

# The Rashi Database Project

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\*This is accomplished by skillful English translations instantly suggesting the Rashi comment to the reader PUBLICATION:  
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**MAIN BIBLIOGRAPHY:** DT = Doctoral Thesis ([www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm](http://www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm),

MG=Modern Grammar with Applications to Rashid ([www.Rashiyom.com/Rashibook2.htm](http://www.Rashiyom.com/Rashibook2.htm) )}

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**THEME, THIS ISSUE: *Rashi comments on plurality***

**RASHI ID: Gn14X14d**

**PESHAT: THE SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO SKILLFUL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS**

**WHAT IS NEW IN THIS ISSUE: *Rashi comments based on plurality***

Biblical Hebrew like all languages has rules governing plurality. In English for example,

- *He sings* the anthem

- *They sing* the anthem

Rashi comments sometimes focus on an apparent violation of the rules governing plurality. A beautiful example occurs in Ex19-01:02

...The Jews *travelled (plural)* came (plural) to Mount Sinai

...They *journeyed (plural)* from Refidim

...They *came (plural)* to Mount Sinai

...They *camped (plural)* in the desert

...He *camped (single)* opposite the mountain

Notice how plurality appears to be violated. The first 4 sentences use both a plural subject and plural predicate while the last sentence uses a single subject and single predicate.

Rashi's comment on this is:

*They camped as a unified nation with a unified intention (of received the Torah).*

Thus Rashi explains that using a single subject and single predicate for something done by many signifies unity. Rashi quickly adds:

*The other encampings had the usual differences of opinions and complaints.*

In other words a plural subject and a plural predicate for an action done by many indicates that although many people did an action simultaneously, each person did it in his or her own way.

Throughout this digest we present numerous examples of refinement of the usual rules of plurality along with Rashi's explanation of the nuances they indicate.

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**VERSES: *Ex19-02b, Lv01-02h, Lv01-02i, Nu13-22a, Lv18-29a, Lv18-29b***

*The four examples brought below all illustrate verses with mixed plural-singular. In each case Rashi nuances the shift.*

**VERSE: Lv18-29a, Lv18-29b**

- (a) Watch my commandments (plural); don't do these abominations
- (b) Don't be like the former residents (plural) who sinned and were vomited out of the land
- (c) Whoever (singular) does any of these abominations
- (d) the souls doing them (plural) will be cut off from their nation
- (e) Watch my commandments (plural)

**Explanation:** A rather delicious blend of plural and singular. (a) The verse starts with a plural command: Watch my commandments with a contrast to (b) a plural sin by the former inhabitants of the land. (c) Then the verse switches to singular (Whoever does...) and continues in (d) plural (the offending souls will be cut off) and finally concludes with a (e) plural requirement to watch God's commandments. Quite simply the simultaneous use of plural and singular implies that both individuals and the community must watch, that is, the ruling community body must set guardrails to prevent sin. As to the singular plural shift in (c)-(d) ---whoever does...these souls will be cut off-- this is similar to English where a plural can emphasize that both men and women are obligated.

## VERSE: Ex19-02b

*...They came to Mount Sinai...They journeyed from Refidim, They came to Mount Sinai, they encamped in the desert, he camped opposite the mountain*

**Explanation:** Notice that (a) five verbs are used of which 4 are plural (came, journeyed, came, encamped) and one is singular (he camped) (b) The act of encamped is mentioned twice one after the other one in the plural and one in the singular (They encamped in the desert, he (the Jews) camped opposite the mountain). So, Rashi is not commenting on the singular verb for the nation but rather on the parallelistic contrast between they encamped ...he encamped. Clearly the Author thereby indicates an emphasis: Namely they camped in unison which is the essence of Rashi's comment. Rashi adds a contrast that other encampments had complaints (such as lack of food)

## VERSE: Lv01-02h, Lv01-02i

*When a human amongst you (if he) offers an offering to God, [then] from animals, from cattle and penned animals, you (plural) shall offer your offerings (plural)*

There are two grammatical points in this verse. (#1) The sentence starts in the singular (when a human...offers an offering) but ends in the plural. Such a plural-singular construction indicates that voluntary elevation offerings may be brought either by a single person or by a plurality of people (a partnership). (#2) Additionally the verse changes from 3rd person (when a person offers an offering) to 2nd person (you shall offer your offerings). The switching to 2nd person plural indicates the community can offer a voluntary offering (as happens when there is extra money in the Temple slush fund which can be allocated to voluntary communal offerings). The idea here is that the community is addressed as 2nd person while an individual would be someone else and hence 3rd person. NOTE: The Sifrah simply makes the two derivations from the two plural words (you (plural) will offer, your offerings) without specifying the driving force of the derivation. My opinion is that one derivation comes from the singular - plural shift while the other derivation comes from 3rd person - 2nd person shift.

## VERSE: Nu13-22a

They went up; they spied the land...; they went up to the south; he came to Chevron; they came to grape-cluster river; they cut a vine...; they carried it by a pole for two

It is important to note parallelism when reading Rashi. The verse has 6 verbs, 5 of which are plural and one of which is singular. The Rashi comment comes from the contrast: Clearly only one spy went to Chevron. This is the simple meaning (*peshat*) of the verse. However, we are not told who went there.

To determine who the one spy was we use the technique of reasonable speculation: We know that

- (a) Caleb differed from the majority of the spies who recommended that the land could not be take;
- (b) that God promised him the land he tread on; and
- (c) he obtained Chevron (Jos 14:6-14). So, it stands to reason that he went there.

We are also not told he went to Chevron. Again, reasonable speculation suggests that he prayed on the graves of his ancestors (similar to practices today) to have strength and resolution against the other spies.

This table summarizes the above four Rashi comments

Verse	Brief Summary of Verse Meaning	Shifting Singular Plural	Rashi Inference
Ex19-02b	<i>The Jews journeyed from Refidim and encamped at Mount Sinai</i>	THEY came; THEY journeyed; THEY arrived; HE camped near the mountain	Although Jews had different factions; at receipt of Torah (Mount Sinai) they were unified
Lv01-02h, Lv01-02i	<i>If desired to offer an elevation offering it can be from cattle or herd animals</i>	A person if HE wishes to offer, then from cattle and herd animals, YOU should offer	Offerers can be (i) individual (he), (ii) partners (plural you), or (iii) Community (you-them)
Lv18-29a, Lv18-29b	<i>Watch my commandments less the land vomit you out the way it vomited the former inhabitants; whomever violates, they will be cut off; you should watch my commandments</i>	YOU (plural) watch my commandments; less YOU (Plural) get vomited out of the land; WHOMEVER (singular) violates, THEY will be cut off; YOU (Plural) should watch	Watching commandments (creating guardrails) is a joint effort of individual and community. Individuals pay for their transgressions
Nu13-22a	<i>The spies went to Israel and spied on the land</i>	THEY went up; THEY Spied; THEY went southward; HE came to Chevron; THEY cut off vines	Apparently one spy went to Chevron to pray at Patriarch grave for strength to dispute other spies

### QUICKIES:

VERSE ID	Text of Biblical Verse	Hebrew Word	Figure of Speech	Brief Explanantion
Ex18-08c	<i>Moses told to his father-in-law the story of what God did for the Jews; all the aggravations they experienced on the journey</i>	<i>ha'te'la'ah</i>	Denominative; Synecdoche	<i>The roots lamed-aleph-hey refers to the exhaustion resulting from doing a great deal of activity and as in English (by synecdoche) can refer to any set of aggravating circumstances. Rashi identifies the roots of the underlying Hebrew word as lamed-aleph-hey explaining that the tauv is a prefix letter. To support this position Rashi gives many examples</i>
Ex18-02a	<i>(Upon hearing the story) Jethro developed goose-pimples (lit. sharp (pimples))</i>	<i>Va Yi ChaD</i>	Synecdoche	<i>The Hebrew cheth-daleth means sharp. From the context of the verse, the word seems to indicate he rejoiced. Rashi connects sharpness with rejoicing by suggesting he developed sharp spots on his skin similar to the English idiom goose pimples. Here goose-pimples are a good example (synecdoche) of rejoicing. Rashi nuances that goose-pimples may reflect joy mingled with some sadness reflecting the death of the Egyptians.</i>
Ex18-11c,d	<i>Jethro</i>	<i>Za-Du</i>	Form	<i>The root zavin-vav-daleth means to boil. Boiling came</i>

	<i>recognize God's greatness since the Egyptians' premeditations (lit. boilings) were placed back on them [By God]</i>			<i>to mean premeditation since both boiling and premeditation have the same form, something happens after a long-time exposure (to heat or thought). Rashi also notes the pun on the literal meaning of zayin-vav-daleth: The Egyptians tried to kill the Jews in water and were themselves instead drowned in water.</i>
<b>Ex18-12a,b</b>	<i>Moses took elevation and peace offerings (lit. up and roasts) Aaron and the elders ate before God with Moses father-in-law</i>	<i>Ze-Va-ChiM</i>	Synonyms	<i>Offering is a parent category or hypernym. Its children (hyponyms) are the types of offerings such as peace offerings and elevation offerings. A peace offering is consumed by owners, priests, and by the altar. The verse uses the term roast before God to describe the peace offering. Contrastively, an elevation offering is exclusively consumed by the altar (no humans eat from it). The verse uses the phrase up to God to describe the elevation offering. In English the elevation offering is called a burnt offering.</i>
<b>Ex18-13c</b>	<i>Moses sat to adjudicate cases of the nation; the people stood before Moses' [court] all day (literally from morning to evening)</i>	<i>min bo-ker ve-ad a-rev</i>	Idiom	<i>Rashi explains that the statement the nation stood before Moses' [court] from morning to evening should be interpreted as the nation stood before Moses' [court] all day (reflecting the similar English idiom all day). Thus, the Rashi comment explains the phrase from morning to evening as an idiom which means the same as the English phrase all day. Interestingly Rashi gives additional comments which are not in the text but reflect homily that is morally exhortative. This is rare when Rashi explains dictionary meaning. In fact, Rashi gives two such moral exhortations. First Rashi notes that a person who spends only a small amount of time in study or court cases is accounted before God as if he spent all day. Second, punning on there was morning and there was evening, a repeating phrase in the creation story (Genesis 1), Rashi states that someone who studies is as if he participated with God in the creation of the world</i>
<b>Ex18-18a</b>	<i>Moses father-in-law told Moses, 'You are not acting properly.' You will wither</i>	<i>na-vol tib-bol</i>	Synecdoche	<i>In Hebrew, the word wither refers to plants that have dried up from the heat and cold. These are good examples (synecdoche) for humans getting worn out from overwork</i>
<b>Ex18-21b,c,d</b>	<i>Select from the nation [for judges] wealthy people [lit. skilled people] who revere God, trustworthy people [lit. people of truth] who despise taking cuts</i>	<i>an-shay Ka-YiL...An-ShaY EMetH</i>	Subject Matter Expertise	<i>The verse simply gives attributes: skilled people, people of truth. Why then does Rashi translate these as wealthy people and trustworthy people? I believe Rashi recognized these one-time idioms as not having precedent elsewhere in the Bible. Therefore, he interpreted their meaning based on context, the context of people worthy of being judges. Hence Rashi interprets people of truth as trustworthy people, an important attribute for a judge. Similarly, Rashi interprets skilled people, based on the concluding phrase who despise taking cuts, as meaning independent people, self-sufficient people, wealthy people who don't have a need for money because of their self-sufficiency. I believe Rashi frequently interprets phrases that have a onetime meaning based on their context and cues.</i>

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## VERSE: Gn14X14b

This is a beautiful Rashi. Here we see textual analysis of the Rashi and biblical texts at its best; it is not however done by modern scholarship but rather by our very own medieval scholars. Let us examine:

*Verse Text Abraham heard that his nephew was captured; he girded his mentees the students of his household, 318 people, and he pursued them till Dan. And he divided on them at night – he and his servants – and he smote them pursuing them till Chovah on the left of Damaseck.*

We, as is our custom, will first the correct explanation (requiring amending Rashi texts). Then with that background we will review what is currently in our Rashi texts. As already mentioned this analysis was done the medieval authorities in fact the *Minchat Shai* and the *Midrash Tanchuma*.

### Correct Explanation (Midrash Tanchuma)

Rashi comment amended (by Midrash Tanchua): Notice the three pronouns *he, he, he*. But Abraham did not pursue them alone but with his 318 staff. It should say *they* not *he*. Here is how the Midrash

- Tachumah explains the three phrases:
- He (Abraham) girded his mentees (318 of them)
  - He (Abraham and the mentees acting as a military unit) pursued them till Dan
  - He (Abraham) divided in the pursuit, he went one way and his mentees under their leadership went another. (This is a familiar war tactice).
  - He (both divisions, Abraham and the mentee division) pursued them till Chovah.

We learn about the 2 divisions from the verse text *he divided on them at night he and his servants* showing that two divisions were formed one led by Abraham and the other leading the mentees. Since the Bible identifies Eliezer as the chief of staff, servants, and mentees, (Gn15-02) it is very reasonable that Eliezer led the mentee division of servant staff.

### Current Corrupt Rashi Explanation Uncovered by *Minchat Shai*

First some background. *Gematria* is the process of assigning numerical values to words. When to words have the same numerical value it suggests linkage. To illustrate this technique we consider the word *cab*. *C* is the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter of the English alphabet, *a* is the first letter, and *b* is the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter. The sum of the values of these letters  $3+1+2=6$  is the *gematric* or numerical value of *cab*.

With this background, Rashi makes two comments:

*1<sup>st</sup>: The Gematria of Eliezer (in Hebrew) is 318. Thus Rashi concludes that the 318 staff were one person Eliezer.*

*2<sup>nd</sup>: Rashi notes that the plural trainees or mentees is spelled deficiently trainee or mentee (but pronounced as plural). Rashi uses this as proof that Abraham took with him only Eliezer and the two conquered the five kings.*

The corruption of this text is pointed out by the *Minchat Shai*.

There is no biblical manuscript including very old ones where mentee is spelled deficiently!

Very early Rashi manuscripts do not have this Rashi comment that *mentee is spelled deficiently and refers to Eliezer who is 318 in Gematria*

Thus the *Minchat Shai* identifies the current Rashi text as unauthentic and corrupt. This is supplemented by the *Midrash Tanchuma* text which providers a satisfying explanation of the underlying Rashi comment.

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