The notion of Neerlands Israel (“Dutch Israel”), the view that the Dutch people were chosen by God, analogous to the biblical story of the Israelites as the people chosen to be in covenant with God, was widespread in seventeenth-century Dutch public discourse. A “Hebraic tint lay over Dutch society in these days,” as the nineteenth-century literary critic and historian Conrad Busken Huet put it. Simon Schama has contended that the Hebraic self-image of the Dutch was “much more successfully a unifying bond than a divisive dogma.” In a same vein Willem Frijhoff has also emphasised the unifying character of the analogy: “Among the religious models of unity, the notion of new Israel or ‘Dutch Israel,’ was particularly important.” Schama’s and Frijhoff’s evaluations of the inclusiveness of the model of the biblical Israelites, however, are only valid to a limited extent. The issue of how to read the Old Testament politically was highly contested between different sides of the ideological spectrum in the Dutch Republic in the third quarter of the seventeenth century.

* I would like to thank Scott Mandelbrote, Joris van Eijnatten, and Frank Daudeij for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.


The arguments, examples, imagery, lessons, and political models that orthodox Calvinist ministers such as Abraham van de Velde, Hermannus Witsius, and Jodocus van Lodenstein culled from the Old Testament were often diametrically opposed to the interpretations of radical writers like Adriaen Koerbagh, Baruch Spinoza, and Lambertus van Velthuysen. At stake in these debates were the lessons the Bible might provide with regard to questions about the most desirable relationship between Church and State, the scope of toleration, and more generally the political organization of the commonwealth. They moreover concerned the nature of history (providential or secular), the concept of divine election, and ultimately the status of the Bible itself.4

This chapter argues that against the background of these debates about the example provided by the ancient Hebrew Republic within the context of the Hebraic self-perception of the Dutch grounded in the analogy with this ancient commonwealth, a refreshing light can be shed on Spinoza’s extensive discussion of the Hebrew Republic in his *Theological-Political Treatise* of 1670. Spinoza’s discussion of the Hebrew Republic is notoriously difficult to understand, even though a number of thoughtful essays have drawn attention, from a variety of angles, to some key issues and historical, political and intellectual contexts. Michael Rosenthal has rightly insisted that Spinoza did not reject, as some have argued, the example of the ancient Hebrew Republic altogether and that we need to turn to the specific political context of the period and seventeenth-century political thought to grasp what Spinoza was up to.5 Lea Campos Boralevi, in an article in which she presents “the Jewish Commonwealth” as one of the “classical foundational myths of European republicanism,” has moreover reconstructed a rich Dutch tradition of political Hebraeism, which tapped into a broader early modern European interest in ancient Israel’s political institutions. The key text within this tradition is *De republica Hebraeorum* (1617) of Petrus Cuneaus, the chair of politics at Leiden University from 1614 to 1638. A close friend of Hugo Grotius, Cuneaus offered this republic—“the holiest ever to have existed in the world, and the richest in examples for us to emulate”—for consideration to the States of Holland.6 Although Campos Boralevi holds that Spinoza’s treatise can be seen as both the “conclusion” and the “overturning” of this tradition, her remarks are only an epilogue to an otherwise

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