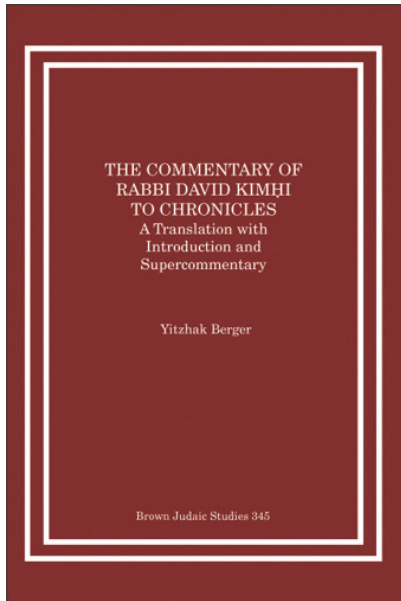


RBL 05/2009



Berger, Yitzhak

***The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi to Chronicles:
A Translation with Introduction and
Supercommentary***

Brown Judaic Studies 345

Providence, R.I.: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007. Pp. x + 318. Hardcover. \$44.95. ISBN 193067547X.

Amos Frisch
Bar-Ilan University
Ramat Gan, Israel

Yitzhak Berger has recently published a book on the commentary on Chronicles by one of the leading medieval Jewish biblical exegetes, David Kimhi (ca. 1160–1235). Berger's work is divided into three parts: an introduction, an English translation of the commentary, and a supercommentary. As the author mentions in his acknowledgment, this book is a revision of his Yeshiva University dissertation, written under the direction of Sid Leiman, Richard Steiner, and Mordechai Cohen. In fact, it is both revised and updated. The Hebrew text of the commentary and the scholarly apparatus, which were included there, have been eliminated. The supercommentary, originally written in Hebrew as a running commentary on the commentary, is given in revised form as English annotations to the English translation of the commentary. The introduction, which was already in English, has been cut back from eighty-one to nineteen pages, the bibliography has been revised (new works have been added and others deleted), and an index of passages and a detailed index of subjects have been added.

Before addressing Berger's book, I want to present three instructive interpretations of signal importance found in Kimhi's commentary on Chronicles, in order to illustrate his method of exegesis. (1) Kimhi grapples with the contradictions and differences between Chronicles and older biblical books (especially Samuel and Kings). Usually he proposes a

harmonizing solution according to which both versions are correct. One example is the different versions of David's war in the Valley of Salt, in which the enemy was either Edom (1 Chr 18:12; also Ps 60:2) or Aram (2 Sam 8:13). There are also discrepancies regarding the name of the Israelite commander and the number of enemy casualties. Kimhi's solution is to treat all the data as reliable, with each version representing only part of the entire picture of a war that was fought against Edom and its Aramean allies. He also posits two stages to the war: first Avishai inflicted losses of six thousand men on the enemy, and later Joab exacted another twelve thousand casualties. (2) Kimhi offers a bold interpretation of "new information" in Chronicles that is not found in its counterpart. The reason given in 1 Chr 22:8 for why David was not allowed to build the temple ("You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me upon the earth") does not appear in Samuel. Kimhi writes (in his first explanation): "Rather, it was David who, in his heart, thought that God had prevented him from building the Temple" (158); in other words, this is David's *subjective* take on the reason for the prohibition but not the *objective* truth. (3) Together with his many references to rabbinic texts, Kimhi sometimes dares to challenge a midrash. He quotes it and adds: "What will they say, though, concerning..." (1 Chr 8:1; p. 101); "I wonder about what our Sages have said..." (2 Chr 30:2; p. 261), "I am surprised that our Sages ... say that..." (2 Chr 32:30; p. 270). Such expressions are not unique to his commentary on Chronicles (see Ezra Zion Melamed, *Mefarshe ha-Miqra* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975], 2:759–64, for twenty-five instances of this throughout Kimhi's commentary on the Bible).

In his introduction Berger focuses on three questions (I present an abbreviated version here of his questions on p. 2): (1) What did Kimhi add to the exegesis of Chronicles? (2) What specific assumptions did he make when confronting contradictions and other challenging textual problems? (3) What differences emerge between the present commentary and Kimhi's later efforts on similar material?

The introduction is too short for my taste (though there is no need to restore the eighty-one-page version of the dissertation); I think readers would be happy to hear more of the author's considered judgments. For instance, I missed a detailed discussion of Kimhi's approach to the second question Berger presents—contradictions or differences between Chronicles and other biblical books. Regarding the phenomenon of discrepant names in Chronicles and parallel texts, Berger presents Kimhi's method of ascribing the phenomenon to the *historical* layer rather than to the process of transmission. On "Rodanim" (1 Chr 1:7) versus "Dodanim" (Gen 10:4), Berger writes (following Uriel Simon, *Bar Ilan Yearbook* 6 [1968]): "The two versions became legitimate alternatives prior to their canonization—because of the *misreading* of pre-biblical records" (8). In other words, in order to avoid reading the text of one of the parallel passages as a scribal

error, Kimhi offers a far-reaching explanation: both forms existed before the book was written and are thus not the result of the Chronicler's inability to decide between two different traditions or of an error at some stage in the process of textual transmission. In my view, it would have been desirable to list the several different types of name discrepancies noted by Kimhi. In his commentary on 1 Chr 4:24, Kimhi himself offers two different examples of one person with two names: "One finds this with many Hebrew names ... for they were not particular about changing one or two letters in a name. Sometimes, they called people by two names that are *not* similar to one another" (70). Kimhi also points out instances of the *transposition of letters*, such as Tilgath (1 Chr 5:6) instead of Tiglath, and notes that "the transposition of letters in names is a normal feature of the language [Hebrew: *derekh halashon*—A. F.], as one sees often" (75). Along with all of the above, Kimhi presents an entirely different type of explanation: only one of the names is "historical"; the other has no basis in reality but is a *deliberate modification* of the name that functions as an evaluation, such that the phenomenon can be explained on the *literary* level. This is how he explains "Achar" instead of "Achan": "the text calls him Achar pejoratively" (1 Chr 2:7, p. 38 [Achar punning on *okher* "troubler," as found explicitly in that verse]). He evidently intends a similar explanation in his comment on 1 Chr 8:33 (Eshbaal = Ish-bosheth). These categories of explanations for the phenomenon should really have been discussed in the introduction.

Berger offers some interesting judgments in his introduction, such as the statement that "Radak gives little attention to the question of motives of biblical characters in the Chronicles commentary" (14). By way of example, Berger points to 1 Chr 11:4. But he should have noted some of the exceptions to this rule, places where Kimhi does state a character's motives clearly: in 1 Chr 10:9–10, "the reason the people of Jabesh-gilead took care of him..." (114); in 1 Chr 13:10, what caused David to order that the ark be transported in a cart; in 1 Chr 14:2, how David knew that God was preparing him to be king; in 1 Chr 18:4, why David hamstringed the chariot horses he had captured; in 2 Chr 11:23, why Rehoboam scattered his sons to many places. In this last, Kimhi also explains the other two actions in the verse—feeding them abundantly and finding them many wives—with a different reason ascribed for each action.

Most of the book (21–282) is given over to the "Translation and Supercommentary." Here Berger includes Kimhi's introduction and commentary on Chronicles, translated into English and annotated. In his supercommentary Berger clarifies Kimhi's meaning, compares Kimhi's biblical exegesis with what he wrote in his linguistic works, contrasts Kimhi with other commentators and authors, refers readers to other places in the book (including Berger's own introduction), and adds textual notes based on MS Paris 198 and MS Munich 363. As part of the comparison with other authors, Berger often refers readers to modern commentators who adopt Kimhi's interpretation. In this way he serves as a

link between the medieval commentator and the moderns and demonstrates Kimhi's enduring legacy (e.g., "his son" [1 Chr 6:7–8, p. 84 n. 256]; *la-bamah* [2 Chr 1:13, p. 188 n. 669]; *Yakhin ... Bo'az* [2 Chr 3:17, p. 201 n. 728]).

The 1,103 notes in Berger's supercommentary (which range from a single line to twenty or more lines) attest to his good judgment and attentiveness to various aspects of the interpretations discussed. Take the following three examples. (1) In the commentary on 1 Chr 21:1 Berger accepts the version "for he is the one who leads people to err and the one who puts them to death (*ha-memit*)" (153–54). Berger explains that "puts to death" refers to the many who died from the plague that broke out when David saw the angel with his drawn sword. He adopts the explanation of Weisse in the *Be'ur* (1837) that Kimhi drew on the rabbinic dictum that "Satan, the evil impulse, and the angel of death are all one and the same" (b. Bava Batra 16a). This modifies the view that Berger expressed in his dissertation that *ha-memit* should be emended to *ha-mesit* ("the one who incites"), given that the passage refers to incitement. (2) With regard to "the God of Israel our father" (1 Chr 29:10), Kimhi explains that "'Our father' refers to Israel" (182). In note 651 Berger provides the motive for this comment: Kimhi wants to eliminate the possibility that "our father" refers to God. But Berger also quotes MS Munich 5, according to which the term refers to God. (3) In note 886 (237) Berger presents two textual possible sources for Kimhi's statement on 2 Chr 18:31, "much as the text says in the book of Kings *va-yesirem* ('and he diverted them')." On the one hand, Berger reports that, to judge by the manuscripts, this statement may be a late addition; on the other hand, in light of the fact that the citation from Kings is incorrect, it may well be original with Kimhi and was intentionally deleted at a later stage (by Kimhi himself or by someone else). Berger adduces further evidence there as well. This is a fine example of how Berger offers readers a diverse assortment of data and textual considerations.

There are places where one would expect Berger to comment but he does not. Here, too, I provide three examples. (1) Regarding 1 Chr 29:15, Kimhi writes: "If we are inhabitants of the world, we are inhabitants only as were our fathers. ... So we are really sojourners" (184). I would have expected Berger to comment on Kimhi's treatment of *ger* (sojourner) and *toshav* (inhabitant). Here, contrary to his usual custom of terming this "a duplication using different words" (i.e., synonyms), Kimhi seems to distinguish between the two. (2) Berger presents Kimhi's interpretation of 2 Chr 7:19 without comment: "But should you turn away. This means: you and the Israelite nation" (217). English readers may legitimately ask why Kimhi introduces the people of Israel into a dialogue between God and Solomon. The answer, of course, is that English does not distinguish between *you* in the singular and plural, whereas Hebrew does. The feature of this verse that elicits comment is precisely the unexpected use of the second-person plural, both in this pronoun and in the verbs that follow. Kimhi is explaining what this plural includes.

(3) Berger compares Kimhi's comment on 2 Chr 13:7 ("he was *like* a boy, in that he did not have the courage to fight" [226]) to what Sara Japhet wrote in her commentary on Chronicles. To my mind, though, he should have noted that the phrase *na'ar ve-rakh levav* ("an untried boy") used in this verse also appears in David's characterization of Solomon (1 Chr 22:5), where it is hard to give it a negative connotation. Berger also neglects to refer to Pseudo-Rashi, who understands "boy" here to be neutral (Berger does mention Pseudo-Rashi in his dissertation, and it is unfortunate that the reference was dropped from the book). Incidentally, in view of Kimhi's rendering of *na'ar* as "*like* a boy," I would have expected that in his citation of the biblical text Berger would have followed his normal procedure and written the word *na'ar* in transliteration. It is a bit disconcerting to find "boy" in the biblical text and see Kimhi gloss it as "*like* a boy."

The book is up-to-date and refers to recent scholarship. For instance, Berger mentions Ayelet Seidler's Hebrew dissertation on Kimhi (Bar-Ilan University, 2003) and even cites still unpublished works (e.g., Eran Viesel's dissertation on Pseudo-Rashi on Chronicles, which has since been published). So it is unfortunate that the author was not aware of Yaakov Fried's master's thesis on Kimhi's commentary on the genealogical chapters in Chronicles (Bar-Ilan, 2003). That study is doubly important because, as Berger highlights, much of Kimhi's commentary—about a third—is devoted to the genealogical lists. Berger views this proportion as a deliberate expression of Kimhi's exegetical method, as reflected in the commentator's remarks in his introduction: "This book contains very obscure matters, and matters contradicting those in Samuel and Kings" (26). The genealogical lists are a good place for investigating such matters.

Five pages of bibliography appear at the end of the book. This is not much, but the reduced scale is evidently due to the paucity of material on the subject. There are also two fine indexes, which I mentioned at the beginning of this review: (1) an index of passages, which refers not only to the Bible but also to rabbinic writings; and (2) an index of subjects, which includes individuals and places in the Bible, assorted biblical concepts, and biblical commentators.

In conclusion, Berger has written a serious and thorough study whose aim is to enable even those who do not read Hebrew to become familiar with a commentary by one of the leading medieval Jewish exegetes. The thoroughness of the supercommentary renders the book important even for those who read Hebrew, because it allows them to plumb the depths of Kimhi's exegesis. It is appropriate that, as part of the current intensive scholarly research on Chronicles, we become acquainted with the interpretive methods of the major medieval commentators. Berger's book makes a significant contribution in this direction.