

Revelation and Reason: Rambam's Approach to Tanakh

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1. Amos 7:14-15

Amos answered Amaziah: "I am not a prophet, and I am not a prophet's disciple. I am a cattle breeder and a tender of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me away from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'"

2. Rambam, *Treatise on Resurrection*

I believe every possible happening that is supported by a prophetic statement and do not strip it of its plain meaning. I fall back on interpreting a statement only when its literal sense is impossible, like the corporeality of God: the possible however remains as stated.

3. Hosea 1:2-3

²When the LORD first spoke to Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, get yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom; for the land will stray from following the LORD." ³So he went and married Gomer daughter of Diblaim. She conceived and bore him a son.

4. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed* II:46

Therefore the multitude think that these actions, transportations, questions, and answers, occurred all of them in a state in which they could have been perceived by the senses, *not in a vision of prophecy*. God is too exalted than that He should turn His prophets into a laughingstock and a mockery for fools by ordering them to commit acts of disobedience. In the same way when He says, *Like as My servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot*, this only happened *in the visions of God*. The position is similar with regard to the words addressed to Hosea: *Take unto thee a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry*. All this story concerning the birth of the children and their having been named so and so happened in its entirety *in a vision of prophecy*. This is a thing that can only be doubted or not known by him who confuses the possible things with the impossible ones.

5. Abarbanel, commentary on Hosea chapter 1

One must be extremely astonished at these learned authors (i.e., Ibn Ezra and Rambam)—how could they advance this kind of sweeping principle in prophetic narrative? If the text testifies that the action occurred, we have no right to depart from its plain sense, lest we interpret the verses incorrectly. Indeed, it is infidelity and a grave sin (*zimmah va-avon pelili*) to contradict the

plain sense of the verses; if this is what we do to them, this disease (*tzara'at*) will spread over all verses and reveal interpretations that contradict their veracity.

6. Isaiah 11:6

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid.

7. Rambam, *Treatise on Resurrection*

You must realize that I am not at all positive that all the promises and the like of them are metaphorical.

8. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed III:22*

To sum up: *whether he has existed or not*, with regard to cases like his, which always exist, all reflecting people become perplexed; and in consequence such things as I have already mentioned to you are said about God's knowledge and His providence.

9. Ramban on Leviticus 1:9

Behold, these words are worthless, they make a big breach, raise big questions, and pollute the table of God.

10. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed III:49*

If we knew the particulars of those practices and heard details of those opinions, we would become clear regarding the wisdom manifested in the details of the practices prescribed in the commandments concerning the *sacrifices* and the forms of *uncleanness* and other matters whose reason cannot, to my mind, be easily grasped. For I for one do not doubt that all this was intended to efface those untrue opinions from the mind and to abolish those useless practices, which brought about a waste of lives *in vain and futile things*.