun. By the guidance of reason, then, we can love God but cannot obey him. For as long as we do not know the cause of divine laws, reason cannot embrace them as divine, nor can it conceive God as a prince who lays down laws.
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The references are to Romans 1:20 and 9:18–21.

revelation no one is bound by divine law, of which he cannot help being ignorant. Hence the state of nature must by no means be confused with the state of religion. It must be conceived as without religion and law, and consequently without sin and wrong, as we have already done and confirmed by the authority of Paul. XVI 55 We conceive the state of nature as prior to revealed divine law, and as without it, not only because of ignorance but also because of the freedom with which all people are born. For if people were bound by divine law by nature, or if divine law had the force of law by nature, it would have been superfluous for God to enter into a contract with people and to bind them by pact and oath.[8] XVI 56 It must therefore be granted without qualification that divine law began from the time when people promised God, by an express pact, to obey him in all things. By this pact they gave up, as it were, their natural freedom and transferred their right to God, just as we said happens in the civil state. But I shall treat these matters at greater length in what follows. XVI 57 It may still be objected that sovereign powers are bound by this divine law just as much as subjects are, whereas we said that they retain natural right and that everything is permitted to them by right. This difficulty arises not so much from the nature of the state of nature as from the nature of natural right. To remove it entirely, I say that everyone in the state of nature is bound by revealed law for the same reason that he is bound to live by the dictate of sound reason: namely, because it is more useful to him and necessary for salvation. But if he refuses, he is permitted to do so, at his own peril. XVI 58 And so he is bound to live by his own decree alone, not by another's, and he is not bound to acknowledge any mortal as judge, or as an avenger by right of religion. I affirm that the sovereign has retained this right. It can indeed consult others, but it is not bound to acknowledge anyone as judge, or any mortal besides itself as the champion of any right. The only exception is a prophet expressly sent by God who has shown

8 Paul: compare Romans 4:15 and 5:13, "where there is no law, there is no transgression."

this by indubitable signs. XVI 59 Yet even then it is compelled to acknowledge as judge not a man but God himself. If the sovereign refuses to obey God in his revealed law, it is permitted to do so at its own peril and loss, since no civil or natural right stands in the way. For civil right depends on its decree alone. XVI 60 Natural right, in turn, depends on the laws of nature. These laws are adapted not to religion, which aims only at human advantage, but to the order of the whole of nature, that is, to God's eternal decree, which is unknown to us. Others seem to have grasped this more obscurely—those, namely, who hold that a person can sin against God's revealed will, but not against his eternal decree, by which he has predetermined all things. XVI 61 But suppose someone now asks: What if the sovereign commands something contrary to religion and to the obedience we have promised God by express pact? Should we obey the divine command or the human one? Since I shall treat these matters at greater length in what follows, here I say only briefly that God must be obeyed above all things when we have a certain and indubitable revelation. XVI 62 But people are especially prone to error about religion, and they invent a great many things with great contention according to their different temperaments, as experience more than sufficiently attests. So it is certain that if no one were bound by right to obey the sovereign in matters he himself thinks belong to religion, the right of the state would depend on the varying judgment and affect of each individual. XVI 63 For no one would be bound by that right who judged a decree to have been made against his faith and superstition, and so each person could, on this pretext, claim license to do anything. Since this destroys the right of the state entirely, it follows that the sovereign has the supreme right to decide whatever it judges concerning religion. By divine as well as natural right, the duty of preserving and protecting the rights of the state falls on the sovereign alone. And all are bound to obey its decrees and commands on religion, by virtue of the faith they have pledged to it, which God commands to be kept without exception. XVI 64 If those who hold sovereign power are pagans, there are two cases.

People should either make no contract with them and resolve to suffer the worst rather than transfer their right to them. Or, if they have made a contract and transferred their right to them, they have by that very act deprived themselves of the right to defend themselves and their religion. In that case they are bound to obey these rulers and keep faith with them, or they may be compelled to do so. The only exception is someone to whom God has promised, by certain revelation, special help against the tyrant, or whom he has willed to exempt by name. XVI 65 Thus we see that, of all the Jews who were in Babylon, only three youths, who did not doubt God's help, refused to obey Nebuchadnezzar. The rest—with the further exception of Daniel, whom the king himself had worshiped—no doubt obeyed, compelled by right. Perhaps they reflected that they had been handed over to the king by God's decree, and that the king held supreme power and preserved it by divine direction.[9] XVI 66 Eleazar, by contrast, while his country was still standing after a fashion, wished to give his people an example of steadfastness. He wanted them to follow him in enduring anything rather than allow their right and power to be transferred to the Greeks, and to try everything rather than be compelled to swear allegiance to pagans. Daily experience also confirms this. XVI 67 Those who hold power over Christian states do not hesitate, for their greater security, to make treaties with Turks and pagans. They order their subjects who go to live there not to take greater freedom in practicing anything human or divine than has been expressly contracted for, or than that state allows. This is evident from the contract between the Dutch and the Japanese, which we mentioned above.[10]

9 See Daniel 3 for the three youths in the furnace, and Daniel 2:46 for Nebuchadnezzar's homage to Daniel.

10 Eleazar, the aged scribe martyred under Antiochus IV, appears in 2 Maccabees 6:18–31. The Dutch traders in Japan were required to abstain from public Christian worship (see chapter 5).

CHAPTER 17: THE HEBREW COMMONWEALTH

No one can transfer all their right to the sovereign, and the state's worst danger is its own citizens.

XVII 1 The theory set out in the preceding chapter, concerning the right of sovereign powers over all things and the natural right of each person transferred to them, agrees with practice to no small degree. Practice can also be arranged so as to approach it more and more. Even so, in many respects it will always remain purely theoretical. XVII 2 For no one will ever be able to transfer his power, and consequently his right, to another in such a way that he ceases to be human. Nor will there ever be any sovereign power that can carry out everything just as it wishes. It would be useless for it to command a subject to hate someone who has bound him by a kindness, or to love someone who has done him harm, or not to be offended by insults, or not to desire to be freed from fear. The same holds for a great many other things of this kind, which follow necessarily from the laws of human nature. XVII 3 Experience itself, I think, also teaches this very clearly. People have never given up their right and transferred their power to another so completely that they ceased to be feared by the very people who received their right and power. Nor did the state ever cease to be in greater danger from its citizens, though deprived of their right, than from its enemies. XVII 4 And indeed, if people could be so deprived of their natural right[11] that thereafter they could do nothing except with the consent of those who held supreme right, then it would surely be permitted to rule subjects with the utmost violence and with impunity. That, I believe, could occur to no one. It must therefore be granted that each person reserves many things to his own right, which therefore depend not on anyone's decree but

11 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 35. Two common soldiers took it upon themselves to transfer the rule of the Roman people, and they did transfer it. Tacitus, *Histories*, book 1.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.25, describing Otho's seizure of power in AD 69.

on his own alone. XVII 5 However, to understand correctly how far the right and power of the state extend, we must note that the power of the state does not consist strictly in its ability to compel people by fear. It consists, without qualification, in everything by which it can bring people to obey its commands. For it is not the reason for obeying, but obedience itself, that makes a subject. XVII 6 Whatever a person's reason for resolving to carry out the sovereign's commands—whether he fears punishment, or hopes to gain something, or loves his country, or is moved by some other affect—he still resolves on his own counsel, and he nonetheless acts by the sovereign's command. XVII 7 So we must not immediately conclude, from the fact that a person does something on his own counsel, that he does it by his own right and not by the right of the state. Whether he is bound by love or compelled by fear to avoid an evil, he always acts on his own counsel and decision. Either, then, there would be no state and no right over subjects, or that right necessarily extends to everything by which people can be brought to resolve to yield to it. Consequently, whatever a subject does that conforms to the sovereign's commands, he does by the right of the state, not by his own. This holds whether he is bound by love, or coerced by fear, or (more frequently) moved by hope and fear together, or by reverence—a passion composed of fear and wonder—or led by any other reason whatever. XVII 8 This is also very clear from the fact that obedience concerns not so much the outward action as the inward action of the mind. So the person most under another's rule is the one who resolves wholeheartedly to obey all his commands. It follows that the one who reigns over the minds of his subjects holds the greatest rule. If those who are most feared held the greatest rule, then surely the subjects of tyrants would hold it, since tyrants fear their own subjects most of all. XVII 9 Further, although minds cannot be commanded in the same way as tongues, minds are still in some measure under the rule of the sovereign. In many ways it can bring a very large part of the people to believe, love, hate, and so on, whatever it wishes. XVII 10 So even though these things do not hap-

pen by the direct command of the sovereign, they often happen, as experience abundantly attests, by the authority of its power and by its direction, that is, by its right. Hence we can conceive, without any contradiction of the intellect, of people who believe, love, hate, despise, and are seized by every affect whatever solely by the right of the state.

XVII 11 In this way we conceive the right and power of the state as quite ample. Yet there will never be any state so great that those who hold it have absolute power to do everything they wish, as I think I have now shown clearly enough. XVII 12 I have already said that it is not my purpose to show how a state could be formed so that it is nonetheless always securely preserved. Yet to reach what I want, I shall note what divine revelation once taught Moses toward this end. Then we shall weigh the histories and fortunes of the Hebrews. From these we shall finally see what the sovereign powers should chiefly grant to subjects for the greater security and growth of the state.

HOW RULERS SECURE THEIR POWER

A state depends on its subjects' loyalty, and kings have claimed divine descent to secure it.

XVII 13 Reason and experience teach most clearly that the preservation of the state depends chiefly on the good faith of its subjects, and on their virtue and steadfastness in carrying out commands. How they should be led to keep their good faith and virtue constantly is not so easy to see. XVII 14 For all of them, both those who rule and those who are ruled, are human beings, inclined, that is, to turn from toil to pleasure. Indeed, those who have experienced how changeable the temperament of the multitude is nearly despair of it. It is governed not by reason but by affects alone, rushes headlong into everything, and is very easily corrupted by greed or by luxury. XVII 15 Each person thinks that he alone knows everything and wants to regulate everything according to his own temperament. He considers a thing fair or unfair, right or wrong, only insofar as he judges

that it brings him gain or loss. Out of vainglory he despises his equals and will not allow himself to be directed by them. Out of envy of another's greater praise or fortune, which is never equal, he desires the other's harm and takes pleasure in it. There is no need to list everything. XVII 16 Everyone knows what crimes are often prompted in people by weariness with the present and the desire for change, by headlong anger, and by poverty that is despised, and how much these occupy and agitate their minds. To forestall all these things, then, and to set up the state so that no room is left for fraud—indeed, to arrange everything so that all people, whatever their temperament, put public right before their private advantage—this is the task, this the toil. XVII 17 Necessity has indeed forced people to devise many things. Yet things have never reached the point where the state was not more endangered by its citizens than by its enemies, and where those who hold it did not fear the former more than the latter. XVII 18 Witness the Roman Republic: unconquerable by its enemies, yet so often conquered and most miserably oppressed by its own citizens, especially in the civil war of Vespasian against Vitellius. On this see Tacitus at the beginning of Book 4 of the *Histories*, where he paints a most wretched picture of the city. XVII 19 Alexander, as Quintus Curtius says at the end of Book 8, judged renown more candidly in an enemy than in a fellow citizen, since he believed that his greatness could be destroyed by his own people, etc.[12] And fearing his fate, he entreats his friends: *Only keep me safe from treachery within and from plots among my own household, and I will face the dangers of war and battle without fear. Philip was safer on the battlefield than in the theater; he often escaped the hands of his enemies, but he could not escape those of his own people. If you consider the deaths of other kings as well, you will count more killed by their own people than by the enemy* (see Quintus Curtius, Book 9, section 6). XVII 20 For this reason, then, kings who in the past had usurped power tried—to make themselves secure, of course—to persuade people that they traced their lineage from the immortal gods. Clearly they thought that if only

12 "This is the task, this the toil" echoes Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.129.

their subjects and everyone else did not regard them as equals but believed them to be gods, they would willingly allow themselves to be ruled by them and would readily surrender themselves to them.[13] XVII 21 Thus Augustus persuaded the Romans that he traced his origin from Aeneas, who was the son of Venus and was believed to be among the gods. He wanted to be worshiped with temples and images like those of the gods, by flamens and priests (Tacitus, *Annals,* Book 1). XVII 22 Alexander wanted to be hailed as the son of Jupiter. He seems to have done this from policy, not from pride, as his reply to the invective of Hermolaus shows. *It was almost laughable*, he says, *that Hermolaus demanded that I reject Jupiter, by whose oracle I am acknowledged. Is it also in my power what the gods answer? He offered me the name of son; to accept it* (NB) *was not at all foreign to the very things we are doing. Would that the Indians, too, believed me to be a god. For wars depend on reputation, and often what was falsely believed has taken the place of truth* (Curtius, Book 8, section 8).[14] With these few words he shrewdly goes on persuading the ignorant of something feigned, and at the same time hints at the reason for the pretense. XVII 23 Cleon did the same in the speech in which he tried to persuade the Macedonians to fall in with the king's wishes. He first gave the pretense the look of truth by recounting Alexander's praises with admiration and listing his merits. Then he moved on to its usefulness, as follows: *The Persians worshiped their kings among the gods not only piously but also prudently, for the majesty of rule is the safeguard of safety.* And finally he concluded that *he himself, when the king entered the banquet, would prostrate himself on the ground; the others ought to do the same, and especially those endowed with wisdom* (see the same author, Book 8, section 5). XVII 24 But the Macedonians were more prudent. Unless people are utterly barbarous, they do not allow themselves to be so openly deceived and to be turned from subjects into slaves useless to them-

13 Philip II of Macedon, Alexander's father, was assassinated in the theater at Aegae in 336 BC.

14 Hermolaus, a royal page, led a conspiracy against Alexander in 327 BC and denounced his claims to divinity. Flamens were Roman priests each devoted to a single god.

selves.[15] Others, however, were able more easily to persuade people that majesty is sacred and holds the place of God on earth; that it is established by God, not by the vote and consent of men; and that it is preserved and defended by a special providence and by divine aid. XVII 25 Monarchs have devised other things of this kind for the security of their rule, all of which I pass over. To reach what I intend, I will, as I said, note and weigh only those things that divine revelation once taught Moses to this end.

THE COVENANT WITH GOD

Freed from Egypt, the Hebrews transferred their right to God alone, making their state a theocracy.

XVII 26 We have already said above, in chapter 5, that after the Hebrews left Egypt they were no longer bound by the laws of any other nation, but were free to institute new laws at their pleasure and to occupy whatever lands they wished. For once they had been freed from the intolerable oppression of the Egyptians and were bound by no agreement to any mortal, they regained their natural right to everything within their power. Each of them could deliberate afresh whether he wished to keep that right or to give it up and transfer it to someone else. XVII 27 So, placed in this state of nature, they decided, on the advice of Moses, in whom they all had the greatest trust, to transfer their right to no mortal, but to God alone. Without long delay they all equally promised, with one shout, to obey God absolutely in all his commands and to recognize no law other than what he himself would establish as law by prophetic revelation. XVII 28 This promise, or transfer of right to God, was made in the same way as we conceived above that it happens in an ordinary society, when people decide to give up their natural right. For by an express covenant (see Exodus 24:7) and by an oath they gave up their natural right freely—not compelled by force or frightened

15 Cleon was a flatterer at Alexander's court who proposed that the Macedonians adopt the Persian custom of prostration before the king.

by threats—and transferred it to God. XVII 29 Next, so that the covenant would be ratified, firm, and free of any suspicion of fraud, God made no covenant with them until they had experienced his wonderful power, by which alone they had been preserved and by which alone they could be preserved in the future (see Exodus 19:4–5). For by the very fact that they believed they could be preserved by God's power alone, they transferred to God all their natural power of preserving themselves, which they had perhaps previously thought they had of themselves, and consequently all their right. XVII 30 God alone, therefore, held sovereignty over the Hebrews. So this state alone, by virtue of the covenant, was rightly called the Kingdom of God, and God was rightly also called the King of the Hebrews. Consequently, the enemies of this state were enemies of God; citizens who wished to usurp it were guilty of treason against the divine majesty; and finally, the laws of the state were the laws and commands of God. XVII 31 Hence in this state civil law and religion—which, as we have shown, consists solely in obedience to God—were one and the same. That is, the doctrines of religion were not teachings but laws and commands; piety was regarded as justice, impiety as crime and injustice. Whoever defected from religion ceased to be a citizen and by that alone was considered an enemy; whoever died for religion was reckoned to have died for his country. In short, civil law and religion were held to be absolutely without distinction. XVII 32 For this reason this state could be called a theocracy, since its citizens were bound by no law except that revealed by God. But in truth all this was so more in opinion than in fact. For in reality the Hebrews retained the right of sovereignty absolutely, as will become clear from what is about to be said—namely, from the manner and method by which this state was administered, which I have decided to explain here.

THE HEBREW THEOCRACY

The people transferred their right to Moses, and after his death authority was split between priest and princes.

XVII 33 The Hebrews transferred their right to no one else; rather, they all gave up their right equally, as in a democracy, and cried out with one voice, "Whatever God speaks" (no mediator being specified) "we will do." It follows that by this covenant they all remained completely equal: the right to consult God and to receive and interpret the laws was equal for all, and absolutely the whole administration of the state was held by all equally. XVII 34 For this reason they all equally approached God the first time, to hear what he wished to command. But at this first greeting they were so terrified, and so astounded at hearing God speak, that they thought their last hour had come. XVII 35 So, full of fear, they approach Moses again and say: Behold, we have heard God speaking in fire, and there is no reason why we should wish to die; surely this great fire will consume us. If we must hear the voice of God again, we shall surely die. So you go near and hear all that our God says, and you *(not God)* will speak to us; whatever God speaks to you, we will obey and carry it out. XVII 36 By these words they clearly abolished the first covenant and transferred absolutely to Moses their right to consult God and to interpret his edicts. For here they promised to obey not, as before, everything God would speak to them, but what God would speak to Moses (see Deuteronomy 5, after the Decalogue, and 18:15–16). XVII 37 Moses, therefore, remained the sole giver and interpreter of the divine laws, and consequently also the supreme judge, whom no one could judge. He alone among the Hebrews held the place of God—that is, supreme majesty—since he alone had the right to consult God, to give the people God's answers, and to compel them to carry them out. He alone, I say. For if anyone wished to preach anything in God's name while Moses was alive, even if he was a true prophet, he was neverthe-

less guilty, a usurper of the supreme right (see Numbers 11:28)[16]. XVII 38 And here it should be noted that, although the people had chosen Moses, they could not rightfully choose a successor in his place. For as soon as they transferred to Moses their right to consult God, and promised absolutely to regard him as a divine oracle, they lost all their right entirely, and had to accept whomever Moses chose as his successor as though chosen by God. XVII 39 Suppose he had chosen someone who, like himself, would have had the whole administration of the state: namely, the right to consult God alone in his tent, and consequently the authority to make and repeal laws, to decide on war and peace, to send envoys, to appoint judges, to choose a successor, and in short to discharge all the functions of the sovereign power. Then the state would have been purely monarchical. There would have been no other difference than this: an ordinary monarchy is, or should be, governed by God's decree hidden even from the monarch himself, whereas the Hebrew one would be governed in a definite way by God's decree revealed to the monarch alone. XVII 40 This difference does not diminish the monarch's dominion and right over everyone, but on the contrary increases it. As for the people of either kind of state, both are equally subject and equally ignorant of the divine decree. For both hang on the monarch's lips and learn from him alone what is right and wrong. And because the people believe that the monarch commands nothing except by God's decree revealed to him, they are

16 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 36. In this passage two men are accused of having prophesied in the camp, and Joshua thinks they should be taken into custody. He would not have done so if everyone had been allowed to give the people divine answers without Moses' order. But Moses chose to acquit the accused, and he rebukes Joshua for urging him to assert his royal right at a time when he was so weary of ruling that he would rather die than rule alone, as is clear from verse 14 of the same chapter. For he answered Joshua thus: *Are you incensed on my account? Would that all God's people were prophets*; that is, *would that the right to consult God returned to the point where sovereignty lay with the people itself*. So Joshua was ignorant not of the right but of the circumstances of the time, and that is why Moses reproves him—just as David reproved Abishai when he urged the king to condemn Shimei to death, though Shimei was certainly guilty of treason; see 2 Samuel 19:22–23.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The two men are Eldad and Medad (Numbers 11:26–29).

not less but, on the contrary, more truly subject to him. XVII 41 But Moses chose no such successor. Instead he left the state to his successors to be administered in such a way that it could be called neither popular, nor aristocratic, nor monarchical, but theocratic. For the right to interpret the laws and to communicate God's answers lay with one person, and the right and power to administer the state according to the laws already explained and the answers already communicated lay with another. On this see Numbers 27:21[17].

XVII 42 To make this better understood, I will set out the administration of the whole state in order. First, the people were ordered to build a house that would be, as it were, the court of God—that is, of the supreme majesty of that state. This was to be built not at the expense of one person but of the whole people, so that the house where God was to be consulted would belong to all in common. XVII 43 The Levites were chosen as the courtiers and administrators of this divine palace. The highest of them, as it were second to God the King, was Aaron, the brother of Moses, and his sons lawfully succeeded to his place. He, then, as the one closest to God, was the supreme interpreter of the divine laws, the one who gave the people the answers of the divine oracle, and finally the one who interceded with God on the people's behalf. XVII 44 If, along with these powers, he had also had the right to command, nothing would have been lacking for him to be an absolute monarch. But he was deprived of that right. Indeed, the whole tribe of Levi was so completely excluded from the common government that it did not even have a share alongside the other tribes which it could own by right and on which it could at least live. Instead, Moses arranged for it to be supported by the rest of the people, but in such a way that it was always

17 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 37. The translators (those I have happened to see) render verses 19 and 23 of this chapter badly. For in verses 19 and 23 the word does not mean that he gave him commands or instructed him with commands, but that he created or appointed Joshua leader. This usage is frequent in Scripture, as in Exodus 18:23, 1 Samuel 13:14, Joshua 1:9, 1 Samuel 25:30, etc.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The Hebrew verb Spinoza discusses, וַיְצַו *vayetsav*, "and he commanded," has dropped out of this text.

held in the greatest honor by the common people, as the only tribe dedicated to God. XVII 45 Next, once an army had been formed from the other twelve tribes, they were ordered to invade the dominion of the Canaanites, divide it into twelve parts, and distribute these to the tribes by lot. For this task twelve princes were chosen, one from each tribe; together with Joshua and the high priest Eleazar, they were given the right to divide the lands into twelve equal parts and distribute them by lot. XVII 46 Joshua was chosen supreme commander of the army. He alone had the right to consult God in new situations—not, like Moses, alone in his tent or in the tabernacle, but through the high priest, to whom alone God's answers were given. He also had the right to enact God's commands communicated through the priest and to compel the people to obey them, to devise and apply the means of carrying them out, to choose from the army as many men as he wished and whomever he wished, and to send envoys in his own name. In short, the whole right of war depended on his decree alone. XVII 47 No one lawfully succeeded to his place, nor was anyone chosen for it except by God directly, and only when the necessity of the whole people required it. Otherwise all matters of war and peace were administered by the princes of the tribes, as I will soon show. XVII 48 Finally, Moses ordered everyone from the age of twenty to sixty to take up arms for military service, and armies to be formed from the people alone. These swore allegiance not to the commander nor to the high priest, but to religion, or to God. So they were called the armies or ranks of God, and God, in turn, was called among the Hebrews the God of armies. For this reason, in great battles, on whose outcome the victory or defeat of the whole people depended, the ark of the covenant went in the middle of the army, so that the people, seeing their King as if present, would fight with their utmost strength. XVII 49 From these instructions that Moses gave his successors, we easily gather that he chose administrators of the state, not its masters. For he gave no one the right to consult God alone and wherever he wished. Consequently he gave no one the authority that he him-

self had: to make and repeal laws, to decide on war and peace, and to choose administrators both of the temple and of the cities —all of which are functions of whoever holds sovereign rule. XVII 50 The high priest did indeed have the right to interpret the laws and to give God's answers, but not, like Moses, whenever he wished—only when asked by the commander, the supreme council, or the like. Conversely, the supreme commander of the army and the councils could consult God whenever they wished, but could receive God's answers only from the high priest. So God's words in the mouth of the priest were not decrees, as they were in the mouth of Moses, but only answers. Only once Joshua and the councils had accepted them did they have the force of a command and a decree. XVII 51 Furthermore, this high priest, who received God's answers from God, had no army and did not possess sovereignty by right; conversely, those who possessed the lands by right could not rightfully make laws. Moreover, the high priests—both Aaron and his son Eleazar—were each chosen by Moses; but after Moses died no one had the right to choose the high priest, and the son lawfully succeeded the father. XVII 52 The commander of the army was also chosen by Moses, and he assumed the role of commander not by the right of the high priest but by the right given to him by Moses. So when Joshua died, the priest chose no one in his place, nor did the princes consult God about a new commander. Instead, each of them retained Joshua's right over the army of his own tribe, and all of them together over the entire army. XVII 53 And it seems there was no need for a supreme commander except when they had to fight with combined forces against a common enemy. This was chiefly the case in Joshua's time, when they did not all yet have a fixed place and everything was held in common; but once all the tribes had divided among themselves the lands they held by right of war, along with those they had been commanded still to take, and everything no longer belonged to everyone, the reason for a common commander ceased by that very fact. From that division onward, the different tribes had to be regarded not so much as fellow citizens as confederates. XVII 54

With respect to God and religion they had indeed to be considered fellow citizens. But with respect to the right that one tribe had against another, they were only confederates, in much the same way (if you set aside the common temple) as the High and Mighty Confederated States of the Netherlands. For dividing a common possession into parts means nothing other than this: each now possesses his own part alone, and the others give up the right they had over that part.[18] XVII 55 For this reason, then, Moses chose princes of the tribes, so that after the state was divided each would have charge of his own part. That is, each was to consult God through the high priest about the affairs of his tribe, command its army, found and fortify cities, appoint judges in each city, attack the enemy of his own particular state, and in short administer every matter of war and peace. Nor was

18 The States General of the United Provinces, the Dutch Republic in which Spinoza lived, bore the formal style "High and Mighty."

he bound to recognize any judge but God[19], or a prophet whom God had expressly sent. Otherwise, if he had fallen away from God, the other tribes were not to judge him as a subject. They were to attack him as an enemy who had broken the faith of the contract. XVII 56 We have examples of this in Scripture. For after

19 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 38. The rabbis imagine that the so-called Great Sanhedrin was instituted by Moses. Nor is it the rabbis alone: very many Christians talk the same nonsense as the rabbis. Moses did choose seventy assistants to share with him the care of the commonwealth, because he could not bear the burden of the whole people by himself. But he never made any law instituting a council of seventy. On the contrary, he commanded that each tribe appoint judges in the cities God had given it, to settle disputes according to the laws he had laid down. And if the judges themselves happened to be in doubt about the law, they were to go to the high priest (who was, of course, the supreme interpreter of the laws), or to the judge to whom they were subordinate at the time (for he had the right of consulting the high priest), so as to settle the dispute according to the high priest's explanation. But if a subordinate judge happened to maintain that he was not bound to pass sentence according to the mind of the high priest, as he had received it from the priest himself or from the supreme authority over him, he was condemned to death. He was condemned, that is, by the supreme judge of the time, whoever that was, who had appointed the subordinate judge (see Deuteronomy 17:9). This might be someone like Joshua, supreme commander of the whole Israelite people. Or it might be the prince of a single tribe, who after the division held the right of consulting the high priest about the affairs of his tribe, deciding on war and peace, fortifying cities, appointing judges, and so on. Or it might be a king, to whom all the tribes, or several of them, had transferred their right. I could bring many testimonies from the histories to confirm this, but out of many I will cite one that seems the most important. When the prophet of Shiloh chose Jeroboam as king, by that very act he gave him the right of consulting the high priest and appointing judges. In short, all the right that Rehoboam retained over two tribes, Jeroboam obtained in full over ten. So Jeroboam could set up a supreme council of his state in his royal city by the same right as Jehoshaphat did at Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 19:8ff.). For it is certain that Jeroboam, insofar as he was king by God's command, and consequently his subjects too, were not bound by the law of Moses to stand trial before Rehoboam, whose subjects they were not. Still less were they bound to stand trial before the court at Jerusalem that Rehoboam had set up and that was subordinate to him. As many parts as the Hebrews' state was divided into, then, so many supreme councils it had. Those who do not attend to the changing condition of the Hebrews, and instead run their different conditions together into one, tangle themselves up in many ways.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish council and court of the Second Temple period. Rabbinic tradition traced it back to the seventy elders of Numbers 11.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The prophet Ahijah of Shiloh, who foretold Jeroboam's kingship over the ten northern tribes (1 Kings 11:29–39).

Joshua's death it was the children of Israel, not a new supreme commander, who consulted God. When they learned that the tribe of Judah was to be the first of all to attack its enemy, Judah made a contract with Simeon alone, so that the two might attack the enemy with their combined forces. The other tribes were not included in this contract (see Judges 1:1–3). Instead each waged war separately against its own enemy (as the same chapter relates) and received into its dominion and protection whomever it wished, even though it had been commanded to spare no one on any terms of a pact but to exterminate them all. For this sin they are indeed rebuked, but no one calls them to judgment. Nor was there any reason for them to begin waging war on one another on that account, or to meddle in one another's affairs. XVII 57 But against the Benjaminites, who had offended the rest and so broken the bond of peace that none of the confederates could safely find lodging among them, they made war as enemies. After three battles they were at last victorious, and by the right of war they slaughtered all alike, guilty and innocent. Afterward they lamented this with a late repentance.[20]

XVII 58 These examples plainly confirm what we have just said about the right of each tribe. But perhaps someone will ask who chose the successor of each tribe's prince. On this I can gather nothing certain from Scripture itself. I conjecture, however, that since each tribe was divided into families, whose heads were chosen from among the elders of the family, the eldest of these succeeded by right to the prince's place. XVII 59 For Moses chose his seventy assistants, who formed the supreme council with him, from among the elders. Those who held the administration of the state after Joshua's death are called elders in Scripture. And finally, nothing is more common among the Hebrews than to mean judges by "elders," which I think everyone knows. XVII 60 But it matters little to our purpose to know this for certain. It is enough that I have shown that after the death of Moses no one held all the offices of supreme commander. Nothing depended

20 The war against Benjamin after the outrage at Gibeah is told in Judges 19–21.

on the decree of one man, or of one council, or of the people. Some things were administered by one tribe and others by the rest, each with equal right. It follows most evidently that from the death of Moses the state remained neither monarchic, nor aristocratic, nor popular, but, as we have said, theocratic. First, because the royal house of the state was the temple, and only by reason of it, as we have shown, were all the tribes fellow citizens. Second, because all the citizens had to swear allegiance to God, their supreme judge, whom alone they had promised to obey absolutely in all things. And finally, because the supreme commander of all, when one was needed, was chosen by no one but God alone. XVII 61 Moses expressly foretells this to the people in God's name (Deuteronomy 18:15), and the actual choice of Gideon, Samson, and Samuel bears it out. So there is no doubt that the other faithful leaders were chosen in a similar way too, even if their history does not make this evident.

XVII 62 With these points established, it is time to see how far this way of constituting the state could moderate people's minds and restrain both rulers and ruled, so that the ruled did not become rebels nor the rulers tyrants.

WHAT RESTRAINED RULERS AND PEOPLE

The checks on the Hebrew princes and the institutions that bound citizens to their country.

XVII 63 Those who administer the state, or who hold it, always try to cloak whatever crime they commit with a show of right and to persuade the people that they acted honorably. And they easily succeed when the whole interpretation of right depends on them alone. For there is no doubt that by this very fact they take the greatest freedom to do everything they want and their appetite urges. Conversely, much of that freedom is taken from them if the right of interpreting the laws lies with someone else, and if at the same time the true interpretation of the laws is so open to all that no one can doubt it. XVII 64 From this it is clear that a great occasion for crimes was removed from the princes of the

Hebrews, because the entire right of interpreting the laws had been given to the Levites (see Deuteronomy 21: 5). The Levites had no part in the administration of the state and no share with the others, and their whole fortune and honor depended on the true interpretation of the laws. Further, the whole people was commanded to assemble every seven years in a certain place, where the high priest would teach them the laws. Besides this, each person was to read and reread the book of the law by himself, continually and with the greatest attention (see Deuteronomy 31:9ff. and 6:7). XVII 65 So the princes had to take the greatest care, for their own sake at least, to administer everything according to laws that were laid down and well known to all, if they wished to be held in the highest honor by the people. The people would then revere them as ministers of God's state and as acting in God's stead. Otherwise they could not escape the most intense hatred of their subjects, as theological hatred usually is. XVII 66 There was another factor of very great importance in restraining the unbridled license of the princes. The army was formed from all the citizens (none excepted from the twentieth to the sixtieth year of age), and the princes could not hire any foreign soldier for pay. XVII 67 This, I say, was of very great importance. For it is certain that princes can oppress the people only by means of an army to which they pay wages. Moreover, there is nothing princes fear more than the freedom of citizen soldiers, by whose courage, toil, and great expense of their own blood the freedom and glory of the state were won. XVII 68 That is why Alexander, when he had to fight Darius a second time and heard Parmenio's advice, rebuked not the man who gave it but Polyperchon, who sided with him. For, as Curtius says in book 4, section[21] 13, Alexander could not bring himself to reprove Parmenio again, since he had recently rebuked him more sharply than he wished. Nor could he crush the freedom of the Macedonians, which, as we have said, he feared above all, until he had

21 Quintus Curtius Rufus (1st century AD) wrote a history of Alexander the Great. Parmenio and Polyperchon were Macedonian generals, and Darius III was king of Persia.

raised the number of soldiers drawn from captives far above the number of Macedonians. Only then could he give free rein to his ungovernable spirit, long held in check by the freedom of the best citizens. XVII 69 This freedom of citizen soldiers restrains the princes of a human state, who usually claim all the credit for victories for themselves alone. If so, it must have restrained the princes of the Hebrews all the more, since their soldiers fought not for the prince's glory but for God's, and joined battle only after receiving God's answer.

XVII 70 Further, all the princes of the Hebrews were joined together by the bond of religion alone. So if any one of them had fallen away from it and begun to violate the divine right of any of the others, the rest could thereby treat him as an enemy and rightly crush him.

XVII 71 Third, there was the fear of some new prophet. For if any man of proven life showed by certain accepted signs that he was a prophet, he thereby had the supreme right of command. He held it as Moses did, in the name of a God revealed to him alone, and not merely, like the princes, in the name of a God consulted through the high priest. XVII 72 There is no doubt that such men could easily draw an oppressed people to themselves and persuade them of whatever they wished with trifling signs. If, on the other hand, affairs were rightly administered, the prince could arrange in good time that the prophet must first submit to his judgment. The prince would examine whether he was of proven life, whether he had sure and indubitable signs of his mission, and finally whether what he wished to say in God's name agreed with the accepted doctrine and the common laws of the country. If the signs did not answer well enough, or the doctrine was new, the prince could rightly condemn him to death. Otherwise the prophet was received on the prince's authority and testimony alone.

XVII 73 Fourth, the prince did not surpass the others in nobility. The administration of the state did not belong to him by right of blood, but only by reason of his age and virtue.

XVII 74 Finally, neither the princes nor the whole army could be more possessed by a desire for war than by a desire for peace. For the army, as we have said, consisted solely of citizens, so that the affairs of war and of peace alike were administered by the same men. He who was a soldier in the camp was a citizen in the forum. He who was an officer in the camp was a judge in the council. And he who was commander in the camp was prince in the state. XVII 75 So no one could desire war for the sake of war, but only for the sake of peace and to protect freedom. And perhaps the prince abstained from innovations as far as he could, so as not to be obliged to approach the high priest and stand before him, beneath his own dignity.

So much for the reasons that kept the princes within their bounds. XVII 76 Now we must see by what means the people were held in check. But the foundations of the state show this too, very clearly. Anyone willing to attend to them even slightly will see at once that they must have produced in the citizens' minds a love so singular that nothing could be harder for anyone to bring himself to do than betray his country or desert it. On the contrary, all must have been so disposed that they would sooner suffer the utmost than foreign rule. XVII 77 For they had transferred their right to God. They believed that their kingdom was God's kingdom, that they alone were God's children, and that the other nations were God's enemies, toward whom they therefore bore the bitterest hatred (for they believed this too to be pious; see Psalm 139:21, 22). After this, they could abhor nothing more than swearing allegiance to some foreigner and promising him obedience. Nor could they conceive of any greater outrage, or anything more execrable, than betraying their country, that is, the very kingdom of the God they worshiped. XVII 78 Indeed, even going to live somewhere outside the country was held to be a disgrace. The worship of God, to which they were always bound, could be practiced only on their native soil, since that land alone was held to be holy and the rest unclean and profane. XVII 79 That is why David, forced into exile, complains thus before Saul: *If there are those who stir you up against me, they are men, and they*

are cursed, because they shut me out so that I may not walk in God's inheritance, and they say, Go and worship other gods. For this reason too—and this should be especially noted here—no citizen was ever condemned to exile. One who sins deserves punishment, but not disgrace. XVII 80 The Hebrews' love for their country, therefore, was not simple love but piety. This piety, together with hatred toward the other nations, was so fostered and nourished by daily worship that it must have turned into their nature. For their daily worship was not only entirely different from that of others (which made them wholly singular and completely separate from the rest), but also absolutely contrary to it.[22] XVII 81 Hence a kind of daily reproach had to give rise to a continual hatred, and no hatred could cling more firmly in the mind. It was a hatred born of great devotion or piety and believed to be pious, and surely no hatred can be greater or more stubborn than that. Nor was the common cause lacking by which hatred is always inflamed more and more, namely its being returned. For the nations in turn must have held them in the bitterest hatred. XVII 82 Consider all these things: the freedom from human rule, devotion to their country, absolute right against all others, a hatred not only permitted but even pious, the hostility of everyone, the singularity of their customs and rites. How much, I say, these could strengthen the Hebrews' minds to endure everything for their country with singular constancy and virtue, reason teaches most clearly and experience itself has attested. For as long as the city stood, they could never endure under another's rule, and that is why Jerusalem was called a rebellious city (see Ezra 4:12, 15). XVII 83 The second state was barely a shadow of the first, once the high priests had usurped the right of rule as well. Even so, the Romans could destroy it only with the greatest difficulty, as Tacitus himself testifies in book 2 of the *Histories* in these words: *Vespasian had brought the Jewish war to an end, except for the siege of Jerusalem—a task made hard and arduous more by the character of the nation and the obstinacy of its superstition than because the besieged had enough*

22 David's words are from 1 Samuel 26:19.

strength left to endure their privations. XVII 84 But besides these things, whose value depends on opinion alone, there was something else singular to this state, and the most solid of all. It must have done most to keep the citizens from thinking of defection and from ever being gripped by a desire to desert their country. This was the consideration of advantage, which is the strength and life of all human actions—and this, I say, was singular in this state. XVII 85 For nowhere did citizens hold their possessions by a stronger right than the subjects of this state. They held an equal share of the lands and fields with the prince, and each was the perpetual owner of his share. If anyone, forced by poverty, had sold his estate or field, it had to be restored to him in full when the jubilee came. Other institutions of this kind ensured that no one could be parted from his fixed property.[23] XVII 86 Further, poverty could nowhere be more bearable than where charity toward one's neighbor, that is, toward one's fellow citizen, had to be practiced with the greatest piety, so that they might have God their King well disposed toward them. So Hebrew citizens could fare well only in their own country. Outside it lay the greatest loss and disgrace. XVII 87 Further, certain things were especially conducive not only to keeping them on their native soil but also to avoiding civil wars and removing the causes of contention. No one served his equal, but God alone. And charity and love toward a fellow citizen were esteemed the highest piety, a love fostered in no small degree by the common hatred with which they regarded the other nations, and those nations regarded them in turn. XVII 88 Moreover, it was especially conducive that they were brought up in the strictest discipline of obedience, since they had to do everything according to the fixed prescription of the law. They were not allowed to plow at will, but only at fixed times and in fixed years, and with only one kind of animal at a time. Likewise they could sow and reap only in a fixed manner and at a fixed time. In short, their life was a continual practice of obedience (on which see chapter 5, on the use of cere-

23 The jubilee was every fiftieth year, when sold land returned to the family that originally held it (Leviticus 25).

monies). XVII 89 So to those wholly accustomed to it, this must no longer have seemed servitude but freedom. From this it must also have followed that no one desired what was forbidden, only what was commanded. Another thing seems to have contributed not a little to this: at certain times of the year they were bound to give themselves to leisure and joy, not so as to obey their own heart, but so as to obey God from the heart. XVII 90 Three times a year they were God's guests (see Deuteronomy 16). On the seventh day of the week they had to stop all work and give themselves to rest. Besides these, other times were appointed at which decent acts of rejoicing and feasting were not merely permitted but commanded. I do not think anything more effective than this could be devised for swaying people's minds, for nothing captivates the mind more than the joy that arises from devotion, that is, from love and wonder together. XVII 91 Nor could they easily grow weary of familiar things, since the worship set aside for feast days was infrequent and varied. To this was added the deepest reverence for the Temple. Because of its unique worship, and the things they were bound to observe before anyone was allowed to go there, they always kept this reverence most scrupulously, so much so that Jews today still read with great horror of that outrage of Manasseh, who dared to set up an idol in the Temple itself.[24] XVII 92 The people's reverence for the laws, which were kept with the utmost care in the inner sanctuary, was no less. So here there was very little to fear from popular rumors and prejudices. No one dared to pass judgment on divine matters. In everything commanded of them on the authority of a divine answer received in the Temple, or of a law laid down by God, they had to obey without consulting reason at all.

24 Manasseh, king of Judah in the seventh century BC, placed an idol in the Temple (2 Kings 21:1–9).

WHY THE HEBREW STATE FELL

Choosing the Levites over the firstborn bred resentment and revolt, and the kings finally wrecked the state.

With this I think I have set out the essential plan of this state, briefly but clearly enough. XVII 93 It now remains to inquire into the causes: why the Hebrews so often fell away from the law, why they were so often subjugated, and why in the end the state could be utterly destroyed. Perhaps someone will say here that this came from the stubbornness of the nation. But this is childish. Why was this nation more stubborn than the rest? By nature? Nature, surely, does not create nations. It creates individuals, and these are divided into nations only by differences of language, laws, and accepted customs. XVII 94 From these two, laws and customs, and from them alone, it can come about that each nation has its own particular character, its own particular condition, and finally its own particular prejudices. If, then, we had to grant that the Hebrews were stubborn beyond the rest of mortals, this would have to be blamed on a defect in their laws or accepted customs. XVII 95 And it is certainly true that, if God had wished their state to be more lasting, he would also have laid down different rights and laws and established a different way of governing it. So what else can we say but that their God was angry with them, not only, as Jeremiah says (32:31), from the founding of the city, but from the very founding of the laws? XVII 96 Ezekiel too testifies to this (20:25), saying, *I also gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances by which they should not live, in that I defiled them in their own gifts by releasing every opening of the womb* (that is, the firstborn), *so that I might lay them waste, so that they might know that I am Jehovah*. To understand these words, and the cause of the state's destruction, correctly, we must note that the original intention was to entrust the whole sacred ministry to the firstborn, not to the Levites (see Numbers 8:17). XVII 97 But after all except the Levites had worshiped the calf, the firstborn were rejected and defiled, and the

Levites were chosen in their place (Deuteronomy 10:8). The more I consider this change, the more it compels me to break out in the words of Tacitus: that at that time God's concern was not for their safety but for vengeance. Nor can I wonder enough that there was such anger in a heavenly mind that he laid down the very laws, which always aim solely at the honor, safety, and security of the whole people, with the intent of avenging himself and punishing the people. As a result the laws seemed not to be laws, that is, the safety of the people, but rather penalties and punishments.[25] XVII 98 For all the gifts they were bound to give to the Levites and priests constantly reproached them with their impurity and rejection. So did the requirement that the first-born be redeemed and money paid to the Levites for each one, and finally the fact that only the Levites were allowed to approach sacred things. XVII 99 The Levites, moreover, always had something to throw in their faces. There is no doubt that among so many thousands there were many tiresome petty theologians. This gave the people a desire to watch the conduct of the Levites, who were, after all, only human, and, as usually happens, to accuse all of them for the fault of one. Hence constant murmuring, and then resentment at having to feed idle and hated men who were not related to them by blood, especially when grain was dear. XVII 100 What wonder, then, if in times of peace, when manifest miracles had ceased and there were no men of the most outstanding authority, the people's spirit, irritated and grudging, began to flag? What wonder if at last it fell away from a form of worship that, though divine, was humiliating to them and even suspect, and longed for something new? And what wonder that the princes, who always seek a way to hold the supreme right of rule for themselves alone, granted the people everything and introduced new forms of worship, in order to bind the people to themselves and turn them away from the high priest? XVII 101 But if the commonwealth had been set up according to the original intention, all the tribes would always

25 Tacitus, *Histories* 1.3; the phrase about anger in a heavenly mind echoes Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.11.

have had equal right and honor, and everything would have been perfectly secure. For who would want to violate the sacred right of his own kin? Who would want anything other than to support his own kinsmen, brothers, and parents out of religious piety? To be taught the interpretation of the laws by them? And, finally, to await divine answers from them? XVII 102 In this way, moreover, all the tribes would have stayed far more closely united with one another, since all would have had an equal right to administer sacred things. Indeed, there would have been nothing to fear if the choice of the Levites itself had had any cause other than anger and vengeance. But, as we have said, their God was angry with them, and, to repeat Ezekiel's words once more, he defiled them in their own gifts by releasing every opening of the womb, so that he might lay them waste. XVII 103 These things are further confirmed by the histories themselves. As soon as the people in the desert began to have plenty of leisure, many men, and not of the common sort, began to resent this choice. They took it as grounds for believing that Moses had instituted nothing by divine command but everything at his own pleasure, since he had chosen his own tribe above all others and had given the right of the high priesthood to his brother forever. So they stirred up a tumult and came to him, crying that all were equally holy and that he was raising himself above everyone against right. XVII 104 He could not calm them by any reasoning, but when a miracle was used as a sign to confirm his credibility, they were all destroyed. From this arose a new and general revolt of the whole people, who believed that those men had been destroyed not by God's judgment but by Moses' contrivance. Worn down at last after a great slaughter, or plague, the people grew quiet, but in such a way that all would rather have died than lived.[26] So at that time the revolt had ended rather than harmony begun. XVII 105 Scripture testifies to this in Deuteronomy 31:21. There God, after foretelling to Moses that the people would fall away from divine worship after his death, says to

26 The revolt of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and its aftermath are told in Numbers 16.

him, *for I know their appetite and what they are plotting today, before I have brought them into the land that I swore*. And a little later Moses says to the people themselves, *for I know your rebellion and your stubbornness. If while I have lived with you, you have been rebels against God, how much more will you be after my death.* XVII 106 And in fact this is just what happened, as is well known. Hence came great changes, and great license in everything, luxury and indolence, through which everything began to go from bad to worse. At last, after being often subjugated, they broke openly with divine right and wanted a mortal king. The seat of the state was to be not the Temple but a court, and all the tribes were to remain fellow citizens no longer by virtue of divine right and the high priesthood, but by virtue of their kings. XVII 107 But this supplied vast material for new revolts, from which in the end the ruin of the whole state followed. For what can kings bear less than to reign on sufferance and to tolerate a state within the state? Those who were first chosen from private life were content with the rank to which they had risen. XVII 108 But after their sons had obtained the kingdom by right of succession, they began gradually to change everything, so as to hold the whole right of rule for themselves alone. They largely lacked this right so long as the right over the laws depended not on them but on the high priest, who kept the laws in the sanctuary and interpreted them to the people. So they were bound by the laws like subjects, and could neither rightfully repeal them nor make new ones with equal authority. Further, the right of the Levites forbade kings, just as it did subjects, to administer sacred things, since they were laymen. And finally, the whole security of their rule depended on the will of one man alone who seemed to be a prophet. They had seen examples of this: how freely Samuel gave Saul orders in everything, and how easily he could transfer the right to reign to David for a single offense. So they had a state within the state, and they reigned on sufferance. XVII 109 To overcome this, then, they allowed other temples to be dedicated to the gods, so that the Levites would no longer be consulted at all. Then they sought out many who would proph-

esy in the name of God, so as to have prophets they could set against the true ones. XVII 110 But whatever they tried, they could never get their wish. For the prophets, ready for anything, waited for a favorable moment—namely, the reign of a successor, which is always precarious while the memory of the predecessor is still fresh. Then, by divine authority, they could easily induce someone hostile to the king and distinguished for his prowess to vindicate divine right and take possession, by right, of the state or part of it. XVII 111 But not even the prophets could achieve anything this way. Even if they removed a tyrant, the causes remained. So all they did was buy a new tyrant with much of the citizens' blood. There was thus no end to discord and civil wars, while the causes of violating divine right always remained the same, and these too could be removed only together with the whole state.

XVII 112 From this we see how religion was introduced into the Hebrew commonwealth, and how the state could have been eternal if the just anger of the lawgiver had allowed it to continue on the same footing. But because that could not happen, it had in the end to perish. Here I have spoken only of the first state, XVII 113 for the second was hardly a shadow of the first. They were bound by the law of the Persians, whose subjects they were, and after they gained their freedom, the high priests usurped the right of princely rule and so obtained absolute power. Hence the priests' enormous lust to reign and to obtain the high priesthood at the same time. XVII 114 So there was no need to say more about this second state. But whether the first, insofar as we have conceived it as durable, can be imitated, or whether it is pious to imitate it as far as possible, will become clear from what follows. XVII 115 Here, by way of conclusion, I would only like to note what I have already hinted at above. From what we have shown in this chapter it is evident that divine right, or the right of religion, arises from a pact, and without a pact there is no right but natural right. Therefore the Hebrews were not bound by any command of religion to show

piety toward the nations that had no part in the pact, but only toward their fellow citizens.

CHAPTER 18: POLITICAL LESSONS FROM THE HEBREWS

Priests should not rule, laws should not govern opinions, and sovereigns must decide what is right.

XVIII 1 Although the Hebrew state, as we conceived it in the previous chapter, could have been eternal, no one can imitate it now, nor would it even be advisable. If any people wished to transfer their right to God, they would have to make an express covenant with God, as the Hebrews did. So not only the will of those transferring their right would be required, but also the will of God, to whom it was to be transferred. XVIII 2 But God has revealed, on the contrary, through the apostles, that God's covenant is no longer written in ink or on tablets of stone, but by the Spirit of God in the heart. Moreover, such a form of state might perhaps be useful only to those who wish to live for themselves alone without outside dealings, to shut themselves within their own borders, and to be cut off from the rest of the world. It would be of no use at all to those who need to have dealings with others. So such a form of state can serve very few.[27] XVIII 3 And yet, even though it cannot be imitated in every respect, it had many features most worthy at least of notice, which it might perhaps be very advisable to imitate. But since my intention, as I have already said, is not to treat the commonwealth systematically, I shall pass over most of them and note only those that bear on my purpose. First, that it is not contrary to the kingdom of God to choose a supreme majesty holding the supreme right of rule. XVIII 4 For after the Hebrews had transferred their right to God, they handed over the supreme right of command to Moses. He alone therefore had authority to make and repeal laws in God's name, to choose the ministers of sacred things, to judge, teach, and punish, and, in short, to command everyone absolutely in everything. XVIII 5 Further, although the ministers of sacred

27 The allusion is to 2 Corinthians 3:3.

things were the interpreters of the laws, it was not their place to judge citizens or to excommunicate anyone. This belonged only to the judges and princes chosen from the people (see Joshua 6:26, Judges 21:18, and 1 Samuel 14:24).

XVIII 6 Besides these, if we also look at the fortunes and histories of the Hebrews, we shall find other things worth noting. I. There were no sects in religion until the high priests in the second state had the authority to issue decrees and handle the business of the state. To make that authority perpetual, they usurped for themselves the right of princely rule, and in the end they wanted to be called kings. XVIII 7 The reason is obvious. In the first state no decrees could bear the high priest's name, since the high priests had no right to issue decrees, but only to give God's answers when asked by the princes or councils. So they could have had no desire then to decree anything new, but only to administer and defend what was customary and accepted. For there was no other way they could safely preserve their freedom against the princes' will than by keeping the laws uncorrupted. XVIII 8 But after they had also gained power to handle the business of the state, and the right of princely rule alongside the high priesthood, each of them began to seek glory for his own name, in religion as in everything else. They settled everything by their authority as high priests and daily issued new decrees about ceremonies, about faith, and about everything, which they wanted to be no less sacred and of no less authority than the laws of Moses. XVIII 9 As a result, religion sank into ruinous superstition, and the true meaning and interpretation of the laws were corrupted. Added to this, while the high priests were seeking a path to princely rule at the beginning of the restoration, they flattered the people in everything to win them over, approving the people's deeds even when they were impious, and accommodating Scripture to their utterly corrupt morals. XVIII 10 Malachi testifies to this about them in the most explicit words. After rebuking the priests of his time and calling them despisers of God's name, he goes on to reproach them thus: *The lips of the high priest keep knowledge, and the law is sought from his mouth,*

because he is God's messenger. But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused the law to be a stumbling block to many; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the God of hosts. And so he goes on accusing them of interpreting the laws as they pleased and of having no regard for God, but only for persons.[28] XVIII 11 But it is certain that the high priests could never have done these things so cautiously that the more prudent did not notice. As that boldness grew, these men maintained that no laws were binding except those that were written. As for the decrees that the deceived Pharisees (who, as Josephus reports in his *Antiquities*, came mostly from the common people) called the traditions of the fathers, these were by no means to be kept. XVIII 12 However that may be, we cannot doubt in the least that the high priests' flattery, the corruption of religion and the laws, and the incredible multiplication of the laws gave great and frequent occasion for disputes and quarrels that could never be settled. For when people begin to quarrel in the heat of superstition, with the magistrate supporting one side or the other, they can by no means be calmed, but necessarily split into sects.[29]

XVIII 13 II. It is worth noting that the prophets, who were private individuals, irritated people more than they reformed them by their freedom to warn, rebuke, and reproach; whereas the same people, when warned or punished by kings, were easily swayed. Indeed, the prophets were often intolerable even to pious kings, because of the authority they had to judge what had been done piously or impiously, and even to rebuke the kings themselves if they dared to carry out any public or private business against the prophets' judgment. XVIII 14 King Asa, who according to the testimony of Scripture reigned piously, sent the prophet Hanani to the mill (see 2 Chronicles 16), because he had dared to reprove and rebuke him freely over the pact made with the king of Aram. Besides this there are other examples showing that religion suffered more harm than gain from such freedom—not to

28 Malachi 2:7–8.

29 Those who accepted only the written law are usually identified with the Sadducees; Josephus describes both parties in *Jewish Antiquities*, books 13 and 18.

mention that great civil wars also arose because the prophets kept so much right for themselves.

XVIII 15 III. It is also worth noting that, as long as the people held the rule, they had only one civil war. Even that was completely extinguished, and the victors took such pity on the vanquished that they made every effort to restore them to their former dignity and power.[30] But after the people, wholly unaccustomed to kings, changed the original form of the state into a monarchy, there was almost no end to civil wars, and they fought battles so savage that they surpassed anything ever reported. XVIII 16 In one battle (which almost passes belief) five hundred thousand Israelites were slain by the Jews. In another, conversely, the Israelites slaughter many of the Jews (the number is not given in Scripture), capture the king himself, all but demolish the wall of Jerusalem, and strip the Temple itself bare (so that we may know their anger had no limit). Then, laden with vast plunder taken from their brothers and sated with blood, they take hostages, leave the king in his kingdom, now almost laid waste, and lay down their arms, feeling secure not because of the Jews' good faith but because of their weakness.[31] XVIII 17 For a few years later, once the Jews had recovered their strength, they joined battle again. Once more the Israelites came out the victors. They slaughtered a hundred and twenty thousand of the Jews, led away as many as two hundred thousand of their women and children as captives, and again seized a great deal of plunder. Worn out by these battles and by others that the histories mention in passing, they at last became the prey of their enemies. XVIII 18 Next, if we also care to reckon up the periods in which they were able to enjoy complete peace, we shall find a great difference. Before the kings they often lived in harmony for forty years, and once (which surpasses all belief) for eighty years, without external or internal war.[32] XVIII 19 But after

30 The war of the other tribes against Benjamin and its aftermath (Judges 20–21).
31 See 2 Chronicles 13:17 and 2 Kings 14:11–14; here "Jews" means the kingdom of Judah, as against the northern kingdom of Israel.
32 Here "Jews" means the southern kingdom of Judah and "Israelites" the northern kingdom of Israel. This battle is told in 2 Chronicles 28:6–8.

the kings had obtained power, the struggle was no longer, as before, for peace and freedom, but for glory. So we read that all of them except Solomon alone waged wars, and his virtue, namely wisdom, could show itself better in peace than in war. Added to this was a deadly lust for ruling, which made the road to the throne very bloody for most of them. XVIII 20 Finally, while the people held sovereignty, the laws remained uncorrupted and were more steadily observed. Before the kings there were very few prophets to admonish the people. After a king was chosen there were a great many at the same time. Obadiah, in fact, saved a hundred of them from slaughter and hid them, so that they would not be killed with the rest. Nor do we see that the people were deceived by any false prophets until after sovereignty passed to the kings, whom most prophets were eager to flatter.[33] XVIII 21 Add that the people, whose spirit is usually high or low as circumstances dictate, readily corrected themselves in times of disaster. They turned back to God, restored the laws, and in this way also freed themselves from every danger. The kings, by contrast, whose spirits are always equally lofty and cannot be bent without disgrace, clung stubbornly to their vices right up to the final destruction of the city.

XVIII 22 From this we see most clearly: I. How ruinous it is, both to religion and to the commonwealth, to grant the ministers of sacred things any right to issue decrees or to handle the business of the state. On the contrary, everything holds together much more steadily if they are kept within such bounds that they give answers on nothing unless they are asked, and meanwhile teach and practice only what is received and most customary. XVIII 23 II. How dangerous it is to refer purely speculative matters to divine law, and to make laws about opinions, which people are accustomed to dispute, or can dispute. For rule is most violent where opinions are treated as crimes, although they belong to each person by a right that no one can give up. Indeed, where this happens, the anger of the people usually

33 Obadiah, steward of King Ahab, hid a hundred prophets from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4).

reigns supreme. XVIII 24 Pilate, for instance, gave in to the anger of the Pharisees and ordered Christ to be crucified, though he knew him to be innocent. Then, in order to oust the wealthier from their positions of honor, the Pharisees began to stir up questions about religion and to accuse the Sadducees of impiety. Following this example of the Pharisees, all the worst hypocrites, driven by the same frenzy that they call zeal for divine law, have everywhere persecuted men outstanding for integrity and renowned for virtue, and for that very reason hated by the people. They have done it by publicly denouncing their opinions and by inflaming the savage multitude with anger against them. XVIII 25 This insolent license is cloaked in the appearance of religion, and so it cannot easily be restrained. That is especially so where the sovereign powers have introduced some sect of which they are not themselves the authors. For then they are regarded not as interpreters of divine law but as sectarians, that is, as people who acknowledge the sect's teachers as interpreters of divine law. Consequently, in these matters the authority of the magistrates usually counts for little with the people, while the authority of the teachers counts for a great deal; people think even kings ought to submit to their interpretations. XVIII 26 To avoid these evils, then, nothing safer can be devised for the commonwealth than to place piety and the worship of religion in works alone, that is, in the practice of charity and justice alone, and to leave everyone free to judge everything else for themselves. But more on this later. XVIII 27 III. We see how necessary it is, both for the commonwealth and for religion, to grant the sovereign powers the right to decide what is right and what is wrong. For if this right of deciding about actions could not be granted even to the divine prophets themselves without great harm to the commonwealth and to religion, much less should it be granted to those who can neither foretell the future nor work miracles. But I shall deal with this expressly in the next chapter. XVIII 28 IV. Finally, we see how disastrous it is for a people that is not used to living under kings, and that already has established laws, to choose a monarch. The people themselves will not be

able to bear such great power. Nor will royal authority be able to tolerate laws and rights of the people instituted by someone of lesser authority, much less bring itself to defend them. This is especially so because in instituting them no account could be taken of the king, but only of the people, or of the council that thought it held the kingdom. And so the king, by defending the people's ancient rights, would seem to be their servant rather than their master. XVIII 29 A new monarch, then, will strive with the utmost zeal to establish new laws and to reshape the rights of the state for his own use. He will try to reduce the people to a condition in which they cannot take dignity away from kings as easily as they can give it.

THE DANGER OF REMOVING A KING

Killing a tyrant only brings another, as England and Rome show; Holland never had a king.

XVIII 30 But here I cannot possibly pass over the point that it is no less dangerous to remove a monarch, even when it is perfectly clear in every respect that he is a tyrant. A people accustomed to royal authority, and held in check by it alone, will despise and mock any lesser authority. Consequently, if it removes one king, it will be forced, as the prophets once were, to choose another in place of the first. He will be a tyrant not by choice but of necessity. XVIII 31 For how will he be able to bear the sight of citizens' hands stained with royal blood, and of citizens boasting of regicide as of a fine deed? They committed it for no other purpose than to set an example aimed at him alone. Surely, if he wishes to be king, and not to acknowledge the people as the judge of kings and as his master, nor to reign on sufferance, he must avenge his predecessor's death. For his own sake he must set an example in turn, so that the people will not dare to commit such a crime again. XVIII 32 But he will not easily be able to avenge the tyrant's death by putting citizens to death unless he also defends the cause of that earlier tyrant and approves his deeds, and consequently follows in all the earlier tyrant's footsteps. This is why

a people has often been able to change its tyrant, but never to do away with the tyrant, nor to change a monarchical state into a state of another form. XVIII 33 The English people have given a fatal example of this. They sought grounds on which, under a show of legality, they could remove their monarch. But once he was removed, changing the form of the state was the last thing they could do. Instead, after much bloodshed, things came to this: a new monarch was hailed under another name (as though the whole question had been about the name alone). He could not maintain himself in any way except by utterly destroying the royal line and by killing the king's friends, or those suspected of friendship with him. He also had to disturb the leisure of peace, which breeds rumors, with war, so that the common people, busy and intent on new affairs, would turn their thoughts away from the killing of the king. XVIII 34 Too late, then, the people realized that for the welfare of their country they had done nothing but violate the right of a lawful king and change everything for the worse. So they resolved to retrace their steps as soon as they could, and they did not rest until they saw everything restored to its former state.[34] XVIII 35 But perhaps someone will object, citing the example of the Roman people, that a people can easily remove a tyrant. I think, however, that this very example fully confirms our view. The Roman people could indeed remove a tyrant and change the form of the state far more easily, for two reasons. The right of choosing the king and his successor lay with the people themselves. And the people, being made up of seditious and criminal men, had not yet grown used to obeying kings: of the six kings they had had before, they had killed three. Even so, they did nothing but choose several tyrants in place of one. These kept them wretchedly afflicted by external and internal war, until at last sovereignty passed once more to a monarch, with only the name changed, as in England. XVIII 36 As for the States of Holland, they have never, so far as we know, had kings, but counts, and the right of sovereignty was never trans-

34 Charles I was executed in 1649. Oliver Cromwell then ruled as Lord Protector, and the monarchy was restored under Charles II in 1660.

ferred to them. The High and Mighty States of Holland make this public themselves in the Deduction they issued at the time of the Earl of Leicester. They always reserved to themselves the authority to remind these counts of their duty. They also kept the power to defend this authority of theirs and the freedom of the citizens, to protect themselves against the counts if they degenerated into tyrants, and to keep them in check so that they could do nothing without the consent and approval of the States. XVIII 37 From this it follows that the right of supreme majesty always lay with the States. The last count did try to usurp that right. So it is far from true that they rebelled against him when they restored their former sovereignty, which by then was almost lost.[35] These examples, then, fully confirm what we said: the form of each state must necessarily be preserved, and it cannot be changed without danger of the state's utter ruin. These are the points I thought worth noting here.

CHAPTER 19: RELIGION AND THE SOVEREIGN

Right over sacred matters belongs to the sovereign, and religion has the force of law only through the state.

XIX 1 When I said above that those who hold sovereignty alone have the right to everything, and that all right depends on their decree alone, I meant not only civil right but also sacred right. Of sacred right, too, they must be both the interpreters and the defenders. I wish to note this expressly here and to deal with it specifically in this chapter. There are a great many people who flatly deny that this right, the right concerning sacred matters, belongs to the sovereign powers, and who refuse to acknowledge them as interpreters of divine law. XIX 2 Hence they also take the liberty of accusing and maligning them, and even of excommunicating them from the Church (as Ambrose once did

35 The Deduction (1587), written by François Vranck, defended the sovereignty of the States against Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, governor-general of the Netherlands in 1586–87. The "last count" is Philip II of Spain.

the emperor Theodosius).[36] But we shall see later in this very chapter that in this way they divide sovereignty, and indeed seek a path to sovereignty for themselves. First I want to show three things. Religion acquires the force of law only from the decree of those who have the right to command. God has no special kingdom over human beings except through those who hold sovereignty. And the worship of religion and the practice of piety must be adapted to the peace and advantage of the commonwealth, and so must be determined by the sovereign powers alone, who must therefore also be its interpreters. XIX 3 I am speaking expressly of the practice of piety and the external worship of religion. I am not speaking of piety itself and the inner worship of God, or of the means by which the mind is inwardly disposed to worship God with integrity of heart. For the inner worship of God and piety itself belong to each person by their own right (as we showed at the end of chapter 7), a right that cannot be transferred to another. XIX 4 Further, what I mean here by the kingdom of God is, I think, clear enough from chapter 14. There we showed that the one who fulfills God's law is the one who practices justice and charity because God commands it. From this it follows that the kingdom of God is the one in which justice and charity have the force of law and of command. XIX 5 And here I recognize no difference whether God teaches and commands the true worship of justice and charity through the natural light or through revelation. It makes no difference how that worship was revealed, provided it holds supreme right and is the supreme law for human beings. XIX 6 So suppose I now show that justice and charity can acquire the force of law and command only from the right of the state. Then, since the right of the state lies with the sovereign powers alone, I shall easily conclude that religion acquires the force of law only from the decree of those who have the right to command, and that God has no special kingdom over human beings except through those who hold sovereignty. XIX 7 That the worship of

36 Ambrose, bishop of Milan, barred the emperor Theodosius I from communion after the massacre at Thessalonica in AD 390.

justice and charity acquires the force of law only from the right of the state is clear from what has gone before. In chapter 16 we showed that in the state of nature reason has no more right than appetite. Those who live by the laws of appetite, just as much as those who live by the laws of reason, have a right to everything they can do. XIX 8 For this reason we could not conceive of sin in the state of nature, nor of God as a judge punishing people for their sins. Rather, everything happens according to the common laws of universal nature, and the same fate (to speak with Solomon) befalls the just and the wicked, the pure and the impure, and so on, and there is no place for justice or charity. But for the teachings of true reason to have the force of law absolutely, it was necessary for each person to give up their natural right, and for all to transfer it to all, or to some, or to one. These teachings of true reason are (as we showed in chapter 4 about divine law) the divine teachings themselves. Only then did we first come to know what justice and injustice are, and what equity and inequity are.[37] XIX 9 Justice, then, and absolutely all the teachings of true reason, and consequently charity toward one's neighbor, acquire the force of law and command only from the right of the state. That is (by what we showed in the same chapter), they acquire it only from the decree of those who have the right to command. And since (as I have just shown) the kingdom of God consists solely in the right of justice and charity, or of true religion, it follows, as we wished to show, that God has no kingdom over human beings except through those who hold sovereignty. And it is all the same, I say, whether we conceive religion as revealed by the natural light or by the prophetic light. XIX 10 For the demonstration is universal, since religion is the same, and equally revealed by God, whichever way it is supposed to have become known to people; and therefore, for religion revealed through prophecy to have the force of law among the Hebrews as well, it was necessary for each of them first to give up their natural right. All of them had to resolve by common consent to obey only what God revealed to

37 Ecclesiastes 9:2, traditionally ascribed to Solomon.

them through prophecy. This is exactly what we showed happens in a democratic state, where all decide by common consent to live by the dictate of reason alone. XIX 11 And although the Hebrews also transferred their right to God, they could do this more in mind than in deed. In actual fact (as we saw above) they retained the right of sovereignty absolutely until they transferred it to Moses. Moses thereafter remained king absolutely, and through him alone God reigned over the Hebrews. XIX 12 It was also for this reason (namely, that religion acquires the force of law only from the right of the state) that Moses could not punish those who violated the Sabbath before the covenant (see Exodus 16:27), since they were still under their own right. After the covenant he did punish such a violation (see Numbers 15:36), once each person had given up their natural right and the Sabbath had acquired the force of command from the right of the state. XIX 13 Finally, it was also for this reason that revealed religion ceased to have the force of law once the Hebrew state was destroyed. We cannot doubt in the least that, as soon as the Hebrews transferred their right to the king of Babylon, the kingdom of God and divine law immediately ceased. XIX 14 By that very fact the covenant was entirely abolished. In it they had promised to obey everything God said, and it had been the foundation of God's kingdom. They could no longer abide by it, since from that time on they were no longer under their own right (as when they were in the desert or in their homeland) but under that of the king of Babylon. They were bound to obey him in everything (as we showed in chapter 16), and Jeremiah too expressly admonishes them of this in Jeremiah 29:7: *Look after the peace of the city to which I have led you captive*, he says, *for in its safety you will have safety*. XIX 15 But they could not look after the safety of that city as ministers of the state (for they were captives), but only as slaves. They did so by showing themselves obedient in everything in order to avoid sedition, and by observing the rights and laws of the state, even though these were very different from the laws they had been used to in their homeland, and so on. XIX 16 From all this it follows most evidently

that among the Hebrews religion acquired the force of law only from the right of the state. Once the state was destroyed, religion could no longer be regarded as the command of a particular state, but only as a universal teaching of reason. Of reason, I say, for the universal religion had not yet become known through revelation. XIX 17 We conclude absolutely, therefore, that religion, whether it is revealed by the natural light or by the prophetic light, acquires the force of command only from the decree of those who have the right to command. God has no special kingdom over human beings except through those who hold sovereignty. XIX 18 This also follows, and is understood even more clearly, from what was said in chapter 4. There we showed that all God's decrees involve eternal truth and necessity, and that God cannot be conceived as a prince or legislator laying down laws for human beings. XIX 19 Therefore divine teachings, whether revealed by the natural light or by the prophetic light, do not acquire the force of command from God immediately. They necessarily acquire it from those who have the right to command and to issue decrees, or through their mediation. And so only through their mediation can we conceive of God as reigning over human beings and directing human affairs according to justice and equity. Experience itself confirms this, XIX 20 for no traces of divine justice are found except where the just reign. Otherwise (to repeat Solomon's words once more) we see the same fate befall the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure. This, indeed, has made a great many people doubt divine providence, people who thought that God reigns over human beings immediately and directs all of nature for their use. XIX 21 Since, then, it is established both by experience and by reason that divine law depends solely on the decree of the sovereign powers, it follows that they are also its interpreters. In what way, we shall now see. For it is time to show that the external worship of religion and all practice of piety must be adapted to the peace and preservation of the commonwealth if we wish to obey God rightly. Once this is demonstrated, we shall easily

understand in what way the sovereign powers are the interpreters of religion and piety.

PIETY MUST SERVE THE PEACE OF THE STATE

The welfare of the people is the supreme law, so outward worship must fit the public good.

XIX 22 It is certain that piety toward one's country is the highest piety anyone can show. Once the state is taken away, nothing good can survive. Everything is put at risk, and anger and impiety alone reign, amid the greatest fear on all sides. It follows that any act of piety toward one's neighbor is impious if it brings harm to the whole commonwealth. Conversely, any act against him that would otherwise be impious is counted as piety if it is done for the preservation of the commonwealth. XIX 23 For example, it is pious, when someone quarrels with me and wants to take my tunic, to give him my cloak as well. But where this is judged ruinous to the preservation of the commonwealth, it is pious instead to take him to court, even though he must be condemned to death. That is why Manlius Torquatus is celebrated: the welfare of the people counted for more with him than piety toward his son.[38] XIX 24 Since this is so, it follows that the welfare of the people is the supreme law, to which all laws, human as well as divine, must be adapted. It is the duty of the sovereign alone to determine what is necessary for the welfare of the whole people and the security of the state, and to command whatever it has judged necessary. It follows that it is also the duty of the sovereign alone to determine how each person ought to show piety toward his neighbor, that is, how each person is bound to obey God. XIX 25 From this we clearly understand how the sovereign powers are the interpreters of religion. We also understand that no one can rightly obey God unless he adapts the practice of piety, by which everyone is bound, to the public good, and consequently unless he obeys all the decrees of the

38 Titus Manlius Torquatus, Roman consul, had his own son executed in 340 BC for engaging the enemy against orders.

sovereign.[39] XIX 26 By God's command we are all bound to show piety toward everyone, no one excepted, and to harm no one. It follows that no one is permitted to help anyone at the cost of harm to another, and much less at the cost of harm to the whole commonwealth. Hence no one can show piety toward his neighbor according to God's command unless he adapts piety and religion to the public good. XIX 27 But no private individual can know what is good for the commonwealth except from the decrees of the sovereign powers, whose business alone it is to manage public affairs. Therefore no one can practice piety rightly or obey God unless he complies with all the decrees of the sovereign. XIX 28 This is confirmed by actual practice as well. Suppose the sovereign has judged someone guilty of a capital crime, or an enemy, whether he is a citizen or a foreigner, a private person or one who holds rule over others. Then none of its subjects is permitted to give him help. So too, the Hebrews were told that each should love his fellow as himself (see Leviticus 19:17–18). Yet they were bound to report to the judge anyone who had done something against the edicts of the law (see Leviticus 5:1 and Deuteronomy 13:8–9), and, if he was judged guilty of a capital crime, to put him to death (see Deuteronomy 17:7). XIX 29 Further, the Hebrews needed to preserve the freedom they had gained and to hold the lands they occupied under absolute rule. For this it was necessary, as we showed in chapter 17, for them to adapt religion to their own state alone and to separate themselves from the other nations. That is why they were told, *Love your neighbor and hate your enemy* (see Matthew 5: 43). XIX 30 But after they lost their state and were led captive to Babylon, Jeremiah taught them to look to the safety (even) of the city into which they had been led captive. And after Christ saw that they would be scattered across the whole world, he taught them to show piety toward absolutely everyone. All of this shows most clearly that religion has always been adapted to the good of the commonwealth. XIX 31 Someone may now ask by what right, then,

39 "The welfare of the people is the supreme law" echoes Cicero, *On the Laws* 3.8: *salus populi suprema lex esto*.

Christ's disciples, who were after all private individuals, could preach religion. I answer that they did so by right of the power they had received from Christ against unclean spirits (see Matthew 10:1). XIX 32 For above, at the end of chapter 16,[40] I expressly pointed out that everyone is bound to keep faith even with a tyrant. The only exception is someone to whom God has promised, by a sure revelation, special help against the tyrant. So no one may take an example from this unless he too has the power to work miracles. This is also evident from the fact that Christ told the disciples not to fear those who kill the body (see Matthew 10:28). XIX 33 If this had been said to everyone, it would be pointless to establish a state. Solomon's saying (Proverbs 24:21), *My son, fear God and the king*, would then have been impious, which is far from the truth. And so we must necessarily admit that the authority Christ gave the disciples was given to them alone, as a special grant, and that others cannot take it as an example. XIX 34 As for my opponents' arguments, I will not dwell on them. They seek to separate sacred right from civil right, and they contend that the latter rests with the sovereign powers alone while the former rests with the universal Church. Their arguments are so frivolous that they do not even deserve refutation. XIX 35 One thing alone I cannot pass over in silence: how wretchedly they deceive themselves. To support this seditious opinion (I beg pardon for the harsh word), they take as their example the high priest of the Hebrews, who once held the right to administer sacred things. As if the high priests had not received that right from Moses, who, as we showed above, alone retained supreme rule, and by whose decree they could also be deprived of it! XIX 36 For he chose not only Aaron but also his son Eleazar and his grandson Phinehas, and gave them authority to administer the high priesthood. Afterward the high priests retained this authority in such a way that they nonetheless appeared to be the deputies of Moses, that is, of the sovereign. For, as we have already shown, Moses chose no successor to his rule. Instead he distrib-

40 Jeremiah's counsel to the exiles to seek the welfare of Babylon is at Jeremiah 29:7.

uted all its functions in such a way that those who came after him seemed to be his vicegerents, administering the state as though the king were absent, not dead. XIX 37 Then, in the second state, the high priests held this right absolutely, once they had acquired the right of rule along with the high priesthood. So the right of the high priesthood always depended on the edict of the sovereign, and the high priests never held it except together with rule. XIX 38 Indeed, the right over sacred matters lay absolutely with the kings, as will be clear from what I shall say shortly, at the end of this chapter. There was one exception: the kings were not permitted to lay hands on the sacred rites to be performed in the temple, because all who did not trace their lineage back to Aaron were regarded as laymen. This certainly has no place in a Christian state. XIX 39 And so we cannot doubt that today's sacred rites belong to the right of the sovereign powers alone. Their administration requires particular character, not a particular family, so even those who hold rule are not excluded from it as laymen. No one has any of the following rights and powers except by the sovereigns' authority or permission: to administer these rites, to choose their ministers, to determine and establish the foundations and doctrine of the Church, to judge morals and acts of piety, to excommunicate anyone or receive anyone into the Church, or, finally, to provide for the poor. XIX 40 These things are not only shown to be true, as we have just done. They are also shown to be supremely necessary both for religion itself and for the preservation of the commonwealth. Everyone knows how much right and authority over sacred matters count with the people, and how much everyone hangs on the words of whoever holds that authority. One may even affirm that whoever possesses this authority reigns most of all over people's minds. XIX 41 So whoever wishes to take this authority away from the sovereign powers is seeking to divide the state. From this, necessarily, quarrels and discords must arise that can never be settled, as they once did between the kings and the high priests of the Hebrews. Indeed, whoever seeks to take this authority away from the sovereign powers is,

as we have already said, angling for a path to power. XIX 42 For what can the sovereigns decide if this right is denied them? Nothing at all, whether about war or peace or any business whatever, if they are bound to wait for someone else's opinion to tell them whether what they judge useful is pious or impious. On the contrary, everything will be done by the decree of the one who has the right to judge and decree what is pious or impious, lawful or unlawful. XIX 43 Every age has seen examples of this. I shall give just one, which stands for all. Because this right was granted absolutely to the Roman pontiff, he gradually began to hold all kings under his power, until he rose to the very summit of rule. Afterward monarchs, and especially the German emperors, tried to diminish his authority even slightly. They achieved nothing; on the contrary, by that very attempt they increased it many times over. XIX 44 Yet what no monarch could accomplish with sword or fire, churchmen were able to accomplish with the pen alone. From this alone one can easily recognize the force and power of this authority, and also how necessary it is for the sovereign powers to reserve it for themselves. XIX 45 If we are also willing to consider what we noted in the previous chapter, we shall see that this arrangement contributes not a little to the growth of religion and piety as well. For we saw above that the prophets themselves were endowed with divine power. Yet because they were private individuals, their freedom to warn, rebuke, and reproach irritated people more than it reformed them. People admonished or chastened by kings, on the other hand, were easily brought round. We saw, further, that the kings themselves very often fell away from religion simply because this right did not belong to them absolutely, and that almost the whole people fell away with them. It is known that the same thing has very often happened in Christian states for the same reason. XIX 46 But here someone will perhaps ask me: who, then, will rightfully defend piety if those who hold rule choose to be impious? Are they still to be regarded as its interpreters even then? I in turn ask him: what if churchmen, or any others to whom he would assign the right over sacred matters,

choose to be impious? Churchmen are also human beings and private individuals, whose duty is to mind only their own business. Are they still to be regarded as its interpreters even then? XIX 47 It is certainly true that if those who hold rule choose to go wherever they please, everything, sacred and profane alike, will go to ruin, whether or not they have the right over sacred matters. And it will go to ruin much faster if some private individuals seditiously try to defend divine right. XIX 48 So denying them this right achieves absolutely nothing; on the contrary, the evil is only increased. For this very denial necessarily makes them impious, like the kings of the Hebrews, to whom this right was not granted absolutely. Consequently it turns the harm and evil to the whole commonwealth from uncertain and contingent into certain and necessary. XIX 49 Whether, then, we look to the truth of the matter, or to the security of the state, or finally to the growth of piety, we are compelled to hold that divine right too, or the right over sacred matters, depends absolutely on the decree of the sovereign powers. They are its interpreters and defenders. From this it follows that the ministers of the word of God are those who teach the people piety by the authority of the sovereign powers, in the form that piety has been adapted to the public good by their decree.

WHY CHRISTIANS DISPUTE THIS RIGHT

Christianity began among private persons, so churchmen claimed authority the Hebrew kings had held.

XIX 50 It remains now to indicate the reason why there has always been dispute about this right in Christian states, whereas the Hebrews, so far as I know, never had doubts about it. It might indeed seem monstrous that there has always been controversy over a matter so evident and so necessary. It might seem equally monstrous that the sovereign powers have never held this right without dispute, and indeed never without great danger of sedition and damage to religion. XIX 51 Truly, if we could assign no definite cause for this, I could easily persuade myself that

everything I have shown in this chapter is merely theoretical, the kind of speculation that can never be of any use. But for anyone who considers the very beginnings of the Christian religion, the cause shows itself plainly. XIX 52 For the Christian religion was not first taught by kings but by private individuals. Against the will of those who held rule, and whose subjects they were, these individuals were long accustomed to preach in private churches. They instituted and administered sacred offices, and they arranged and decreed everything by themselves, without any regard for the state. XIX 53 Many years later, when the religion began to be introduced into the state, the churchmen had to teach it to the emperors themselves just as they had defined it. In this way they could easily secure recognition as its teachers and interpreters, and also as pastors of the Church and, as it were, God's vicars. And to prevent Christian kings from later taking this authority for themselves, the churchmen took excellent precautions—namely, by forbidding marriage to the highest ministers of the Church and to the supreme interpreter of religion. XIX 54 Added to this, they had multiplied the dogmas of religion to so great a number, and had so confused them with philosophy, that religion's supreme interpreter had to be a supreme philosopher and theologian. He also had to devote himself to a great many useless speculations, something open only to private individuals with plenty of leisure. XIX 55 Among the Hebrews, however, things were very different. Their Church began together with the state, and Moses, who held the state absolutely, taught the people religion, ordained the sacred ministries, and chose their ministers. Hence, on the contrary, it came about that royal authority counted for most with the people, and that the kings held the right over sacred matters most fully. XIX 56 After Moses' death no one held rule absolutely. Yet, as we have already shown, the right to decree in sacred matters as well as in all others lay with the prince. Moreover, to be instructed in religion and piety, the people were no more bound to go to the high priest than to the supreme judge (see Deuteronomy 17:9, 11). XIX 57 Finally, the kings did not have a right equal to that of Moses.

Even so, almost the entire ordering of the sacred ministry, and the choice of its ministers, depended on their decree. For David drew up the whole design of the temple (see 1 Chronicles 28:11–12, etc.). Then from all the Levites he chose twenty-four thousand for singing psalms and six thousand from whom judges and officers were to be chosen. He also chose four thousand gatekeepers and, finally, four thousand to play instruments (see the same book, 23:4–5). XIX 58 He further divided them into divisions, whose chiefs he also chose, so that each would serve in its own time, in rotation (see verse 6 of the same chapter). He likewise divided the priests into as many divisions. XIX 59 But so as not to be obliged to list everything one by one, I refer the reader to 2 Chronicles 8. Verse 13 says that *the worship of God, as Moses had instituted it, was administered in the temple by the command of Solomon*. Verse 14 says *that he* (Solomon) *appointed the divisions of the priests in their ministries, and of the Levites, etc., according to the command of the man of God, David*. And finally, in verse 15 the historian testifies *that they did not depart from the king's command imposed on the priests and Levites in any matter, not even in the administration of the treasuries*. From all of this, and from other histories of the kings, it follows most clearly that the entire practice of religion, and the sacred ministry, depended solely on the command of the kings. XIX 60 Above I said that the kings did not have the right that Moses had to choose the high priest, to consult God directly, and to condemn prophets who prophesied during their lifetime. I said this for no other reason than that the prophets, by the authority they had, could choose a new king and grant pardon for regicide. I did not mean that the prophets were permitted to summon a king to judgment if he dared anything against the laws, or to proceed against him by right[41]. XIX 61 Therefore, had there been no prophets who could safely grant pardon for regicide by a special revelation, the kings would have had absolute right over all things, sacred as well as civil. XIX 62 Hence today's sovereign powers have this right absolutely,

41 SPINOZA'S NOTE. Note 39. Here one must pay particular attention to what we said about right in chapter 16.

even though they are not celibate. They have no prophets and are not bound by right to accept any, since they are not bound by the laws of the Hebrews. They will always retain this right, provided only that they do not allow the dogmas of religion to be multiplied into a great number or to be confused with the sciences.

CHAPTER 20: FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND SPEECH

In a free state everyone may think what they like and say what they think.

XX 1 If it were as easy to command minds as tongues, every ruler would reign in safety, and no rule would be violent. For everyone would live as their rulers wished, and would judge what is true or false, good or bad, just or unjust, by their decree alone. XX 2 But, as we noted at the beginning of chapter 17, this cannot happen: one person's mind cannot be absolutely under another's right. For no one can transfer to another his natural right, that is, his faculty of reasoning freely and of judging about anything whatever, nor can he be compelled to do so. XX 3 Hence rule exercised over minds is held to be violent. The supreme majesty seems to wrong its subjects and usurp their right when it tries to prescribe to each person what he must embrace as true and reject as false. The same holds when it prescribes by what opinions each person's mind ought to be moved to devotion toward God. For these things belong to each person's own right, which no one can give up even if he wishes. XX 4 I admit that judgment can be captured in advance in many, almost incredible ways. Although it is not directly under another's command, it may hang on another's words so completely that it can rightly be said, to that extent, to be under his right. But whatever art has been able to achieve in this matter, it has never gone so far that people ceased to find that each person is full of his own opin-

ions, and that heads differ as much as palates.[42] XX 5 Moses had captured the judgment of his people to the highest degree, not by trickery but by divine power, since he was believed to be divine and to say and do everything by divine inspiration. Even he could not escape their rumors and hostile interpretations, and other monarchs could do so much less. If such control could be conceived at all, it would be in a monarchy, and least of all in a democracy, where all the people, or a great part of them, hold power collectively. The reason for this, I think, is plain to everyone.

XX 6 However much, then, sovereign powers are believed to have a right to everything and to be the interpreters of right and of piety, they will never be able to stop people from judging any matter whatever according to their own minds, or from being affected, to that extent, by one affect or another. It is true, of course, that they can by right treat as enemies all who do not agree with them absolutely in everything. But we are not now arguing about their right; we are arguing about what is useful. XX 7 For I grant that they can by right rule with the utmost violence and send citizens to their deaths for the most trivial reasons. But everyone will deny that this can be done without violating the judgment of sound reason. Indeed, since they cannot do these things without great danger to the whole state, we can even deny that they have absolute power to do these and similar things, and consequently that they have absolute right to do them either. For we have shown that the right of sovereign powers is determined by their power.

XX 8 If, then, no one can give up his freedom to judge and to think what he wishes, but everyone is master of his own thoughts by the highest right of nature, it follows that in a commonwealth the attempt to make people say nothing except what the sovereign powers prescribe, however different and contrary their opinions, can only ever end very badly. For not even the

42 "Each person is full of his own opinions" renders a phrase that echoes the Vulgate of Romans 14:5, *unusquisque in suo sensu abundet*, "let each be fully persuaded in his own mind."

most learned know how to hold their tongues, let alone the common people. XX 9 It is a common failing of human beings to confide their plans to others, even when silence is needed. That state, therefore, will be the most violent in which everyone is denied the freedom to say and to teach what he thinks. On the contrary, that state will be moderate in which this same freedom is granted to everyone.

XX 10 Yet we certainly cannot deny, either, that sovereign majesty can be injured by words as well as by deeds. And so, if it is impossible to take this freedom away from subjects entirely, it will on the other hand be most ruinous to grant it without any limit. It falls to us here, therefore, to inquire how far this freedom can and ought to be granted to each person without harm to the peace of the commonwealth and to the right of the sovereign powers. As I noted at the beginning of chapter 16, this has been my principal aim here.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STATE IS FREEDOM

People gave up the right to act as they please, never the right to reason, judge and speak.

XX 11 From the foundations of the commonwealth explained above, it follows most evidently that its ultimate end is not to dominate, nor to hold people in check by fear and make them subject to another's right. On the contrary, its end is to free each person from fear, so that he may live securely, as far as possible —that is, so that he may best preserve his natural right to exist and to act without harm to himself or to anyone else. XX 12 It is not, I say, the end of the commonwealth to turn people from rational beings into beasts or automata. On the contrary, its end is that their minds and bodies may perform their functions safely, that they themselves may use their reason freely, and that they may not fight with hatred, anger, or deceit, nor treat one another with ill will. The end of the commonwealth, then, is in truth freedom. XX 13 Further, we saw that to form a commonwealth this one thing was necessary: that all power of making

decrees should rest with all, or with some, or with one. For since people's free judgment varies enormously, and each thinks he alone knows everything, and it cannot happen that all think alike and speak with one voice, they could not live in peace unless each gave up his right to act solely by the decree of his own mind. XX 14 Each person, therefore, gave up only his right to act by his own decree, not his right to reason and to judge. So no one can act against the decree of the sovereign powers without harm to their right. But he can certainly think and judge, and consequently also speak—provided he only speaks or teaches, and defends his view by reason alone, not by deceit, anger, or hatred, nor with the intention of introducing something into the commonwealth on the authority of his own decree. XX 15 For example, if someone shows that a law conflicts with sound reason and therefore thinks it should be repealed, and if at the same time he submits his opinion to the judgment of the sovereign power (to which alone it belongs to make and repeal laws), and meanwhile does nothing against what that law prescribes, he certainly deserves well of the commonwealth, as the best citizens do. But if, on the contrary, he does this in order to accuse the magistrate of injustice and make him hateful to the common people, or if he seditiously tries to repeal that law against the magistrate's will, he is plainly a disturber of the peace and a rebel. XX 16 We see, therefore, how each person can say and teach what he thinks without harm to the right and authority of the sovereign powers—that is, without harm to the peace of the commonwealth. He can do so if he leaves to them the decision on everything that is to be done, and does nothing against their decree, even if he must often act against what he judges to be good and openly says he thinks. This he can do without harm to justice and piety; indeed he must do it, if he wishes to show himself just and pious. XX 17 For, as we have already shown, justice depends solely on the decree of the sovereign powers, and so no one can be just unless he lives according to their accepted decrees. Piety, moreover (by what we showed in the preceding chapter), is highest when it is exercised for the peace

and tranquility of the commonwealth. But this peace cannot be preserved if everyone had to live as his own mind dictated. And so it is also impious to do anything on one's own judgment against the decree of the sovereign power whose subject one is. For if everyone were permitted to do this, the ruin of the state would necessarily follow. XX 18 Indeed, as long as he acts according to the decrees of the sovereign power, he can do nothing against the decree and dictate of his own reason. For it was precisely at reason's urging that he resolved to transfer to it his right to live by his own judgment. XX 19 We can confirm this from practice as well. In the councils of both higher and lower powers, hardly anything is done by the unanimous vote of all the members, and yet everything is done by the common decree of all—that is, of those who voted *against* as well as of those who voted *for*. XX 20 But I return to my subject. We have seen from the foundations of the commonwealth how each person can use his freedom of judgment without harm to the right of the sovereign powers. From the same foundations we can determine no less easily which opinions in a commonwealth are seditious: namely, those which, as soon as they are adopted, abolish the pact by which each person gave up his right to act at his own discretion. XX 21 For example, if someone holds that the sovereign power is not its own master, or that no one ought to keep his promises, or that everyone should live at his own discretion, or other things of this kind that directly conflict with that pact, he is seditious. He is seditious not so much because of his judgment and opinion as because of the act that such judgments involve: by the very fact that he thinks such a thing, he breaks the faith he has pledged, tacitly or expressly, to the sovereign power. Accordingly, other opinions, which do not involve such an act—that is, the breaking of the pact, revenge, anger, and so on—are not seditious, except perhaps in a commonwealth that is corrupted in some way. I mean one where the superstitious and the ambitious, who cannot bear people of independent mind, have won such renown that their authority counts for more with the people than that of the sovereign powers. XX 22 We do not deny,

however, that there are also certain views which, though they seem to concern simply truth and falsity, are nonetheless put forward and spread with malicious intent. But we have already defined these too in chapter 15, and in such a way that reason nonetheless remained free. XX 23 If, finally, we also consider that each person's faith toward the commonwealth, like his faith toward God, can be known only from his works—namely, from charity toward his neighbor—we shall not be able to doubt that the best commonwealth grants everyone the same freedom to philosophize that we have shown faith grants to everyone. XX 24 I admit, of course, that some disadvantages sometimes arise from such freedom. But what was ever instituted so wisely that no disadvantage could arise from it? Whoever wants to regulate everything by laws will provoke vices rather than correct them. What cannot be prohibited must necessarily be allowed, even though harm often follows from it. XX 25 For how many evils arise from luxury, envy, greed, drunkenness, and other such things? Yet these are tolerated, because they cannot be prohibited by the command of the laws, though they are in truth vices. All the more, then, must freedom of judgment be granted, which is certainly a virtue and cannot be suppressed. XX 26 Besides, no disadvantages arise from it that cannot be avoided by the authority of the magistrates, as I shall show shortly. I need hardly add that this freedom is supremely necessary for advancing the sciences and the arts, since these are cultivated successfully only by those whose judgment is free and wholly unprejudiced.

WHY LAWS AGAINST OPINIONS FAIL

Such laws breed hypocrisy, punish the honest, turn executions into martyrdoms and stir up sedition.

XX 27 But suppose this freedom could be suppressed, and people held in check so that they dared not utter a word except as the sovereign powers prescribe. It will certainly never come about that they also think nothing except what the sovereign powers wish. So it would necessarily follow that people would every day

think one thing and say another. Consequently good faith, which is supremely necessary in a commonwealth, would be corrupted, and detestable flattery and treachery would be fostered—and from these come deceit and the corruption of all good arts. XX 28 But it is far from possible to make everyone speak according to a prescribed script. On the contrary, the harder one tries to deprive people of freedom of speech, the more stubbornly they resist. I do not mean the greedy, the flatterers, and the rest of the feeble-spirited, whose whole salvation lies in gazing at the money in their coffers and stuffing their bellies. I mean those whom a good upbringing, integrity of character, and virtue have made freer. XX 29 Most people are so constituted that there is nothing they bear less patiently than having opinions they believe to be true treated as crimes, and having what moves them to piety toward God and their fellow human beings counted against them as wickedness. As a result, they come to detest the laws and will dare anything against the magistrate. They think it not shameful but most honorable to stir up sedition for this reason and to attempt any outrage. XX 30 Since human nature is evidently so constituted, it follows that laws made about opinions are aimed not at the wicked but at people of independent mind; that they are made not to restrain the malicious but rather to provoke the honest; and that they cannot be upheld without great danger to the state. XX 31 Besides, such laws are wholly useless. Those who believe that the opinions condemned by the laws are sound will be unable to obey the laws. Those who, on the contrary, reject these opinions as false accept the laws that condemn them as privileges, and triumph in them so much that the magistrate cannot afterward repeal them, even if he wishes to. XX 32 Add to this what we deduced above in chapter 18, under no. 2, from the history of the Hebrews. And finally, how many schisms in the Church have arisen chiefly because magistrates tried to settle the controversies of the learned by laws? For if people were not gripped by the hope of drawing the laws and the magistrate to their side, of triumphing over their adversaries to the general applause of the common

people, and of winning honors, they would never fight with such malice, nor would such fury agitate their minds. XX 33 Not only reason but also experience teaches this, with daily examples. Laws of this kind—laws, that is, which command what each person must believe and forbid anyone to say or write anything against this or that opinion—have often been enacted to gratify, or rather to give way to, the anger of those who cannot bear free minds. These are people who, by a kind of grim authority, can easily turn the devotion of a seditious populace into rage and incite it against whomever they please. XX 34 But how much better it would be to restrain the anger and fury of the common people than to enact useless laws, which can be broken only by those who love the virtues and the arts, and to reduce the commonwealth to such straits that it cannot tolerate people of independent mind! XX 35 For what greater evil can be devised for a commonwealth than that honest men should be sent into exile as criminals because they think differently and do not know how to pretend? What, I say, is more ruinous than that people should be treated as enemies and put to death, not for any crime or misdeed, but because they have free minds? Or that the scaffold, the terror of the wicked, should become the finest of theaters for displaying the highest example of endurance and virtue, to the signal disgrace of sovereign majesty? XX 36 For those who know themselves to be honest do not fear death as criminals do, nor do they beg to be spared punishment. Their minds are not tormented by remorse for any shameful deed. On the contrary, they think it honorable, not a punishment, to die for a good cause, and glorious to die for freedom. What example, then, is set by the death of such people? Its cause is unknown to the idle and the feeble-spirited, hated by the seditious, and loved by the honest. Certainly no one can take an example from it, except to imitate it, or at least to praise it.

XX 37 So if good faith, not flattery, is to be prized, and if the sovereign powers are to keep their rule as securely as possible and not be forced to give way to the seditious, freedom of judgment must necessarily be granted. People must be governed in such a

way that, although they openly hold different and contrary opinions, they nevertheless live in harmony. Nor can we doubt that this way of governing is the best and suffers the fewest disadvantages, since it agrees most closely with human nature. XX 38 For in a democratic state (which comes closest to the state of nature), we have shown that all agree to act by common decree, but not to judge and reason by it. That is, since not all people can think alike, they agreed that whatever had the most votes should have the force of a decree, while keeping the authority to repeal it whenever they saw something better. So the less freedom of judgment people are granted, the further one departs from the most natural state, and consequently the more violently one rules.

THE EXAMPLE OF AMSTERDAM

A flourishing city where people of every sect live in peace under the law.

XX 39 Further, examples are at hand to make it clear that no disadvantages arise from this freedom that cannot be avoided by the authority of the sovereign power alone, and that by this authority alone people can easily be kept from harming one another, even if they openly hold contrary opinions. Nor do I need to seek them far afield. XX 40 Let the city of Amsterdam serve as an example, which enjoys the fruits of this freedom to its own great growth and to the admiration of all nations. In this most flourishing commonwealth and most outstanding city, people of every nation and sect live together in the greatest harmony. Before entrusting their goods to someone, they care to know only whether he is rich or poor, and whether he usually acts in good faith or with deceit. As for religion or sect, that does not concern them at all, because before a judge it does nothing to win or lose a case. And there is no sect so hated that its adherents (provided they harm no one, give each person his due, and live honestly) are not protected by the public authority and safeguard of the magistrates. XX 41 By contrast, when the controversy

over religion between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants began some time ago to be taken up by politicians and by the States of the provinces, it ended at last in schism. Many examples then made it clear that laws made about religion —that is, to settle controversies—provoke people more than they correct them; that others, moreover, take unlimited license from such laws; and that schisms do not arise from a great zeal for truth (the source, after all, of courtesy and gentleness), but from a great lust for power. XX 42 From this it is clearer than the noonday sun that the real schismatics are those who condemn other people's writings and seditiously incite the unruly common people against their authors, rather than the authors themselves, who mostly write only for the learned and call on reason alone for support. It is clear, too, that the real disturbers of the peace are those who, in a free commonwealth, want to abolish freedom of judgment, though it cannot be suppressed.[43]

XX 43 In this way we have shown: I. that it is impossible to take from people the freedom to say what they think; II. that this freedom can be granted to everyone without harm to the right and authority of the sovereign powers, and that everyone can retain it without harm to that same right, provided he takes no license from it to introduce anything into the commonwealth as a matter of right, or to do anything against the accepted laws; III. that everyone can have this same freedom while the peace of the commonwealth is preserved, and that no disadvantages arise from it that cannot easily be kept in check; IV. that everyone can also have it without harm to piety; V. that laws made about speculative matters are wholly useless. XX 44 VI. Finally, we have shown that this freedom not only can be granted while the peace of the commonwealth, piety, and the right of the sovereign powers are preserved, but must be granted in order to preserve all these. For where, on the contrary, people strive to take it away, and the opinions of dissenters are put on trial rather

43 The dispute in the Dutch Republic between the followers of Arminius and of Gomarus over predestination, which led to the Synod of Dort (1618–19) and the execution of the statesman Oldenbarnevelt in 1619.

than their minds, which alone can sin, examples are made of honest men that look more like martyrdoms. These provoke the rest instead of frightening them, and move them to pity, if not to revenge. XX 45 Then good arts and good faith are corrupted, flatterers and traitors are fostered, and opponents triumph, because concessions have been made to their anger and because they have made the holders of power followers of their doctrine, whose interpreters they are taken to be. The result is that they dare to usurp the authority and right of the rulers, and do not blush to boast that they have been chosen directly by God, that their own decrees are divine while those of the sovereign powers are merely human, and that the latter must therefore give way to the divine decrees—that is, to their own. No one can fail to see that all this is wholly opposed to the well-being of the commonwealth. XX 46 Here, therefore, as above in chapter 18, we conclude that nothing is safer for the commonwealth than that piety and religion should consist solely in the practice of charity and equity; that the right of the sovereign powers, in sacred and secular matters alike, should relate only to actions; and that, for the rest, everyone should be allowed to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks.

XX 47 With this I have finished what I set out to do in this treatise. It remains only to state expressly that I have written nothing in it that I would not most willingly submit to the examination and judgment of the sovereign powers of my country. If they judge that anything I have said conflicts with the laws of my country or harms the common welfare, I wish it unsaid. I know that I am a human being and could have erred. But I have taken great care not to err, and above all to make sure that whatever I wrote should accord entirely with the laws of my country, with piety, and with good morals.