

(c)Dr Russell Jay Hendel; Jun 2026

RASHI ID: Ex34-31b, Ex34-32a

Biblical Text:

* Ex34-01:03 God commands Moses to ascend (a 2nd time) on Mount Sinai with two new blank tablets

* Ex34-04:09 Moses

- ascends the mountain;
- God reveals his 13 attributes of Mercy;
- Moses asks God to go with the Jewish people (i.e. forgive them)

* Ex34-10:26 God

- establishes a *new covenant*
- with emphasis on the prohibition of idolatry and
- the three Jewish festivals when the nation unites

* Ex34-27:28 God orders Moses to *write* the new covenant; Moses stays 40 days on the mountain writing

* Ex34-29: AS Moses descends the mountain with new tablets he is unaware of his *radiance*

* Ex34-30 - Jews are afraid to approach Moses because of radiance

* Ex34-31 - Moses calls to them; Aaron and princes return to Moses; *Moses speaks to them*

* Ex34-32 AFTERWARDS the Jews return to Moses; *He commanded them* (What God revealed to him)

Rashi Text: The following explanation combines the Rashi and Ramban comments. Clarification of Ramban's objection to Rashi is given afterwards with discussion of the Rashi writing principle he was unaware of.

Comment #1) From the contrast of the two parallel italicized phrases *Moses spoke to them (the elders)* vs. *Moses commanded them*, Rashi & Ramban infer (more explicit however in Ramban) that

- First, because the Jews were afraid of Moses' radiance, *Moses spoke* to them and explained to them that there was a new covenant, and that they had been forgiven
- When the Jews were reassured and re-approached Moses, *Moses commanded* them the laws he had written which emphasized the prohibition of idolatry and three pilgrimage festivals when the nation unites.

As indicated this distinction (*speech of reassurance* vs. *commands in new covenant*) is mainly emphasized from the parallelism of the two phrases.

This explanation is explicit in Ramban. Rashi simply modestly says *This biblical text is a present*

tense tone by which he meant *this biblical text is a continuation (present tense) of the previous chapter*.

Comment #2) Rashi cites a Talmudic passage in TB Eruv. 54, that all learning was fivefold: i) Moses taught Aaron, ii) Aaron taught the priests, iii) the priests taught the tribal elders, iv) the elders taught the Jews, v) The Jews taught each other.

- Ramban: Erroneously believes that Rashi derived this from the succession in this biblical text that first Moses spoke to Aaron and the elders and *then* spoke to the Jewish people
- Rashi: Rashi however did not derive this fact from here. Rashi is simply cross referencing another Rashi comment Nu30-02a which itself is derived from numerous contrasts of paragraph openers: (Nu30-02 *Moses spoke to the tribal governors*; the usual opener e.g. Ex34-25 *God spoke to Moses*; Ex34-21 Elazar the priest spoke to the soldiers; Lv21-01 *God spoke to Moses to speak to the priests* vs. the closing sentence *Moses spoke to Aaron, his children, and the Jewish people* and many more.

Summary: Rashi acknowledges that our biblical text is simply a continuation of the previous chapter dealing with the new covenant and specific laws. Ramban is more explicit that there are two messages: i) establishment of a new covenant and ii) the laws of the covenant. This is reflected in the parallel phrases *Moses spoke to them* vs. *Moses commanded them* as well as the emphasis in v. 32, *Moses commanded them*, implying they had to be reassured that God was with them before commanding them.

Rashi also cross references the five-fold method of Jewish learning which has nothing to do with the current biblical text. Ramban, however, though Rashi was deriving this comment from here leading him to disagree with Rashi. In reality both agree.