

(c)Dr Russell Jay Hendel; Jun 2026

VERSES: *Ex21-02a, Ex21-02b, Ex21-02c, Ex21-03a, Ex21-03b, Ex21-03c, Ex21-03d, Ex21-04a, Ex21-05a*

Malbim presented the beautiful insight, discussed by me in a recent article, that the Bible indicates a bulleted list of sub-paragraphs using the *ki - im* paradigm whereby the Chapter

- Begins with *Ki* (*When (Ki)* you purchase a Jewish slave)
- Continues with *Im – if (im)* single, *if* married, *if* given a wife by his master, *if* he refuses to leave

Rashi then makes inferences from the fact that the list is bulleted: Each bullet contains a case distinct from the others. In making these inferences Rashi employs what reading specialists refer to as *inference* vs. *fact*. To clarify this, consider the sentence *Little Johnny changed his socks because he walked through a puddle*

*The answer to the question, *Who walked through the puddle*, is *Johnny* and is a **fact** found in the sentence

*Contrastively, the answer to the question, *Why did he change his socks?*, that is, *Because they were wet!* is an **inference** not explicitly *found* in the paragraph

Even though inferences are not found in the paragraph they are considered *peshat* the straightforward meaning of the paragraph. Inference questions are routinely found on reading comprehension tests. To acquire citizenship, to graduate elementary and high school, students are expected to have minimum reading proficiency which includes the capacity to make inferences.

With this background let us review the 4 bullets of the paragraph describing buying a slave. To assist in understanding Rashi, note that the word *wife* is used several times in the paragraphs sometimes referring to an actual Jewish wife and sometimes referring to a non-Jewish wife which the master asked the worker to marry to produce more help.

Here are the bullets of the paragraph:

- If he comes in single, he leaves single (Rashi: Ex21-03b: *He leaves single* contrasts with the next two bullets *he is married* and *his master gives him a wife*; from the sequence of bullets, we infer that the master may not give him a non-Jewish wife *unless* he was already married)
- If he is married his *wife* leaves with him (Rashi Ex21-03c,d: So this is a Jewish wife since she leaves with him;

The enigmatic *leaves with him* is explained, not by her having to work for the master, since she never lost her freedom, but rather, by the master having to support her since her husband, too destitute to pay off a theft he committed, can't support her; when her husband is free (and hence able to work again), his wife, or more precisely, the support of his wife, leaves with him, that is the master no longer must support her.)

- If his master gives him a *wife* with consequent children, the master owns the wife and children when the worker completes his term and leaves to freedom (Rashi Ex21-04a: So, this is a non-Jewish wife, since otherwise the master would not have the right to retain her)
- If he refuses to leave because he likes his *wife* (Rashi Ex21-05a: So this is the non-Jewish wife, since the Jewish wife (Which presumably he likes also) leaves with him not giving him a reason to stay; thus the non-Jewish wife whom he likes but is not leaving to freedom gives him a reason to stay and refuse to leave).