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**VERSES: Ex08-05b, Ex08-05a, Ex08-06a, Ex08-08a**

**Biblical text:** [Background: Moses has just brought the plague of frogs on Egypt. Pharaoh summons Moses before him to request God to remove them. Moses responds] *Try and outsmart me (1). For when (2) should I pray to cease the frogs....Pharaoh said, "For tomorrow"; Moses responded "As you have requested: In order that you know that there is none like our God."....Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed about the frogs (3).*

**Rashi text:** (1) Rashi explains that the *hitpael* conjugation indicates doing an action under some type of influence. In this case, Moses is asking Pharaoh to *outsmart* him, that is, to try and *influence* him when the frogs will depart.

(2) Rashi explains that

- *When should I pray for the frogs cease* would indicate *when should I pray they decrease* while
- *For when should I pray that the frogs decrease* indicates *although I am praying now for when should I pray that the frogs cease.*

(3) Consistent with this distinction Rashi explains that the verse *Moses prayed to God about the frogs* was done immediately *for removal* the next day.

**Ramban Text:** One has to read the Ramban carefully. He does not disagree with Rashi's conclusion. But rather he disagrees with the method of derivation. *You can't prove Rashi's point from the phrase for when since Hebrew unlike English simply adds the word for without it necessarily having additional nuance and meaning.*

So first of all: One can argue that Rashi's interpretation *for when* vs. *when* is based on the context of the entire biblical paragraph in which Moses says *pick a time* and that is when they will go in order that you know how great our God is. Ramban would not necessarily disagree with this.

But a hidden lurking issue behind the Ramban is *why* or *who cares*. Isn't the miracle that the frogs departed? Why all the fuss on *when* they went?

**Ibn Ezra Text:** Ibn Ezra explains what the fuss is about: *Recall that one issue between Pharaoh and Moses was whether Moses was representing a new God Pharaoh had never heard of or whether Moses simply knew more than the Egyptian magicians. In other words, perhaps the frogs was a decree, not of the Jewish God, but of the Egyptian gods, and perhaps Moses knew that the Egyptian gods were removing the frogs. To counter this, Ibn Ezra explains that Moses said to Pharaoh: You pick a time when your gods are not removing the plague and I will have the frogs removed then so you should recognize that this comes from God.*

In other words, Ibn Ezra has explained that the miracles were two-fold in purpose: To show the Jewish God's power *and* to show that this power came from other than the Egyptian gods.

**Ramban Text Revisited:** Let us now re-examine Ramban's criticism that *for* can simply be added to phrases without additional meaning or nuance. Ramban brings 4 texts to prove his point!!!

(A) Ex08-19 [when the locust comes, they will come to Egypt but not to the Jews]...Tomorrow is *designated* for this miracle

(B) Dt09-07 Remember and don't forget how you infuriated God *continuously from the time you left Egypt till now*

C) 2C03-11 The Kerubic wings were 20 *amoth* in length: *five solid amoth (on one side) reaching to the Temple wall (and other side) 5 amoth reaching to the wing of the other Kerub.*

(D) (Ez09-04) People who seriously took the words of the Jewish God all gathered to me [to address the intermarriage] but I *continuously sat depressed* until the Minchah [The text continues that Ezra got out of his depression and started praying then]

**Possible Rashi Response to Ramban:** Rashi did defend his comment using the difference between *for when* vs. *when*. Ramban objected that *for* in Hebrew doesn't necessarily give new meaning and nuance. We therefore propose to defend Rashi by showing possible nuances to the extra *for* (Lamed in Hebrew). Of course that could raise the question as to why Rashi knew this but not Ramban. So, some background in Hebrew Grammar is welcome.

Jewish sources by and large ignored the study of Grammar prior to the 5th-9th century. The Arabs developed grammar to understand their Korayn in the 5th century. The Karaites learned from the Arabs and developed a Jewish grammar which they applied to Tanakh. The orthodox Jewry sensing they were losing out then decided to develop their grammar. It was during this period that the monumental Aleppo codex was finalized which finalized a written form for Jewish pronunciation. The grammar continued to develop and culminated in the Northern school, the 7 scholars in Northern France (including Rashi) which applied the newly formed grammar to the Bible producing the many beautiful commentaries we now have.

However, Jewish grammar was a reaction to Arab grammar which was heavily verb-based. So, the major Jewish grammarians- Ibn Ezra, Rambam, Radak -- excelled at Jewish Biblical verbal grammar, the 7 conjugations etc. The Jewish grammarians did not always excel in other grammatical matters. A notable exception is Rashi who was not primarily influenced by the Arab grammarians and made contributions to all of grammar.

Thus, in this particular verse Rashi asserts that the preposition *for* always has an added nuance while Ramban is unaware of that nuance. The nuances of prepositions are not verbal grammar and hence it is not surprising that Rashi may have known the underlying nuance of *al* while the Ramban was oblivious to it.

In explaining Rashi, I of course am not a fluent speaker on Biblical Hebrew (no one is). But I speak English fluently and can find analogies to nuances to prepositions like *from* and *until* which I can then assume Rashi applied to the verses in question. With this background I now address the 4 prooftexts brought by Ramban.

(D) In verse (D) above the text basically says that Ezra *sat depressed until Minchah*/. The biblical text adds the word *for/to* : *Ezra sat for depressed until to Minchah*. So, we see why Ramban says this word doesn't add anything. In attempting to translate according to what Rashi might have wanted I found the English phrase *continually depressed until Minchah*.

- *Depressed until Minchah* simply means he sat depressed and didn't do anything until Minchah

time

- *Continually depressed until to Minchah* would mean that he sat depressed *and additionally* any attempt to get him out of the depression led to more depression and inactivity until Minchah time (The text says that at Minchah time he got up and prayed).

The *continually depressed* interpretation is consistent with the verse which indicates that *all people who seriously took the word of the Jewish God came to Ezra*; this would be consistent with *until to* that is, with something starting *and* continuing.

(B)(C) This explanation of *continuous* activity is also consistent with verses (B) and (C). Not only did the Jews start rebelling against God *from* the time they left Egypt, but they also continuously *rebelled* on many occasions, an interpretation consistent with the Jewish migrations. Similarly in verse (C): The wings did not just spread 5 *amoth* tapering off at the walk, they continuously and strongly spread (there was no thinning of the wings).

Finally in verse (A), the *to* (Hebrew Lamed) indicates designation.

- *tomorrow this miracle will happen* would simply mean that something would happen tomorrow while

- *tomorrow is designated for this miracle* would indicate a day when people could prepare for it.

Returning to the verse we are studying: *Moses asked Pharoh: For when should I entreat that the frogs cease*: Using the English analogy, the distinction between *for when* and *when* is established and even with the Ramban's objections, Rashi's distinction makes sense: The question is when Pharoh wanted the frogs to cease not when Moses should pray. Ibn Ezra then comes to the rescue explaining the importance of this: Pharoh had to be convinced that what was happening came from the Jewish God and not from Egyptian gods.