

ESSAYS FROM THE RASHI WEBSITE

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MINOR MODIFICATIONS OF RASHI COMMENTS

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ABSTRACT: This essay studies the biblical idiom, *be-etzem ha-yom haz-zeh*, lit. *in the bone of the day*. The idiom occurs 11 times in the Torah in 5 passages. It functions like a homonym with 3 distinct meanings: (i) in broad daylight, (ii) at the anniversary, (iii) in the lit part of the day. Rashi only comments on meanings (i) and (ii). Remarkably, Rashi says “in three places it says *be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh*” when in fact it says it in 5 chapters, or if you count distinct occurrences, the text says it in 11 places. We will explain why Rashi said “in three places” very simply; but the explanation points to a general characteristic of Rashi that the reader must *first* be aware of the biblical text and if necessary, slightly modify Rashi’s original language to obtain all nuances of a Rashi comment.

OVERVIEW OF TODAY’S ESSAY

Today’s essay focuses on the biblical hebrew phrase *be-etzen hay-yom haz-zeh* which literally means *in the bone of the day*. Table IN_BROAD_DAYLIGHT presents the 11 occurrences of this phrase in the Torah and the five chapters in which it occurs. According to Rashi, the phrase has 3 distinct meanings. Rashi however only comments on two of the meanings. We have included the 3rd meaning based on the Talmudic-Midrashic understanding of the phrase. Rather remarkably, at Dt32-48a, Rashi says “This phrase occurs in 3 places” when in fact as the table shows, it occurs in 11 places in 5 chapters.

We will first explain the verses and the five Rashi comments. We will then explain why Rashi said “This phrase occurs in 3 places.” This will afford us an opportunity to discuss the beautiful world of the Masorites, a sorely neglected source of Jewish study.

Based on our explanation, we will see that skillful emendation of Rashi comments may be necessary to fully understand him.

TABLE IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

Biblical Chapter /Verse	Biblical Verses	Translation of text with Rashi comment	Rashi comment on Dt32-48a “In three places”
Gn07-13a	Gn07-13a	Noah, his children, and their wives, came into the Ark in broad daylight	#1 (Noah would be saved but his generation would die in the flood)
Gn17-23:26	Gn07-23a	Abraham circumcised himself on that day in broad daylight	
	Gn07-26a	Abraham and Ishmael circumcised themselves on that day (their birthdays)	
Ex12-40:51	Ex12-17, Ex12-41a, Ex12-51	On that day (the anniversary of the announcement of the Egyptian exodus) the Jews left Egypt	
	Ex12-51	Jews left Egypt in broad daylight	#2) No Rashi comment at Ex12-51 but cross-referenced comment at Dt32-48a: Jews left, but Egypt was punished
Lv23-26:32	Lv23-21,28 ,29,30	Fast and abstain from work in the lit part of that day (Yom Kippur)	
Dt32-48a	Dt32-48a	God spoke to Moses in broad daylight (telling him to ascend the mountain to die).	#3) Moses dying and Jews left without his leadership

THE FIVE CHAPTERS AND THEIR TRANSLATION

This section presents the five chapters with *be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh* and translates them with special attention to Rashi comments.

Gn07-13a: In Gn07 God tells Noah to build an Ark in order to save himself from the flood by which God will punish his generation for their many sins. At Gn07-13, relating how Noah and his family came to the ark, we find the phrase we are studying. Following Rashi, we interpret the phrase to mean the same as the English idiom, in *broad daylight*. Thus, the verse is translated as *Noah, his children and their wives came into the ark (on that day) in broad daylight*. Rashi further explains the emphasis in the phrase *in broad daylight*. “The phrase was used since Noah’s generation said, ‘If a flood comes, we will kill Noah, and board the ark ourselves.’ Therefore, the verse emphasizes that Noah came into the ark in broad daylight without any interference.”

Gn17-23:26: This chapter relates how Abraham fulfilled God’s commandment to circumcise himself, his son, and his household. The phrase we are studying occurs twice. At Gn17-23 Rashi translates *On that day in broad daylight Abraham and Ishmael circumcised themselves*. Rashi explains the emphasis, that Abraham was proud of fulfilling God’s commandment and didn’t hesitate to do it publicly in broad daylight.

However, Gn17-25:26 speaks about the age at which Abraham and Ishmael circumcised themselves, Abraham being 99 years old and Ishmael being 13 years old. The verse continues using the phrase *be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh* which Rashi translates as referring to their exact birthday. Here, *be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh* refers to the anniversary of some special event.

Ex12-40:51: This chapter relates how the Jews left Egypt. The phrase we are studying occurs three times. At Ex12-40:41 Rashi translates *The Jews dwelled in Egypt 430 years and on the anniversary of their entry they left*. Rashi gives details on when the Egyptian dwelling started and relates it to certain key events such as the prophecy by God to Abraham that his descendants would be in Egypt.

Rashi does not comment on the occurrence at Ex12-51; however, Rashi at Dt32-48 cross references Ex12-51 and does provide a comment. This is most interesting. It shows that a Rashi comment on a particular verse may be found elsewhere.

Rashi (at Dt32-48) translates Ex12-51 as *On that day, in broad daylight, the Jews left Egypt*, again explaining the nuance, that even though the Egyptians were being punished for enslaving them, they could not stop them from leaving.

Lv23-21,28,29,30: Lv23 explains the laws of the Jewish holidays and Festivals. The requirements to publicly declare certain days as Jewish Holidays, as well as the various requirements of those holidays, like hearing the shofar on the Jewish New Year or fasting on Yom Kippur are also mentioned. Rashi does not comment at all on these four occurrences of the phrase we are studying. But the Talmud and Midrashim explain that the various requirements apply to the lit part of the day. While there is also a biblical obligation to fulfill the requirement at dawn and twilight, the various punishments for non-compliance do not apply. For example, a person who eats after sunset on Yom Kippur during twilight, while violating a biblical commandment, is not punished with being cut-off from his nation the way a person who eats on Yom Kippur during the lit part of the day is punished.

We have an interesting takeaway here. Rashi when dealing with some textual issue may only comment on certain aspects of it. Rashi actually leaves it to the reader to fill in the other comments based on the Talmud, Midrash, and Jewish law.

Dt48-12: This chapter discusses how God ordered Moses to ascend the mountain and prepare for his death. The chapter begins with the phrase we are studying which Rashi translates *God spoke to Moses on that day in broad daylight*, emphasizing, that the Jews who did not want to lose their leader were totally helpless to prevent Moses’ death.

THE RASHI CITATION IN THREE PLACES

A problem arises because Rashi, at Dt48-12 says, *In three places the phrase *be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh* occurs*. This is simply inaccurate. If you count distinct occurrences, the phrase occurs in 11 places. If you count biblical chapters, the phrase occurs in 5 places.

One might want to defend Rashi, that he was speaking about the particular meaning *in broad daylight*, implying that the act was done despite possible opposition. Thus, *Noah entered the ark in broad daylight*, despite the probable intent of his generation to kill him and take over the ark if a flood started; *the Jews left Egypt in broad daylight*, despite the

probable opposition of Egypt who valued the cheap labor; *Moses dies in broad daylight* despite the probable opposition of the Jewish people who didn't want to lose their leader.

This interpretation of Rashi's *in three place* would make sense since he proceeds to elaborate on the three cases just discussed where *be-etzen hay-yom haz-zeh* is translated as *in broad daylight*. Unfortunately, there is a fourth passage, Abraham's circumcision which was done in broad daylight without fear of possible ridicule by his generation. So we are still left with the problem: *Why did Rashi say that the phrase occurs in 3 places when in fact it occurs in 11 places, in 5 chapters, and 4 times with the meaning of in broad daylight?*

My own thoughts are that Rashi selected the 3 passages where *both* the translation is *in broad daylight* and also the witnesses of the event suffered – Noah's generation was punished with death by flood, Egypt was punished with death by the 10 plagues, and the Jews suffering from losing their leader. While Abraham circumcised himself in broad daylight, those who knew about the circumcision, while they might have ridiculed him, were certainly not losing anything or being punished in any way.

The takeaway from this, is that to fully understand Rashi we need to amend the text. Rashi actually said *in three places the phrase be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh is used* while we have suggested the amended text *in three places the phrase be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh is used with a meaning of in broad daylight despite the suffering to those witnessing the event.*

Such emendations of Rashi text are done on the Rashi website frequently. They are in all cases justified by coupling the reading of the Rashi text, with a careful gathering of the biblical verses to which the text applies.

To understand why Rashi wrote with omissions that he expected the reader to fill in, we first give some background on the *Mesorah*. Rashi was simply following the *Mesorah* which also frequently leaves items to be filled in by the reader.

The *Mesorah* refers to two commentaries on the entire Bible called the *Great Mesorah* and the *Little Mesorah*. The *Mesorah* comments on a verse by pointing out if there are similar verses, or if this is the only occurrence of a certain word, phrase, or grammatical attribute. You can find the two *Mesorah* commentaries in many Chumashim, such as the *Mikraoth Gedoloth*. They are frequently written in small font. As indicated, they might point to verses with similar occurrences of phrases. The *Masorites*, who wrote the *Mesorah* did this to preserve the accuracy of the text. Today, with modern database methods, we can easily, for example, press a few buttons and find all verses where *be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh* occurs. The *Mesorah* literally has thousands of such comments; they did this without any computational power. In a very real sense, the *Mesorah* was an enormous database undertaking, possibly the first in human history, over a 1000 years before the modern development of database theory and language.

The *Mesorah* will sometimes list subsets of occurrences of a phrase, such as Rashi did with *be-etzem hay-yom haz-zeh* where as we have explained Rashi, in fact following the *Mesorah*, listed all occurrences of this phrase where the meaning is *in broad daylight* and also the witnesses to the event described were suffering.

The *Mesorah* as just indicated has thousands of such lists which were all hand-compiled. For the *Masorites* to explain for each phrase what they were doing could easily multiply the amount of work by a factor of 3 or 4. Hence, the *Mesorah* frequently just gives lists with numbers. A typical comment might be *three occurrences* followed by the beginnings of those verses.

This explains and justifies why the *Mesorah* and *Rashi* would leave out reasons and descriptions. The following citation is from Chapter 21 of my Doctoral Thesis:[1] "A standard reference on the *Mesorah* commentaries is found at Encyclopedia Judaica.[2] A discussion of the state of the study of *Mesorah* (which is still in its infancy!) is given by Martin-Contreras. [3] Himmelfarb shows how the *Mesorah* can contribute to understanding Rashi, a position taken in this book. [4-6]." Chapter 7 of my thesis presents the basics of database theory and relates it to Rashi comments.

Rashi frequently brings citations from the *Mesorah*. Based on what we have described, the *Mesorah* is more than a collection of lists; it also bears witness to commentary on those lists. Thus, the *Mesorah* is important for understanding the bible. Unfortunately, *Mesorah* study is still in its infancy. In fact, part of the reason for this is the cryptic and terse manner in which it summarizes information. As mentioned above, in my doctoral thesis I point out several academic papers showing how the *Mesorah* when skillfully used sheds light on Rashi and the biblical text.

NOTES

- [1] Russell Jay Hendel, **The Dynamics of Peshat and Derash in Rashi**, Doctoral Thesis, Chicago, Ill: The Spertus Institute, Dr. Dean Bell Advisor, 2020-2022, accessible at <http://www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm>
- [2] **Encyclopedia Judaica**, Article #10465 <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>
- [3] E. Martin-Contreras, *The Current State of Masoretic Studies* **Sefarad**, 73(2), 433—458, 2014
- [4] L. Himmelfarb, L (2004) *On One Mesorah in Rashi's Biblical Commentary*, **Sefarad** 64, 75—94, 2004
- [5] L. Himmelfarb, (2007) *The Identity of the First Masoretes*, **Sefarad** 67, 37—50, 2007
- [6] L. Himmelfarb, (2012) *The Masoretic Notes in Three Commentaries Attributed to Rashi*, **Sefarad**, 71, 247—263, 2012