Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508)

As we saw last week (see **this**) Rabbi "Don" Isaac Abarbanel was a famous statesman, a wealthy merchant, a Jewish philanthropist and one of the most illustrious biblical commentators and philosophers. Despite his turbulent life Rabbi Abarbanel was a very prolific Rabbinic author. In his youth, while in Portugal, he wrote his first book: *'ateret zeqenim* , "the crown of the elders" where he explained some difficult Biblical passages in Exodus chapter 33. He also wrote at a very young age "The way of the Principles" (*surat haysodot*) where he discussed philosophical issues like God's individual supervision, the immortality of the soul, etc. The issues of faith and dogma were extremely important for Rabbi Abarbanel in light of the permanent pressure exerted upon the Jews of Spain and Portugal by the catholic Church in its pursuing to convert them. Rabbi Abarbanel had to stop his literary enterprise when he was called to serve as the Finance Minister of King Alfonso 5th.

He wrote his commentary on the Bible in Spain while he was working as the Administrator of Tax Revenues for the Kings of Spain. He began with Joshua, Judges and Shemuel.

Once in italy and now virtually retired from serving in the court he wrote his most famous and most extensive work, a commentary on the Five Books of the Tora. He developed a very interesting exegetic style: first, rabbi Abarbanel asks 10-15 profound questions on every Biblical paragraph and then, he explains this paragraph answering systematically every question he brought.

Another important book he wrote is *ma'ayane hayeshu'a*, "The springs of salvation" where he explains thoroughly the Jewish belief in the coming of the Messiah and compares it with the Christian belief in a Messiah. This book is written as a commentary of the Biblical book of Daniel. He wrote many other books on the Jewish concept of the Messiah, which was obviously one of the main points of controversy with the Church.

"Rosh Amana", was one of the last books he wrote. This book is a commentary on the 13 principles of Jewish faith formulated by Maimonides.

All his books can be found in
www.hebrewbooks.org

One of the best books one can find about the incredible life and ideas of rabbi “Don” Isaac Abarbanel is the book written by Professor Benzion Netanyahu z”l, the father of Israel’s Prime Minister Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu. Professor Netanyahu was an expert in the history of Sephardic Jews.
The book is called:
“Don Isaac Abravanel, statesman and Philosopher.”