Did Abarbanel Study with R. Joseph Hayyun or Know His Biblical Commentaries?

In this article I shall examine the relationship between Don Isaac Abarbanel and R. Joseph Hayyun and the extent of Abarbanel’s familiarity with Hayyun’s biblical commentaries. Scholars have offered four different suggestions as to who might have been Abarbanel’s teacher (or teachers), none of which are at this point more than hypothetical. Barzilay and Saperstein think his teacher was R. Joseph b. Shem Tov.[[1]](#footnote-1) Their suggestion is based on Abarbanel’s comment to Exod 25:10: “The godly R. Joseph b. Shem Tov (the memory of the righteous for a blessing), whose wisdom I heard from his own mouth in my youth and from his many essays, has already explained this.”[[2]](#footnote-2) But this is insufficient evidence. Abarbanel notes that he read R. Shem Tov’s writings and appreciated them, not that he studied directly with him or that he learned with him on any kind of permanent, ongoing basis. At the end of those comments, where he praises R. Joseph — “How beautiful are his words about this! ‘A wise man’s talk brings him favor’ [Eccl 10:12]” — it would seem that he was not his teacher, since a student does not indicate approval of his teacher in this way.

Shmueli[[3]](#footnote-3) suggested R. Isaac Aboab as one of Abarbanel’s teachers, based on the testimony of R. Joseph Caro, who wrote that Abarbanel was at Aboab’s yeshiva.[[4]](#footnote-4) This too is hard to accept, given that Aboab was just four years older than Abarbanel. Moreover, when Abarbanel came to Spain, he was already a noted sage himself, 46 years old,[[5]](#footnote-5) certainly too old to become a student of this kind. It is more reasonable to assume that Abarbanel’s time in Aboab’s yeshiva was indeed spent in learning, but not as Aboab’s student.

Regev added R. Isaac Arama to the list of possibilities.[[6]](#footnote-6) He relied on a statement by R. Meir, Arama’s son, who accuses Abarbanel, who was in and out of his father’s house in Naples after the expulsion, not only of knowing his father’s books but of copying many complete works out of them.[[7]](#footnote-7) But this suggestion, too, is difficult to accept. When Abarbanel was in Naples — where he spent quite a short time, less than two years — he was already 55 years old.[[8]](#footnote-8) At this point Abarbanel himself was considered a great sage, certainly an independent thinker — it is difficult to suppose that he learned as a student in any yeshiva.

The fourth suggestion about the identity of Abarbanel’s teacher, which will be the focus of our discussion, is that he was the student of his older contemporary R. Joseph Hayyun until he was forced to flee Portugal at age 46. The first to suggest this was Shmueli,[[9]](#footnote-9) subsequently followed by others.[[10]](#footnote-10) The goal of this article is to argue that despite the historical and geographical facts bolstering this theory, it too, like the earlier suggestions, is apparently made out of whole cloth.[[11]](#footnote-11) Moreover, I intend to argue that Abarbanel was not familiar with Hayyun’s Bible commentaries (except perhaps for two of them), even though they were widely available at the time.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Below we shall deal with the relationship between Hayyun and Abarbanel, after which we shall present the reasons for caution about the possibility that Abarbanel was Hayyun’s student or knew his writings. The contribution of this study lies not merely in seeking the historical truth, but also in the implications with regard to the development of exegesis in Portugal and the nature of the houses of study there in the 15th century.

**A Geographical-Historical Connection**

There is no doubt that Abarbanel, who lived in Lisbon for 46 years, knew R. Joseph Hayyun quite well. According to Hayyun’s student R. Joseph Jabez, Hayyun headed the Lisbon community:

Even in this generation there arose intelligent, sagacious men in the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, and particularly in the great Jewish metropolis — I have seen none other like it in all the Jewish world — called Lisbon, where there lived many people of great piety, holding firmly to the Torah and the commandments and especially the commandment to give charity… And the “chief of the Sanhedrin,” an elderly, respected man, as full of Torah as one of the Amoraim, was R. Joseph Hayyun of blessed memory.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Jabez describes his teacher as standing at the head of the community, among whom were numbered men of great piety, “holding firmly to the Torah and the commandments.” He goes on to mention Abarbanel as well, describing him as “one of the greatest men of the city, world-famous for his great wisdom.”

Shmueli, who thought that Abarbanel was the student of Hayyun, based this assumption on the words of one of Joseph Hayyun’s descendants, R. Abraham b. R. Solomon Hayyun, for the edition published in Istanbul in 1578 of Hayyun’s book on Tractate Avot, *Millei de-Avot*. In praise of his great-great-grandfather, R. Abraham wrote:

And also the Great Eagle, the complete sage, our teacher, His Honor R. Don Isaac Abarbanel of blessed memory asked many questions of him in Lisbon, specifically the question about the commentary on Deuteronomy that Abarbanel introduces with the words “before all who are versed in law and precedent” [Esth 1:13], to which he responded in a pamphlet entitled *Maggid Mišne*.[[14]](#footnote-14)

R. Abraham Hayyun refers to the question that Abarbanel asked R. Joseph Hayyun on the status of Deuteronomy. Hayyun responded to this question in a separate work entitled *Maggid Mišne*.[[15]](#footnote-15) Among the other affectionate names Hayyun called Abarbanel in this response was “attentive to my words,”[[16]](#footnote-16) which can be understood to indicate that Abarbanel was Hayyun’s student.

From Hayyun’s response, it is evident that they shared a mutual respect. Abarbanel opens his question by noting that he is presenting it “‘before all who are versed in law and precedent,’ the wisest of the wise, ‘hewers of trees’ (the tree of life and the tree of knowledge), and ‘drawers of water’ for all the community.” At the end of his question he adds, “I decided I would go before the great ones, ‘wise and experienced men,’ ‘letting them decide every difficult question,’ for ‘surely they know the way of the Lord’ that I should seek, each of them a man ‘whom God has touched’ to the core with ‘knowledge and fear of the Lord.’” Hayyun’s appreciation of Abarbanel is equally evident from his response. He calls him “the top of the cedar” and “the cherub with outstretched wings”[[17]](#footnote-17) and praises him as “enlightened”; his warm feelings for him are clear when he says, “The dear man’s life is very precious to me.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Even Hayyun’s implied criticism of Abarbanel sounds like the criticism a teacher makes of his student. At the end of his comments Hayyun sums up what he believes led Abarbanel to ask his question:[[19]](#footnote-19)

In general, I would say that what all the questions you ask and other questions of the kind have in common is in the lack of close attention to knowing the meaning of this sacred book and understanding the true meaning of what our Sages say about it. For they, at the beginning of their study, spread out a net for the feet of those who study when they read them superficially and do not probe their depths … not everyone manages to attain such matters — only those who come early to the gates of study day and night, and despise imaginary desire but love the desire for true success, based on the truth. In the words of the wisest man of all, “Happy is the man who listens to me, coming early to my gates each day” [Prov 8:34].

Gross thinks this is an implied criticism of Abarbanel for his being occupied with business and matters other than those that bring one “true success,” preoccupations that cause one to understand biblical verses and rabbinic texts “superficially.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

Two additional critical remarks by Hayyun about Abarbanel and his disputatious nature may be added here. First, at the end of his answer to one of Abarbanel’s questions, Hayyun criticized the very fact that he had raised the question: “The truth is, this was said to start an argument.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Hayyun describes this question of Abarbanel’s as said “to start an argument” and not as a genuine question.[[22]](#footnote-22) Hayyun adds a second critical remark when he suggests a new interpretation of a rabbinic saying, but first cautions the reader: “I have thought of a new interpretation of this statement. ‘I hold it fast and will not let it go’ [Song 3:4], if my dear friends, who desire to know the truth (such as it is) will agree not to provoke me by disputing it.”[[23]](#footnote-23) It could be that, knowing the questioner and his assertiveness, Hayyun felt it necessary to introduce this warning before offering his interpretation.

The difference in age between Hayyun and Abarbanel might also support the suggestion that Abarbanel was Hayyun’s student. Hayyun’s dates of birth and death are unknown[[24]](#footnote-24) but he was clearly older than Abarbanel.[[25]](#footnote-25) In 1441, R. Moses ha-Hazzan copied a book for Hayyun. In the colophon he treats him with utmost respect: “I, Moses ha-Hazzan, wrote this … for the sagacious R. Joseph Hayyun, the ‘spray of henna blooms’ and ‘bag of myrrh’ [Song 1:14, 13].”[[26]](#footnote-26) At this time Abarbanel (1437-1508) was at most four years old. R. David b. R. Solomon ibn Yahya, too, in his introduction to his book on the dietary laws, a work that he wrote at the beginning of the 1490s,[[27]](#footnote-27) called him “our teacher, older in wisdom and in years, whose commentaries are for us nowadays like ‘brooks of water in the desert’ [Isa 32:2].” At that time Abarbanel was less than 50 years old, whereas Hayyun is being called “old in wisdom and in years.” On the testimony of Capsali,[[28]](#footnote-28) Hayyun was one of the four most important students of R. Isaac Canpanton (1360-1463). When Canpanton died, Abarbanel was all of 26, while Hayyun was one of the greatest of Canpanton’s students.

**Abarbanel’s Total Failure to Mention Hayyun**

But a heavy shadow beclouds this theory. Abarbanel completely ignores Hayyun, never mentioning him even once in any of his writings. Admittedly, Abarbanel does not often mention his predecessors — even when he quotes their interpretations[[29]](#footnote-29) — to the extent that he has been accused on this account of plagiarism;[[30]](#footnote-30) he does, nonetheless, refer explicitly in his work to many scholars, e.g., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Nahmanides, Gersonides, Nissim ben Reuven, Joseph Kaspi, and others, including several Christian scholars.[[31]](#footnote-31) As a result, it is surprising that someone who was the greatest of all the scholars of his home town, Lisbon, someone of whom it was said that his commentaries were like “brooks of water in the desert,” would be the one scholar Abarbanel would refrain from mentioning.

The fact that Abarbanel fails to mention Hayyun in a place where he ought specifically to have done so is especially surprising. In his introduction to Deuteronomy, Abarbanel discusses the authorship of the book, the very question about which Hayyun wrote *Maggid Mišne* for Abarbanel. In the prologue, Abarbanel notes that when he was young he sent this question to all the contemporary scholars: “I set it ‘before all who are versed in law and precedent,’ the greatest of the sages of the land, ‘those who sit in judgment,’ ‘those who follow good paths,’ and the heads of the academies.”[[32]](#footnote-32) One of the scholars to whom he sent this question was Hayyun, whose answer was well known to Abarbanel; it was before him when he was writing his introduction.[[33]](#footnote-33) Despite this, Abarbanel did not mention his name, referring to him only as “one of the contemporary scholars,”[[34]](#footnote-34) a phrase he also used to refer to R. Isaac Arama.[[35]](#footnote-35) Nor was Abarbanel reluctant to describe Hayyun’s response as “weak,” though he knew that Hayyun himself had reservations about his suggestion.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Abarbanel’s failure to cite Hayyun in his Deuteronomy commentary is especially harsh, since he wrote it after his commentary on the Minor Prophets,[[37]](#footnote-37) where he noted that he had taken it upon himself to make sure to quote things in the name of those who said them:

And behold the Lord our God caused it to befall me in this city to find the commentary of Ibn Ezra to this book, in which (for all its terseness) I rejoiced, since it was unobtainable in the land of my birth. For he wrote it in a city of the south, and it had not reached my own country, in the far west. In it I saw that the best and brightest of the comments of R. David Kimhi had actually been taken from Ibn Ezra, though he never mentioned his name. But I will attribute each comment to the one who said it, lest I be one of those who steal words.[[38]](#footnote-38)

And in his commentary to the Minor Prophets, Abarbanel is indeed careful to quote things in the name of the one who said them. He makes sure to cite the words of the Sages by tractate and chapter; frequently quotes Targum Jonathan; and presents the interpretations of Saadia, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak in their names.[[39]](#footnote-39) In light of this, it is quite amazing that later, when he writes his Deuteronomy commentary, he omits mention of the commentator whom he knew so well from his home town.

It is not only when Abarbanel does not accept Hayyun’s interpretation that he describes him anonymously as “one of the contemporary scholars.” He does the same thing in a case where he not only accepts but praises Hayyun’s interpretation. In his comments on Deuteronomy 33, before offering his own understanding of Moses’s blessings for the tribes, Abarbanel lists four previous models for interpreting Deut 33:1-5. When he gets to the fourth model, he writes, “This is the model used by some of the contemporary commentators.” He concludes his description by praising this model: “This is a beautiful interpretation that fits nicely with the text.”[[40]](#footnote-40) This particular model appears in *Birkhot HaTorah*, a work that Hayyun wrote to explain the various blessings in the text of the Torah, among them the blessings of Moses for the tribes.[[41]](#footnote-41) There is no doubt that when Abarbanel wrote “one of the contemporary scholars” he was referring to Hayyun. Yet he does not explicitly mention his name.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Abarbanel was not one of those commentators who are sparing with biographical details; many such details are found throughout his commentaries. Despite this, he never once mentions having studied with Hayyun.[[43]](#footnote-43) From his place of exile in Spain, Abarbanel describes Lisbon, the city of his birth, as a place of scholars and scribes, but without mentioning Hayyun even obliquely: “I lived serenely in my home … in Lisbon, the acclaimed metropolis of the Kingdom of Portugal … my house was a meeting place for scholars, for ‘thrones of judgment were set there’ [Ps 122:5], and from there would go forth many scripts and scribes of ‘good sense and knowledge’ [Ps 119:66] and fear of the Lord … and there was Torah and greatness in the same place.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Here Abarbanel takes special note of the yeshiva that met in his home and the great number (and the high level) of those who learned there, but he does not mention any scholar in whose yeshiva he himself learned. We know from other sources that Abarbanel himself taught various subjects. Jabez notes that when he was in Lisbon, he heard lectures by Abarbanel on the *Guide of the Perplexed*.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The (few) historical sources that we have in which Hayyun and Abarbanel are both mentioned also lack anything that smacks of their being teacher and student. Jabez (as noted)[[46]](#footnote-46) describes Hayyun and Abarbanel as two scholars who were equally (or almost equally) important. He describes Hayyun as the head of the community and Abarbanel as “one of the great men of the city.” In a letter to R. Abraham Hayyun, Joseph Hayyun’s son, R. Isaac da Pisa, mentions both Abarbanel and R. Abraham with great respect, without noting that one of them was the student of the other’s father.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Abarbanel mentions R. Joseph Kaspi dozens of times in his commentary, citing him by name both in his Torah commentary and in his commentary on the *Guide* — this despite the fact that he does not refrain from criticizing him severely and accusing him of attributing heretical ideas to Maimonides: “And all the other things that commentator [Kaspi] claimed were heretical … He should wash his mouth out with soap! My heart cries out for the author of the *Guide*. How he tried to help! Yet scoundrels rose up against him, ‘slaves who run away from their masters.’”[[48]](#footnote-48) Hayyun too (according to Jabez) was quite scornful of Kaspi’s words. Despite this, Abarbanel mentions Kaspi by name when he cites him. He never does this with Hayyun.

It would seem that Abarbanel was a talented autodidact[[49]](#footnote-49) who had no need for a permanent relationship with a teacher or to frequent any particular yeshiva. His many business affairs and his being a royal courtier all the more obviously left him no opportunity to spend regular time in the house of study. It is worth noting that the term *yeshiva* had a different meaning then than it does today. In his article on the yeshivas of Castile, Gross writes:[[50]](#footnote-50)

In the Valladolid Takkanot of 1432 we read: “Moreover we ordain that each Rabbi shall maintain a Talmudical academy [*yeshiva*], where those desirous of learning may study the Halakhah.” The meaning of the term *yeshiva* [literally “sitting”] here is actually a fixed *time* for study, with any individual or individuals who may be interested. When R. Isaac Caro, in his introduction to *Toledot Yitzhak*, talks about his life in Castile and says “I disseminated Torah and *yeshiva*,” he is not necessarily talking about the kind of large institution that someone of our day might imagine. R. Isaac Canpanton says in his preface to *Darkhei HaTalmud*, “One who wishes to increase in wisdom must spend a great deal of time in *yeshiva*, that is, in sitting with his books … for he cannot go around doing business or buying and selling, he must only spend time in *yeshiva*.” These examples and others make it clear that we must rein in our imaginations when we hear that someone or other “had a yeshiva.”

The fact that Hayyun headed “the yeshiva” of Lisbon does not refer to one central place where all the contemporary scholars gather and in which they learn as a group. It is more reasonable to think that this was one place out of many where people would gather for study and prayer. Hayyun certainly headed one of the greatest and most important of such centers, but it is similarly probable that there must have been many others of the kind.[[51]](#footnote-51) This being so, there is no need to take Hayyun’s remark that Abarbanel was “attentive to my words” as describing him as his student. It would seem that Hayyun meant simply that Abarbanel was “attentive to my words” with regard to that particular question, not in general.

**Abarbanel’s Lack of Familiarity with Hayyun’s Bible Commentaries**

Moreover, in my estimation it is not merely that Abarbanel was not Hayyun’s student, he apparently did not even know Hayyun’s Bible commentaries, with the (possible) exception of two: the Psalms commentary and the essay *Birkhot HaTorah*. Two manuscripts of Hayyun’s commentary on Psalms are extant today.[[52]](#footnote-52) One of the manuscripts has a notation that it belonged to “the noble Don Judah Abarbanelo,” the son of Isaac Abarbanel; Gross thinks he may have inherited it from his father.[[53]](#footnote-53) This would certainly make sense, but since Abarbanel never wrote a Psalms commentary there is nowhere to look for similarities between the two men’s interpretations.

Gross[[54]](#footnote-54) thinks it clear that Abarbanel knew Hayyun’s essay *Birkhot HaTorah* and used it in his commentary to the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33. As proof, Gross points to three places in which Abarbanel presents an interpretation that appears earlier in Hayyun: in the introduction to the blessings, in the blessings of Zebulun and Issachar, and in the blessing to Gad. The first and third of these are indeed persuasive. As we have seen, Abarbanel reviews four models used to interpret the introduction to the blessings.[[55]](#footnote-55) When he gets to the fourth model, he writes, “And I saw the fourth model in the words of some contemporary scholars. It is that Moses intended his blessings to be perfect in four respects.” This comment is identical to that of Hayyun, despite the lack of verbal similarities between them.[[56]](#footnote-56) With regard to the blessing of Gad as well, “Some explain that the inheritance of Gad was particularly narrow,” a comment almost exactly the same as Hayyun’s, though again with no verbal similarities.[[57]](#footnote-57) But the second example cited by Gross, the blessing of Zebulun and Issachar, is less persuasive. In my own comparison of the two comments, I find no more than a partial similarity. Incidentally, it is worth noting that Abarbanel might have had another source in addition to Hayyun. In the two identical sources Abarbanel notes that he saw the comment in the work of “some contemporary scholars” or that “some explain” — in both cases using the plural.[[58]](#footnote-58)

In a seminal article asking whether Nahmanides knew Rashbam’s Torah commentary, Jonathan Jacobs suggested a set of methodological criteria for determining how well a later commentator might have known the commentary of an earlier one. According to this, the first thing to check is the geographical-historical connection between the two commentators. Then there are eight “positive” criteria that contribute to establishing a connection and four “negative” criteria that contribute to disproving it.[[59]](#footnote-59) We have stated above, at length, the historical and geographical connection between Abarbanel and Hayyun, but with regard to Jacobs’s eight positive criteria, only one is fulfilled: reworked comments, cited anonymously. In the words of Jacobs: “In other cases there are no linguistic similarities or shared sources, but the comment, unattributed, is found nowhere else than in the two commentators under consideration.”[[60]](#footnote-60) As previously noted, we find comments that fulfill this criterion, being parallel to comments of Hayyun’s in *Maggid Mišne* and *Birkot HaTorah*, three times in Abarbanel’s Deuteronomy commentary.

**“Negative” Criteria**

The existence of just a single “positive” criterion diminishes the likelihood of any connection between the commentaries of Abarbanel and Hayyun, and therewith obviously the likelihood that Abarbanel knew Hayyun’s work. As Jacobs has written about his first “negative” criterion, “The fewer the similar comments between the two similar commentators, the more likely it is that they did not know each other.”[[61]](#footnote-61) In this case (as we have seen), Abarbanel indicates that he knew each of the “similar” comments from multiple sources.

In comparing the commentaries of Abarbanel and Hayyun we find the second “negative” criterion fulfilled as well. This second criterion has two possibilities:

It would be reasonable for the secondary commentator to respond to interpretations of the primary commentator that he opposed. If the secondary commentator does not respond to such comments, he may not be aware of them.

The same criterion may occur not only with comments where they disagree but also in potentially supportive ones. A commentator may sometimes cite the work of a predecessor in support of his own comment. If he does not do so, once again the likelihood that he was not aware of that comment increases.[[62]](#footnote-62)

We will see in what follows examples of each of these cases: comments in which Abarbanel does not mention that he is disputing Hayyun, and comments in which he refrains from noting that his comment is like Hayyun’s. These examples strengthen the hypothesis that Abarbanel apparently did not know Hayyun’s comments.

**Failure to Refute Hayyun’s Comment**

How the prophetic books were written — was the prophecy dictated to the prophets or was the writing their own creation? — is controversial and has been extensively discussed.[[63]](#footnote-63) The answers of Hayyun and Abarbanel to this question are completely opposite. In his Jeremiah commentary, Hayyun dealt with the question of why Jeremiah encourages only the Benjaminites to flee from the city: “Flee for refuge, O people of Benjamin, out of the midst of Jerusalem!” (Jer 6:1). Why does he not issue a similar call to the rest of the people? Hayyun provided a number of answers, among them that of Radak, who explained that, since Jeremiah was from Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin, he cared enough about them to give them this advice. But Hayyun did not accept this answer: “That would have been a good enough reason if these words were his own, but they are God’s words.”[[64]](#footnote-64) That is, if Jeremiah was writing on his own, in his own style, this explanation would make sense, but since the words that Jeremiah put into writing were God’s words, Radak’s explanation is hard to accept.[[65]](#footnote-65) Abarbanel, by contrast, thought that the words of the prophecy as written were the fruit of the prophet’s own independent creativity, not simply something that God had dictated to him word for word. In his introduction to Jeremiah, Abarbanel explains the many occurrences of Qere and Kethib in Jeremiah as a result of the fact that Jeremiah was very young when he began to prophesy and was still learning how to write.[[66]](#footnote-66) It is surprising that Abarbanel does not mention Hayyun as a commentator with whom he is disagreeing, making it plausible that he simply did not know Hayyun’s comment.

Another question relates to the unusually long lifespans recorded in the first generations of humanity. Did all humans live such long lives, or only those who are mentioned by name? Here too, Hayyun and Abarbanel took opposite sides. Maimonides (*Guide* 2:47) limited this phenomenon only to those people mentioned by name; everyone else lived as long as did those of later generations — 70-80 years. Nahmanides (to Gen 5:4) rejected this opinion, saying that everyone in those first generations lived such long lives. Hayyun mentions this dispute in his comment to Ps 90:3 and comes down on the side of Nahmanides: “Even though the Rambam (of blessed memory) believed, as he said in his book, that only those special people lived such long lives — with all respect to him, this just does not make sense. Everyone in those generations lived the same long lifespans. The Ramban (of blessed memory) has already knocked the living daylights out of this idea in his Torah commentary,[[67]](#footnote-67) and I agree with him.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Abarbanel, by contrast, was with Maimonides, Nissim ben Reuven having dismissed Nahmanides’s objections.[[69]](#footnote-69) Here too we must notice that Abarbanel does not mention the opinion of “one of the contemporary scholars” on this matter.

How does Jeremiah rank in regard to the rest of the prophets? The midrash[[70]](#footnote-70) interprets the verse “I will raise up a prophet for them from among their own people, like yourself” (Deut 18:18) as a reference to Jeremiah, equal to Moses in his reproofs of the people, and notes six resemblances between Jeremiah and Moses. This comparison would seem to be saying that Jeremiah’s prophecy was of very high rank. Abarbanel says the same, adding nine additional points of comparison between them,[[71]](#footnote-71) all this without mentioning that Hayyun was of the opposite opinion. As the latter wrote in his commentary to Jer 31:3, “The Lord revealed Himself to me from afar” — “‘From afar.’ As the Rambam of blessed memory explained in the *Guide* (2:45), the prophets were at many different levels. For all this one’s greatness in prophecy, there had been other prophets closer to God than he was; he was far from being of their same value.”

In the Talmud (B. Taan. 5b) we read that the prophet Samuel lived only to the age of 52. Hayyun accepts this statement as fact and explains that Samuel was punished for not reprimanding his sons.[[72]](#footnote-72) Abarbanel, however, did not accept this talmudic statement as a biblical fact. He brings both rabbinic literature and Gersonides into the discussion of Samuel’s life span, writing in conclusion that Samuel was 65 or 75 when he crowned Saul king.[[73]](#footnote-73) Once again, he makes this statement without referring to Hayyun’s contradictory assertion.

A prominent feature of the commentaries of both Hayyun and Abarbanel is the importance they give to introductions. This importance finds expression in two methodological principles: (1) writing an introduction to their own commentaries, and (2) demarcating and defining the opening verses of each book of the Bible as an introduction to the entire book.[[74]](#footnote-74) This is in fact extremely characteristic of Abarbanel, as many have pointed out.[[75]](#footnote-75) But in all his introductions Abarbanel never once refers to the introductions of Hayyun.

Hayyun and Abarbanel were accustomed to noting where each prophecy begins and ends before commenting on it. Both did this for all the prophetic books on which they wrote commentaries.[[76]](#footnote-76) But Abarbanel never adopts or disputes the demarcations established by Hayyun. Both the form of demarcation and the way of presenting it differ between the two. For example, in his Jeremiah commentary, Hayyun divides the book into 82 separate prophecies. At the beginning of each prophecy, he sets down where it begins and ends, notes its aim, and then comments on the details. In contrast, Abarbanel divides the whole book into just 17 prophecies, each of which is divided into a number of sections, totaling in all 151 — and he sets all this out in his introduction to the book.

**Failure to Enlist Hayyun’s Commentary in Support**

In his commentary to the story of David and Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite, Abarbanel surveys the interpretations that preceded him, after which he levels harsh criticism at David. Malbim sums this up well:

Don Isaac Abarbanel blamed David greatly, accusing him of sinning in five ways: (1) by sleeping with another man’s wife … (2) by trying to get Uriah to sleep with his wife so he would think the child she would bear was his own, thereby destroying his own ancestral inheritance, besides the mixing of families this would give rise to, potentially leading to a brother marrying his own sister, which Lev 19:29 says would “fill the land with depravity”; (3) by commanding that Uriah be assigned where the battle was fiercest, so he could be killed without David’s dirtying his hands … (4) by having him killed by the Ammonites so that many other good Israelites had to die, when he could have had him killed by an Israelite in secret; (5) by taking Bathsheba into his house right afterward, as if he were still consumed with lust.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Abarbanel’s approach is completely different from the earlier interpretations he has surveyed. He certainly might have enlisted Hayyun in support, since Hayyun too declined to interpret this story apologetically. In his comment to “I have kept in view the paths of the lawless” (Ps 17:4), Hayyun writes: “But have I kept them in view in order to follow them? The Decalogue says “You shall not commit adultery” and “You shall not commit murder,” but I have committed murder and adultery like a ruffian.” Hayyun goes on to attribute to David the transgression of causing the killing of many Israelites: “And he prayed about this in this psalm, which he devoted to praying about the transgression with Bathsheba, since he was very afraid, having commanded that Uriah be killed in battle, lest his own servants die in the battle as well, as many of them indeed did when Uriah was killed, as told in the book of Samuel [2 Sam 11:17]. It would seem that after Uriah’s death the enemies with whom he was fighting were victorious. That is why David prayed about them in this psalm” (in v. 11). In his commentary on a different psalm, Hayyun wrote that David deserved Gehenna for his sins: “The word *tirpa’eni* [Ps 30:3] is a question: “Will you heal me?” … For everyone thought I would be in Gehenna for this transgression” (comment to Ps 30:12-13).

In his essay “On the Sin of Moses and Aaron,” Hayyun takes a unique perspective. In his view, Moses and Aaron were punished by being prevented from entering the land of Israel not for the sin at the Waters of Meribah, but for other sins:

I think it is because of this sin [of sending the spies, in Numbers 13] that Moses was not permitted to enter the land of Israel, for the sin at the Waters of Meribah was not so grievous as to earn him so great a punishment … The Holy One attributed the punishment to his sin at the Waters of Meribah to preserve his honor … Similarly, Aaron was punished for his transgression with the Golden Calf, but the Holy One pretended, to preserve his honor, that he was being punished for what happened at the Waters of Meribah.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Abarbanel takes precisely this same distinct path, but without enlisting Hayyun in support:

In my opinion, both Moses and Aaron were punished for transgressions they committed, Aaron for the transgression with the Calf and our master Moses for the affair of the spies … but to cover for them, and to preserve their honor, He attributed their punishment to their rebellion against God’s word at the Waters of Meribah.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Abarbanel emphasizes that this is his own original idea: “Since my opinion here is so different from that of all my predecessors.”[[80]](#footnote-80) Abarbanel’s assertion that this interpretation is unique to him and that he has seen no other commentator offering the same interpretation strengthens the argument that Abarbanel did not know this essay of Hayyun’s.

On the question of how to achieve prophecy, Maimonides[[81]](#footnote-81) adopted the opinion of the philosophers almost completely. He took prophecy to require a state of perfection, but one that did not necessitate that the perfect man would in fact actually attain prophecy.[[82]](#footnote-82) Maimonides harshly rejected the view that “God chooses whomever He wants … they think it makes no difference whether the person is educated or ignorant …” To Maimonides, this view itself displays ignorance; the view of the Torah itself is that only one of perfect intelligence and virtue can attain prophecy. But neither Hayyun nor Abarbanel accepted this view. They thought that even an imperfect person could become a prophet, since prophecy is intrinsically miraculous.[[83]](#footnote-83) Hayyun, for example, explained that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were young when they prophesied, and attained prophecy despite being imperfect in intelligence and virtue.[[84]](#footnote-84) In his comment on Amos 2:11, Hayyun writes that sometimes prophecy comes miraculously upon a person who is not ready for it.[[85]](#footnote-85) Elsewhere he explains Amos’s answer to Amaziah, the priest at Bethel — “I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet; I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees” (Amos 7:14) — as meaning that he was not ready or prepared for prophecy:

He said, “I am not a prophet” like the other prophets, who have been prophesying since they were young and have prepared themselves to prophesy, and who are called “sons of the prophets” because they endeavor to attain prophecy … This prophecy is in no way due to my preparing for it or choosing it, so you should not accuse me of conspiracy against the king. On the contrary! My profession, since I was young, has been far indeed from one that would prepare me for prophecy; I am a herdsman, and I gather figs to feed my animals. That is what I have done all my life. What does a man of that sort have to do with prophecy? What possible connection could he have with it?[[86]](#footnote-86)

All this is in complete opposition to the approach of Maimonides, so Abarbanel could have used it in his commentary on the *Guide* to support his arguments against Maimonides. He does not do so, apparently because he was not familiar with it. In conclusion, we may state that Abarbanel did not view himself as Hayyun’s student and consequently he apparently was unfamiliar with the latter’s biblical commentaries.

1. I. E. Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought 1250-1650*, The Hague/Paris, 1967, p. 77; M. Saperstein, “The Method of Doubts: Problematizing the Bible in Late Medieval Jewish Exegesis,” in J. D. McAuliffe, B. D. Walfish, J. W. Goering (eds), *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Interpretation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, New York, 2003, p. 133-156. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Peruš Abarbanel (al-ha-tora*, Y. Shaviv, A. Shotland (eds), Jerusalem, 2007, p. 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. E. Shmueli, *Don Yishaq Abarbanel ve-geruš Separad* [*Don Isaac Abarbanel and the Expulsion from Spain*], Jerusalem, 1963; in Hebrew), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Kesep Mišne*, Hilkhot Berakhot 3:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On Abarbanel’s escape to Spain in fear of the King of Portugal, see B. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher*, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. S. Regev, “Nusah ̣Rišon šel Peruš Abarbanel le-Seper Debarim [The First Edition of Abarbanel’s Commentary to Deuteronomy],” *Qobes* *̣ (al Yad* 15 (2000), p. 285-380 (248). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See M. Arama, *HaMaggid* 25 (1858), p. 99; J. Hacker, “Rabbi Meir Arama's Letter of Censure against Isaac Abravanel – A Riddle Solved,” *Tarbiz* ̣76/3-4 (2007), p. 501-518. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Netanyahu, *Abarbanel*, p. 61-68; S. Feldman, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis, Don Isaac Abravanel: Defender of the Faith*, London and New York, 2003, p. 5; D. Ben-Zazon, *Nebukhim Hem: A Journey through Abarbanel’s Exegesis of the “Guide of the Perplexed”* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2015, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Shmueli, *Abarbanel and the Expulsion*, p. 23. Shmueli does not say what he based this suggestion on, but since he mentions Hayyun only as the author of *Millei de-Avot*, he is apparently relying on what Hayyun’s great-great-grandson wrote in his introduction to that work (see below). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This suggestion has been accepted as a reasonable one by all of the scholars who have worked on Hayyun’s commentaries. Gross wrote in a number of places that Hayyun was apparently Abarbanel’s teacher. See A. Gross, *Rabbi Joseph ben Abraham Hayyun: Leader of the Lisbon Jewish Community and his Literary Work* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan, 1993, p. 47, 84; ibid., “Joseph Hayyun and Isaac Abravanel: Intellectual Contacts” (Hebrew), *Michael* 11 (5749), p. כט, לג. Other scholars followed him but without mentioning the reservations he expressed. See S. Regev, “Ha-Šita ha-paršanit šel ha-Abarbanel [Abarbanel’s Exegetical Method],” *Mahanayim* 4 (1993), p. 248; E. Lawee, “Isaac Abarbanel's Intellectual Achievement and Literary Legacy in Modern Scholarship: A Retrospective and Opportunity,” in I. Twersky, J. M. Harris (eds), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* *III*, Cambridge MA, 2000, p. 217-218; J. Haas, “Why were the words of Isaac Arama included in the writings of Isaac Abarbanel?” (Hebrew), *Sinai* 134 (2005), p. 154-159 (156); A. Shoshana and M. Zipor, “Introduction and Preface,” in *Rabbenu Joseph b. Abraham Hayyun’s Commentary on Ezekiel*, Jerusalem, 2006, 10, 15. I went along with this myself in my previous publications. It is interesting that Netanyahu’s monograph on Abarbanel does not mention Hayyun even once. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The first criticisms of this theory can already be found in Y. Elitzur, “The Exegetical Method of Rabbi Joseph Hayyun in his Commentaries on the Bible” (Hebrew), Ph.D. dissertation, Ramat Gan, 2016, p. 64, n. 119 and p. 134, n. 57; ibid., “R. Joseph Hayyun’s Introduction to His Commentary on Hosea: Introduction to His Method and a Suggestion for Further Research” (Hebrew), master’s thesis for Touro College, Jerusalem, 2007), p. 190. See further Ben- Zazon, *Nebukhim Hem*, p. 27, n. 5, who raises the possibility that they were fellow students. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Thus on the testimony of R. David b. R. Solomon ibn Yaḥya, in the introduction to his book *Kav ve-Naki* on Proverbs, surveyed the exegetes who preceded him, among them Hayyun: “I searched for the books of the commentators, old and new … including our teacher, older in wisdom and in years, whose commentaries are for us nowadays like ‘brooks of water in the desert,’ the sage R. Joseph Hayyun.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. R. Joseph Jabez, *Or HaHayyim*, ed. R. Zvi Elimelech Shapiro (Dinov: 1850), ch. 12, p. 14a. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Millei de-Avot*, M. S. Kasher and Y. Y. Balkrovitz (eds), Jerusalem, 1972/3, p. רצ. See also the edition of D. Santini, Venice, 1606, p. 68b. The words of R. Abraham Hayyun are cited in full in Gross, *Hayyun*, Appendix 10, p. 288-290; as well as in J. Hacker, “R. Joseph Hayyun and the Generation of the Expulsion from Portugal” (Hebrew), *Zion* 48.3 (1983), p. 273-280 (with discussion). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. First published as Appendix 7 in Gross, *Hayyun*, p. 231-240; I have since published it in an enhanced edition: “Joseph Hayyun’s ‘Maggid Mišne’” (Hebrew), *Shnaton* 25 (2017), p. 311-341. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Paraphrasing Prov 16:20, “He who is attentive to things will attain success.” This moniker occurs twice in *Maggid Mišne*; in my edition, on 326 and 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Paraphrasing Ezek 17:3 and 28:14; Abarbanel’s question too is full of biblical quotations. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. All six citations are from *Maggid Mišne*; in my edition, on 326, 328, 326, 341, 335 and 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See *Maggid Mišne*, 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Gross, “Intellectual Contacts,” p. לג. Hayyun too, like his father, had business dealings (see J. Hacker, “Some Letters on the Expulsion from Spain” (Hebrew) in E. Etkes, J. Salmon (eds), *Studies in the History of Society Presented to Professor Jacob Katz on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, Jerusalem, 1980, p. צד), but for him this was a secondary occupation (Gross, “Intellectual Contacts,” p. לג, n. 55). Abarbanel wrote a self-criticism on this subject in his introduction to the book of Joshua (Commentary to Joshua-Judges, Y. Shaviv [ed], Jerusalem, 2009). It would seem from Hayyun’s remark in his commentary to Tractate Avot that he did not deny that those who engaged in trade might have wisdom, though he did not think many of them did (see *Millei de-Avot*, 2:6, p. קכא). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Maggid Mišne*, p. 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Compare this to the end of Hayyun’s response: “The truth bears witness to itself and is completely consistent. No one can deny it but one who never stops arguing.” On Abarbanel’s argumentative method in his commentaries, see his introduction to Joshua; M. H. Segal, “R. Isaac Abravanel as Interpreter of the Bible” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 8 (1937), p. 260-299 (267). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Maggid Mišne*, p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. His birth year is unknown; with regard to his year of death, there is a great deal of confusion in the scholarship. For a summary of the various opinions, see Y. Kapah, “Introduction,” *R. Joseph Hayyun’s Commentary on Psalms* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2016, p. א, n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Even Gross, “Intellectual Contacts,” p. כה, simply takes for granted that R. Hayyun was older than Abarbanel: “One was the elder rabbi of the community; the other was a talented youngster.” Hayyun’s literary activity was primarily during the 1460s and 1470s, but this does not prove that he was older than Abarbanel, who also began writing when he was quite young. His first book on philosophy was written when he was 21 (Netanyahu, *Abravanel*, p. 13). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This manuscript, IMHM #F22126, is physically located in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Gross, *Hayyun*, p. 112. [\*\*n. 12 cites this same quote from *Kav ve-Naki*.] תודה על ההערה. נכון. משום כך יש להפנות להערה 12: ראה לעיל הערה 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Elijah Capsali, *Seder Eliahu Zuta* A. Shmuelovich, S. Simonson, M. Benayahu (eds), Jerusalem, 1975, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Elitzur, “Exegetical Method,” p. 90-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. On this, see H. Pollack in *Akedath Jitzchak*, vol. 1, Pressburg, 1849, p. ד, n. טו; S. Heller-Wilensky, *The Philosophy of Isaac Arama in the Framework of Philonic Philosophy* (Hebrew), Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1956, p. 50-57; Shmueli, *Abarbanel and the Expulsion*, p. 86, n. 6; Haas, “Arama,” p. 154-159; Hacker, “Some Letters,” p. 501-518. [\*\*The Hebrew footnote points to “Hacker, n. 20,” which is “Some Letters”; but p. 501-518 points to the *Tarbiz* article in n. 7.] נכון מאוד. צודק. תודה Pollack presumes that Abarbanel wrote his Deuteronomy commentary as a young man, not intending to publish it, and with the passage of time simply forgot the matter; Haas attributes the copying to Abarbanel’s style of writing, heavily ornamented with literary quotations. Abarbanel himself thought there was nothing wrong with it. As he wrote in his commentary on Tractate Avot, “I say that, when authors of books sometimes take material from each other, there is nothing wrong with this, since ultimately everything comes from the Holy One” (*Nahalat Avot* 2:6, 62b, Venice 1566), and see further in his introduction to his commentary on Jeremiah, Jerusalem, 1978/9, p. רצז. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Solomon Gaon showed in his book that Abarbanel was very much influenced by the Christian theologian Alfonso Tostado, who died when Abarbanel was 12 (S. Gaon, *The Influence of the Catholic Theologian Alfonso Tostado on the Pentateuch Commentary of Isaac Abravanel*, New York, 1993, p. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Introduction to Deuteronomy, (Shaviv-Shotland ed.), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Gross, “Intellectual Contacts,” p. כו-כח, showed that Abarbanel copied from this text at a number of places. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See the commentary to Deuteronomy, introduction, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. In his comment to Exod 21:33, Abarbanel quotes section 69 of Arama’s commentary, without mentioning his name. He writes as follows: “And one of the contemporary scholars has given a different explanation for this.” On this, see the note of N. Leibowitz, *(Iyunnim Hadašim be-sefer Šemot be-ikvot paršanenu ha-rišonim ve-ha-ahronim* (New Studies in Shemot [Exodus]), Jerusalem, 1969, p. 267, n. 7. The English version of the book omits this note. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Gross, *Hayyun*, p. כז [\*\*The note cites מנהיג, but that hasנכון זה שייך למאמר של גרוס יחסים אינטלקטואלים Arabic numerals; כז would seem to belong to “Intellectual Contacts”] ; Kapah, “Maggid Mišne,” p. 321-322. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Elitzur, “Exegetical Method,” p. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Abarbanel, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, introduction, end of p. יג. [\*\*If this cites a page number, it needs to cite which edition. I suggest omitting.] מהדורת הרב יהודה שביב, ירושלים תשע"א [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Elitzur, “Exegetical Method,” p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Abarbanel, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 33a; Shaviv-Shotland ed., p. 544-545. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This work is published in Appendix 7 of Gross, *Hayyun*, p. 247-287. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. According to Shotland, p. 544, n. מט, by “one of the contemporary scholars” Abarbanel meant R. Isaac Arama (*HaAkedah*, section 104). In my opinion, though Abarbanel’s comment is quite similar to Arama’s, it is far more similar to Hayyun’s. See below, p. ## 15 and n. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Gross, “Intellectual Contacts,” p. כו, thinks this is nothing to be surprised about, since in his introductions Abarbanel concentrates on the many times that he was forced to leave his home. But this explanation seems insufficient. In the commentaries themselves Abarbanel not only describes various events that occurred in his time but indeed mentions a number of commentators by name, refraining from mentioning no one but Hayyun. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Abarbanel, Introduction to the Commentary on Joshua, (Shaviv ed., p. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Jabez, *Or HaHayyim*, ch. 12, p. 14a. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See above, p. ##. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Hacker, “Some Letters,” p. צד. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Abarbanel’s commentary to the Guide (Vilna, 1903/4), p. 18. [\*\*May I suggest citing where in the Guide this comment occurs, rather than on what page? I was unable to find this specific edition, and perhaps others will have similar trouble.] אני מניח שאתה מאוד מנוסה ולכן אקבל את דעתך. ההפנייה היא לפירוש אברבנאל על מורה נבוכים, וזו מהדורה די נדירה היא מופיעה באוצר החכמה ב: <https://tablet-otzar-org.mgs.orot.ac.il/pages/?&restore=1&t=1610371307274&pagenum=37&book=12862>

    The last phrase is an allusion to 1 Sam 25:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, p. 14, notes that Abarbanel wrote his first book, on philosophy, when he was in his twenties. It would seem that Abarbanel did not view himself as the student of anyone in particular, so there is no need to go out of one’s way (as does Elitzur, “Exegetical Method,” p. 134, n. 57; ibid., “Hayyun’s Introduction to Hosea,” p. 190-223) to claim that Abarbanel did not cite Hayyun because he harbored a grudge against him. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. A. Gross, “A Sketch of the History of Yeshivot in Castile in the Fifteenth Century” (Hebrew), *Paamim* 31 (1987), p. 3-21 (10). The English use of the term Takkanot and the translation from the takkanah are adapted from L. Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1964, p. 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. So it would appear as well from the testimony of Jabez, *Or HaHayyim*, p. 8; and see further Gross, *Hayyun*, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Can. Or 51 in the Bodleian Library and the London MS, British Library 26902. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Gross, “Intellectual Contacts,” p. כח, n. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., p. כח. He thinks Abarbanel knew and used others of Hayyun’s writings on the Bible. He notes, for example, Abarbanel’s comment on Jer 27:3, which he considers similar and almost even word-for-word identical to Hayyun’s. In my own examination of the two commentaries, I found no verbal similarities between them; the comments that the two share appear earlier in the commentary of Radak (to Jer 27:1), and as Gross himself noted (ibid., n. 27), it seems reasonable to assume that Radak was indeed the original source for both of them. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Abarbanel defines Deut 33:1-5 as the introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Abarbanel writes that, according to these scholars’ interpretation, four aspects of the blessing are praiseworthy: the blessing itself, the one who is blessing, the one who is being blessed, and the time at which the blessing is given. He notes further that the text moves from the general to the specific. In n. 42, I noted that I think Hayyun is more likely to be Abarbanel’s source here than Arama. Though Arama does point to a number of superior qualities in the Blessing of Moses, he does not count four of them, but simply notes that this is a blessing offered by the greatest of prophets just before his death, when he is at the peak of his powers; he further asserts the perfection of those who are receiving the blessing. Nor does he say anything about the text moving from the general to the specific — in contrast to Hayyun, who does say explicitly that the blessing has four superior qualities and lists them in the same order as does Abarbanel; he likewise notes that the text moves from the general to the specific. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The similarity between the comments is obvious. Both explain that Gad’s territory was narrow and that he could not expand it because his neighbor was as strong as a lion. Both explain that what motivated Gad to take his territorial possession on the east side of the Jordan was because that was where Moses was buried, and both explain that the reason Moses encouraged those who would help Gad was in return for the help Gad gave the Israelites in taking possession of their own land. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. With regard to the blessing of Levi, “They shall place incense in Your nostril” (Deut 33:10), one may see a clear link to the commentary of Hayyun: “And the commentators explain ‘They shall place incense in Your nostril’ as a reference to the use of incense to stop plague by turning back God’s anger at Israel.” The same explanation, though in different wording, appears in Hayyun’s commentary: “‘They shall place incense in Your nostril’ — that is, when a plague would strike Israel and God’s wrath was aroused at them and ‘He slew their sturdiest’ [Ps 78:31], they would place incense on their firepans to prevent the wrath from destroying them” (Gross, *Hayyun*, p. 227). Here too Abarbanel cites this explanation as that of “the [plural] commentators.” [\*\*This too seems calculated at convincing us that A knew H’s Deut commentary.] לא הבנתי את ההערה. כוונתך שיש להוסיף את המשפט הזה? אם כן אקבל זאת [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. J. Jacobs, “Was Ramban Familiar with Rashbam’s Commentary on the Torah?” (Hebrew), *Madaʿe ha-Yahadut* 46 (2009), p. 85-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid., p. 89, criterion #10. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See for example: M. Greenberg, “Jewish Conceptions of the Human Factor in Biblical Prophecy,” in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, D. Knight, P. Paris (eds), Atlanta, 1989, p. 145-162, reprinted in Greenberg, *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought*, Philadelphia-Jerusalem, 1995, p. 405-419; Sh. HaCohen, “L-signon ha-nebua” [On the Nature of Prophecy], *HaMaayan* 46 (1996), p. 7-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Hayyun’s comment to Jer 6:1. We have Hayyun’s commentary to Jeremiah in a manuscript in the British Museum in London, Add. Ms. 27560. I have just completed an edition of this commentary, with introduction and notes, and I hope it will soon be published in the Eshkolot series of Herzog College, in cooperation with the World Union of Jewish Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Hayyun certainly was aware that the book of Jeremiah has many verses that are not prophecy but rather prayers and the like; despite this, he ruled out the possibility that Jeremiah was writing words that God had not spoken to him. He writes similarly in *Maggid Mišne* (Kapah, “Hayyun’s ‘Maggid Mišne,’” p. 337) about the book of Deuteronomy, that Moses was not authorized to write down his own words until after they had been dictated to him by God. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Introduction (Shaviv ed.), p. 4. Here, of course, Abarbanel is following the great commentators who preceded him: Saadia, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Moses ibn Ezra, and Radak. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. “This is empty talk. Why would these men have miracles done for them? They were neither prophets nor were they righteous or good enough to deserve miracles, and certainly not for generation after generation” (Nahmanides to Gen 5:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Kapah, *Hayyun’s Commentary on Psalms*, p. תיג. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. “What goes around comes around. Just as the Ramban made the effort to disprove the words of the Rambam, so … Rabbenu Nissim, one of the students of his students, bestirred himself to disprove his opinion and his words in their turn” (Abarbanel to Genesis 5:3, Shaviv-Shotland ed, p. 241). Abarbanel writes all this without mentioning that he himself is disagreeing with someone who might be considered his own teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *Pesiqta of Rab Kahana* 13:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. In the introduction to his Jeremiah commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. In his comment to Ps 90:11 (Kapah, *Hayyun’s Commentary on Psalms*, p. תטו). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See Abarbanel’s comment to 1 Sam 13:1 (Shaviv ed., p. 154). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. For example, Hayyun defines Psalm 1 as the introduction to the book of Psalms and not as a psalm of its own. Nor was he the only one to do this sort of thing. Many commentators had said this before him, e.g., Radak, who wrote in his introduction to Proverbs that Prov 1:1-5 were the scribe’s introduction; R. Joseph Kaspi (1279-1340), who wrote something similar in his commentaries to Isaiah and Ecclesiastes; R. Joseph Albo (1380-1444), who wrote that Genesis 1-4 were an introduction to the Pentateuch as a whole (R. Joseph Albo, *Sefer HaIkkarim* 1:11). See further Y. Kapah, “The Psalms Commentary of R. Joseph b. R. Abraham Hayyun: An Analysis of His Exegetical Method, with a Scientific Edition and Supercommentary on Selected Psalms” (Hebrew), Ph.D. diss., Ramat Gan, 1991, p. 72-77; Y. Zeitkin, “Interpretive Characteristics of the Peshat Commentators of the Maimonidean School in Provence in the 13th-14th Centuries” (Hebrew), Ph.D. diss, Ramat Gan, 2011, p. 229-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Many have viewed Abarbanel as the first to write an introduction to a Bible commentary. See, for example, Segal, “Abravanel as Interpreter,” p. קז; Shmueli, *Abarbanel and the Expulsion*, p. 72-73; G. W. H Lampe, “The Study of The Bible in Medieval Judaism,” in E. R. J. Rosenthal (ed), *Studia Semitica, I: Jewish Themes*, Cambridge, 1971, p. 244-271 (264). But Hayyun obviously preceded Abarbanel. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See further Regev, “First Edition of Abarbanel’s Commentary to Deuteronomy,” p. 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Malbim to 2 Sam 11:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Gross, *Hayyun*, Appendix 5, p. 214-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Abarbanel’s comment to Num 20:1 (Shaviv-Shotland ed., p. 172). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. For a more detailed comparison of the two men’s comments on this subject, see Elitzur, “Exegetical Method,” p. 193-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *Guide* 2:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. See also Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* 7:1: “One of the basic elements of the Torah is that God causes people to prophesy and that prophecy never occurs but to one who is of the utmost wisdom and virtue, one who does not yield to his desires with regard to anything in the world but constantly represses his own desires.” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Abarbanel expressed it this way (commentary to the Guide [Vilna, 1903/4], p. 18. [\*\*See my comment there. Also, n. 83 gives no page number, and it’s hard to imagine this comment is on the exact same page as that one] עמ' סח (אבל אם אתה חושב שאין צורך אז עשה כחכמתך)): “You can see from this that of the three attitudes toward prophecy described by Maimonides in *Guide* 2:32, the first view, which he attributed to ‘some fools nowadays,’ is in fact the correct view and none other.…  It is therefore the view of truly religious people, not of fools.” [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See his comment on “You enticed me, O Lord, and I was enticed” (Jer 20:7): “The enticement came when he said ‘I don’t know how to speak, for I am still a boy’ [Jer 1:6] and God replied, ‘Do not say, “I am still a boy,”’ [Jer 1:7]. The enticement is that God magnified him and elevated him by saying that though he might be young in years he was old in wisdom.” He says the same in his comment to Ezek 1:1 (A. Shoshana, M. Zipor [eds], Jerusalem, 2006): “‘In the thirtieth year’ — He is apologizing for his prophecies being so much more obscure than those of other prophets, for which he gives five reasons, the first of them being that he was still young, just 30, and therefore still subject to being overcome by desire.” [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. “‘And I raised up prophets from among your sons’ — not ‘from among you,’ pushing the idea to its limits. Prophets might be raised up even from among children too young to know right from wrong, who certainly would not have the necessary wisdom and intelligence to attain prophecy on their own. As our Sages said: ‘Prophecy rests only on one who is wise, strong, and rich’ [B. Shab. 92a (\*\*not 91תודה; and the Talmud says “the Divine Presence” rather than “prophecy” and adds “and tall”)זו הערה מעניינית. ייתכן ורי"ח הבין שאין הבדל בין הדברים וייתכן שהייתה לו גירסה אחרת]. Yet He rested His Presence upon them. For our Sages only said this about normal prophecy. But sometimes God rests His Presence on one who is not wise and not at all ready for prophecy in the natural way, as when He rested His Presence on Balaam and Abimelech and Laban, not to mention all of the slaves who were at the giving of the Torah. All of this was miraculous and not natural” (Y. Kapah, “Peruš Abarbanel le-Amos le-rabbenu Yosep Hayyun: be-ṣerup mabo ve-heʿarot [Commentary to Amos of R. Joseph Hayyun: With Introduction and Notes],” *Qobes* *̣ (al Yad* 26 (2019), p. 253-317 [\*\*specific page number wanted inside these brackets] לא הבנתי. צריך לשים בסוגריים? אם כן הכנס. מחילה, לא הבנתי. גבם בהערה הבאה. הרי כתבתי מספרי עמודים). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See also his comment to Joel 3:1 (M. Zipor, “Peruš R’ Yosep Hayyun le-seper Yoel [Commentary to Joel of R. Joseph Hayyun], *Meḥqerei Gibʿah* 4 [2017], p. 55-93 [\*\*specific page number]). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)