

Baruch Spinoza on the Concept of Jewish Chosenness

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Source: Baruch Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise, chapter 3

The celebration of the Pesach and the story of the Exodus can all too easily be read in a way that would confirm the most self-aggrandizing notions of Jewish election. Below is a quote from Baruch Spinoza that should encourage us to resist any such interpretation.

"The Hebrew nation was not chosen by God in respect to its wisdom nor its tranquility of mind, but in respect to its social organization and the good fortune with which it obtained supremacy and kept it so many years. This is abundantly clear from Scripture. Even a cursory perusal will show us that the only respects in which the Hebrews surpassed other nations, are in their successful conduct of matters relating to government, and in their surmounting great perils solely by God's external aid; in other ways they were on a par with their fellows, and God was equally gracious to all. For in respect to intellect (as we have shown in the last chapter) they held very ordinary ideas about God and nature, so that they cannot have been God's chosen in this respect; nor were they so chosen in respect of virtue and the true life, for here again they, with the exception of a very few elect, were on an equality with other nations: therefore their choice and vocation consisted only in the temporal happiness and advantages of independent rule."