The Rashi Database Project

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THEME, THIS ISSUE: *Rashi comments Explaining tense (time)*

RASHI ID*:* Gn04-01a, Gn10-25a, Gn21-01a, Ex24-01a, Ex18-15a, Ex18-16a, Ex33-07d, Ex33-07f, Ex33-08a, Ex33-11c, Gn06-09d,

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

WHAT IS NEW IN THIS ISSUE: *Rashi comments explaining* verb tense

I)   In all languages *verbs* indicate *tense* or the *time* when an activity took place. In English, for example, we have
- *past tense,* I sang
- *present tense,* I sing
- *future tense,* I will sing.

II)   Verbs can also indicate *duration*. In English is called the progressive.
- *past progressive,* I was singing
- *present progressive,* I am singing
- *future progressive,* I will be singing.
Thus *I sing* can connote an event of small duration (maybe a few seconds) while *I am singing* connotes an activity in progress of longer duration.

III)   Verbs can also indicate *relative time,* for example (this is called the *perfect*)
- I *had been singing but then sat down to eat.*
There are 2 events in the past in this sentence: The singing and eating. By using the *relative tense* (had been singing), the sentence indicates that the singing happened before eating.

IV)   Verbs can also indicate activities that do not happen in time, for example,
- Water *freezes* at 32 degrees Fahrenheit
- When I eat fruit, I *eat* tangerines
- It *snows* in the winter
In these sentences the activity mentioned does not happen at a particular time in the past, present, or future. Rather the sentences indicate *general facts* (freezing), *personal habits* (eating tangerines), or *periodic behavior* or *duration* of the activity (snows in winter)

V)   Verbs can also be used to indicate a *chapter organization.* For example, Gn20 states
- God remembered (*Pa Kad)* Sarah as he had said
- God did to Sarah *(Va ya as)* as he had said
- Sarah became pregnant and gave birth *(Va ta har Va Tay Led)* to a boy to Abraham at the time God promised
- Abraham named *(Va YiQ Rah)* the name of his son that Sarah gave birth to, Isaac
- Abraham circumcised *(Va Ya Mal)* Isaac his son at 8 days as God commanded

Notice that this *scene*

-- Begins with the *past conjugation (Pa kad)*

- But continues with the past indicated by the *future conjugation prefixed with a conversive vav* (<u>Va</u> ya as)

In this scene, the *beginning* of the scene is indicated by the *past conjugation* while the *continuation* of the scene is indicated by the *future conjugation* with a *conversive vav prefixed to it.* Note the subtlety: This entire scene happened in the past with a succession of actions *continuing* one after the other

VI)   Verbs can also indicate activity *conditional* on an event

- If *I had known* you were visit, I would *have prepared* dinner

Here, the *preparation of dinner* is conditional on knowing you were *visiting.*

There are specific rules for the tenses used in conditional sentences. In English:

-    If the *when* part of the sentence is true, we use simple present (When it *rains* then I *take* my umbrella)
-    If the *when* part is false we use *past* and *present+would* (If it *had rained*, I *would have taken* my umbrella)

However in Hebrew we might use *future* (in the *when* part of the sentence) and *past* in the rest of the sentence

- When they (*will) have* an issue, then they *come (lit came)* to me.

Rashi and my job is to take conditional sentences and translate them into natural English.

Rashi in his commentary shows how the Biblical Hebrew language uses specific grammatical forms to indicate, *tense, progression, relative time, habit, chapter organization,* and *conditional.* The various tables below present Rashi's devoted to these topics.

Organizational Structure: The following Table presents examples where Rashi comments on the grammar indicating organizational structure which is discussed in (V) in the introduction to these lists. In each example, the *chronological sequence* of events indicated by a *continuation vav* (that is a *future conjugation with a prefixed (conversive) vav)* is <u>interrupted</u> by a verb conjugated in the past (or some other deviation) indicating the beginning of a new scene (possibly the resumption of a former scene).

To make the exposition smoother we do not repeat this explanation by each example but rather explain how the story had been *interrupted* and resumes also indicating possible reasons.

TABLE: Verbs indicating *organizational structure* of Biblical paragraphs

Biblical Chapter	Bulleted Outline	Rashi's explanation	Further Support
Gn04-01a	-Gn02 creation of Eve (Adam and Eve naked without embarrassment) -Gn03 Serpent people (3rd world nations) convince Eve to eat forbidden fruit -Gn04 Resumption of Gn02: Eve had given birth & now gave birth again	Gn02 (creation of Eve and marriage to Adam) interrupted to present serpent people story and eating of forbidden fruit. Adam/Eve and serpent people couldn't live together because Adam/Eve approached intimacy with longer duration while serpent people want quicker gratification. Serpent people tried to get Eve to join them (Hence the interruption to juxtapose serpent people episode with "Adam & Eve naked" the reason for the serpent's behavior.	Gn04-01 resumes creation of Eve and marriage to Adam: "She had given birth to her first son, Kayin." The text continues, (Now) <u>Again</u> she gave birth (to the second son). The word <u>again</u> contrasts the previous birth of Kayin and the current birth of Hevel.
Gn10-25a	- Arpachshad <u>begot</u> Shelach -Shelach <u>begot</u> Ever -Ever had <u>given birth</u> to 2 sons…Peleg (Split) and Yaktan -Yaktan <u>begot</u> -The unified language of the world led them to build a tower to control all people, and God dispersed them with different languages	The change of verb form (begot, begot, had given birth, begot) points to Ever as being a new scene with something not part of the sequence. It is clear from the sequence that the splitting of the world and the confusion over languages happened at the end of Yaktan's life. But Peleg (meaning *Split*) was born *before* Yaktan and *before* all this happened. "This teaches that Ever was a prophet and 'saw the split coming' which is why he named his son Peleg(Split)	
Gn21-01a	-God promises a son to Abraham - The three angels come to	The "birth of the son" story is interrupted by the visit to Gerar because at the end of the story, Abraham,	A similar theme that prayer for other's needs leads to one's own

	Abraham, one of which indicates that the some promised will be born next year - The "birth of the son" story is then interrupted by the activities of the other 2 angels, one of which destroys Sedom and one of which saves Lot - Before continuing the birth of the son story, we are told how Abraham and Sarah visited Gerar where Sarah was taken as a wife by the local King (because Abraham/Sarah lied and said Sarah was a sister) - The "birth of the son" is then continued in Gn21-01	upon the release of his wife from the local King's marriage, prayed for the local King and his household all of whom were stricken by barrenness because of the improper taking of Sarah. The interruption and juxtaposition of Abraham praying for the local King that his household should have children followed immediately by the statement that Abraham had a child, leads to the observation, "Whoever prays for his friend that a need should be fulfilled, has his own needs fulfilled first" (as we see in the story)	needs being fulfilled occurs at the end of the Book of Job: "God restored the losses to Job *when* he prayed for this friends that they should have their losses restored."
Ex24-01a	-The Jews arrive at Sinai - Moses ascends the mountain - God reveals the Decalogue (10 commandments) - God gives Civil Laws to the people - The scene, "Arrival at Sinai" is then continued (or repeated) but in more detail	Ex24-01, the continuation of the Sinai-arrival story with more detail is introduced with a past conjugation (*Amar* vs. *Va-Yo-Mer,* a future conjugation with a prefixed conversive *vav.*)	There is controversy when Ex24-01 happened. It appears that Rashi knew of the paragraph organizational feature that switching from future conjugation with prefix vav to past conjugation indicates an interruption of sequence and a new story. The other commentators apparently did not know this rule. The underlying issue is whether the only principle in the biblical narrative is *sequence* or if there are other principles.

Table of Verb Organizational Structure: Chronological sequence (a sequence of activities of a scene all following one after the other) is indicated in the Biblical narrative with a prefix conversive vav prefixed to a future conjugation indicating the past. An interruption (a new scene or resumption of an older one) is indicated by breaking this sequence typically with a past conjugation. The Table presents several cases of this and explains reasons

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VERSES: *Ex18-15a, Ex18-16a, Ex33-07d, Ex33-07f, Ex33-08a, Ex33-11c*

Iin the following verses, Rashi simply indicates that the conditional is being used. (See item VI in the introduction). We have summarized these Rashis by translating the Hebrew verses into the corresponding English. In the following verses the various italicized words may have conjugations correct for the conditional but not corresponding to the literal translation. Rashi explains that this is because the verse is conditional

Ex18-15a-Ex18-16a:
When the nation *comes* to me to seek God's (laws)
When they *have an issue, they come* to me (and I tell them God's laws)

Ex33-07d, Ex33-07f, Ex33-08a, Ex33-11c

In the following verses, although there are only 4 Rashi comments, at Ex33-11c, Rashi says that his comments (that the verses indicate conditional statements of the when-then *form), apply to the* entire *paragraph v7-v11. We have therefore translated the entire paragraph this way and so indicated by italicizing all verses, verse 7-verse 11, in Ex33.*

v7 Moses took a tent outside the camp and called it the meeting-tent
When someone *sought* God, they would *go out* to the meeting-tent.

v8 When moses *went out* to the meeting-tent
the nation *stood* each person stationed by his tent
they *looked* at Moses until he *came* to the tent

v9 When Moses *came* to the tent
The cloud *descends*, *stands* at the entrance of the tent, and *speaks* to Moses

v10 When the entire nation *sees* the cloud standing by the tent
they *get up* and *bow*, each person by this tent

v11 God *speaks* to Moses face to face like a person to his friend
and then Moses *returns* to the Camp

VERSE: Gn06-09d

In the following verse
Noah was a righteous person in his generation, he <u>walked</u> with God
the underlined verb, *walked,* although conjugation in the past, nevertheless, as Rashi explains, refers
to the habitual present (an activity done frequently as in the sentence
I drink orange juice for breakfast) See unit number IV in the introduction.