

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

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Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, SheLaCh

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*We explore a difficult Rashi. We cite the traditional Rashi commentators and show why their defense is weak. We also suggest another approach. This digest is a must for those who wish to understand how to explain Rashi. Please feel free to **send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com***

Nu13-31a But the 10 spies who went with Caleb and Joshua [who said that Israel was very very good] said: We can't go up to this nation because it is stronger than us.

Rashi

The underlined phrase refers [not to Israel]
But to God Himself!!! [The nation we want to conquer is stronger than God, so we shouldn't go up]

I: The Problem

Let us clarify the Rashi.

- Biblical text: Nation stronger than us
- Rashi: Nation stronger than God

So now we see the problem! The text says we shouldn't find the Canaanites because they are stronger than us: How then can Rashi reinterpret the word us as meaning God. In fact, in Biblical Hebrew the word *mimenu* does mean *us*. It does not mean *Him*.

How then can Rashi do this? Let us, in the next sections examine the classic Rashi commentators.

II: The Separation

A good place to start when seeking an explanation of a Rashi comment is the *Sifsay Chachamim*. This commentary reflects an anthology. The author gathered defenses of Rashi sources from several dozen commentators and put them together. Chief among the Rashi defenders was the *Raam*.

In addition to the *Sifsay Chachamim*, other major Rashi defenders are the *Raam*, *Gur Aryeh*, and *Mizrachi* as well as the *Levush*.

The first explanation of the *Sifsay Chachamim* is as follows:

Rashi learned this from the phrase
Because he is stronger than us.

It should have simply said

A) *Because [it is] stronger than us.*

An analogy can be found above in Nu13-28

B) *But the nation is brazen.*

Just as phrase B) does not contain *he*, so too phrase A) should not contain *he*.

III: Response to this attempt

There are at least two equally important responses to this suggestion of the *Sifsay Chachamim*.

1st) Let us suppose that the *Sifsay Chachamim* is correct: Even if the word *he* is extra, how does that justify interpreting the sentence *because he is stronger than us* as meaning *because he is stronger than Him*, referring to God.

This is a very important principle when studying Rashi. *The fact that you found a problem doesn't justify twisting the verse out of its meaning. Rather, to successfully defend the Rashi the problem you found must naturally lead to the solution suggested by Rashi.*

III: Response #2

But is the *Sifsay Chachamim* correct that the word *he* is extra. Let us use the powerful Rashi **Parallelism Method**.

Nu13-28 The nation is brazen
Nu13-31 He is stronger than us

Notice how

- *Nation* in the top verse is parallel to *he* in the bottom-row verse
- Also note the presence of Kugelian Parallelism, a Parallelism where the 2nd half adds and builds on the first half. For in the top-row it simply reports that the Canaanites are *brazen* while in the second row it emphasizes *stronger than us*.

Thus, we see from the Parallelism, that not only does *He* belong there but that *mimenu* meaning *us* is fully consistent!!

IV: The Levush: Response #1

The *Levush* another commenter on Rashi gives two explanations.

His first explanation is as follows

The word *memennu* (stronger *than us*) has a double *n* (a Dagesh in Hebrew).

Hence it could be read: *memin? Who*

When translated this means.

The nation is stronger than whom? Than Him

V: Response to Levush

However, *all* occurrences of *mimennu* in the Bible have a dagesh. This is the normal way it is spelled.

So, you can't make any inference from the dagesh (double *n*)

This also is an important principle when studying Rashi. If you think you have an explanation, test it!! Does it work in several places? If so good. If not, try another attempt.

VI: Two More Attempts

There are two other explanations which are sort of very winding.

1st) The *Levush* notes that the spies that were for the land stated *We will go up and conquer it*. The other spies then disagreed and said *they are stronger than us*.

The *Levush* suggests that Rashi emphasized the verb *go up*: We immediately answer the *Levush*: When speaking about travel to Israel the Bible always uses the phrase *go up*.

But *Levush* suggests that it means, even if the Canaanites towered to Heaven, we can conquer them because God is on our side. To this the other spies said, *be he is stronger than us*

referring to God who is in Heaven.

- A. Clearly this is stretched, twisted and winding.

2nd) The *Gur Aryeh* argues that *he is stronger than us* could have its normal meaning because the spies already stated that *the Canaanites looked at us as grasshoppers*. But if we are as grasshoppers then there is no point in the comparison, *they are stronger than us*.

Gur Aryeh does have a point here: There is *no point after saying* we are grasshoppers to also say *he is stronger than us*.

However, we go back to the point we made earlier. *The fact that you have a problem in the text doesn't justify twisting the text out of its meaning*. The *Gur Aryeh* doesn't explain how this problem leads to a reinterpretation. *Gur Aryeh* is simply saying the statement is anti-climactic (which *is* a problem).

VII: Rashi Reference Method

We now offer our own explanation of Rashi. We use the **Rashi Reference Method** and the **Rashi Formatting method**.

We cite some other verses

Nu14-08 explicitly says *If God wants us, He can bring us to this land and additionally give it to us, a land flowing with fruit juices and honey. But please don't rebel against God: This nation is a piece of cake for us: Their protection is gone, and God is with us. Do not fear.*

In other words, the reason we can expect to conquer them is because *God is with us*. In response to the other spies we are told *don't rebel against God*.

We can now understand the Rashi by using the **Rashi-Formatting-Paragraph** method. We focus on the sequence of statements by the spies

They are brazen

They are stronger than us

(Counter argument) But God can Deliver to us

In other words, Rashi is outlining the *paragraph cohesiveness*

- B. The bad spies say the Canaanites are brazen
C. The bad spies say the Canaanites are stronger than us
D. The good spies counter as it were, *Even though they are stronger than us, nevertheless, with God's help we can conquer.*

So, the Rashi comment that C refer to God, is understood as meaning, that comment D below in the dialogue by the Good Spies, a reference to God, refutes the statement C of the bad spies who just look at the relative strength of the nations without considering that we have God on our side.

VIII: SUMMARY

Bad Spies; A) *Nation is brazen*

Bad spies: B) *Nation is stronger than us*

Good spies: C) *Don't rebel against God, God is with us and He can deliver them to us*

Rashi: Statement B) is answered by Statement C). The reason the bad spies thought the Canaanites stronger than us is because they forgot that our strength lies in God.

In explaining the Rashi this method we use the **Rashi Format (Paragraph)** method and the Rashi reference method. Rashi was not explaining the meaning of the word *memennu* (*from us*); rather Rashi was explaining the context (paragraph juxtaposition) of the statement; it is part of a dialogue between the spies.

APPENDIX

THE 10 RASHI RULE CATEGORIES

A Lightning Summary with Examples

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Rule I-REFERENCE: EXAMPLE: Dt26-05d *We went down to Egypt with a few people* explained by Gn46-27: with 70 people

Rule II-MEANING / Lexicography / Dictionary:
EXAMPLE (Connectives) KI means IF,PERHAPS,RATHER,BECAUSE,WHEN,THAT (Rashi on Gn18-15a Gn24-33a) **EXAMPLE (Nuances):** YDA means FAMILIAR, not KNOW (e.g. Dt34-10a) egg Gn04-01 Adam was FAMILIAR with his wife **EXAMPLE (Idioms)** ON THE FACE OF means DURING THE LIFETIME (Rashi on Nu03-04a Gn11-28a Ex20-03c Dt05-07a) **EXAMPLE (Synonyms)** *Marchese* means pot; *Machinate* means frying pan (Lv02-05a, 07a) **EXAMPLE (Homonyms)** SHAMAH can mean listen, hear, understand: (Gn42-23a) *They didn't appreciate that Joseph understood them* (Note: They knew he was listening) **EXAMPLE (Metonymy)** (Lv02-11a) *Don't offer ...any honey as sacrifices* RASHI: honey includes any sweet fruit juice

Rule III-GRAMMAR: EXAMPLE: BA-ah means COMING not CAME(Gn46-26a)
EXAMPLE: A grammatical conjugation in the Hitpa'el if 1st root letter is Tzade (Gn44-16a)

Rule IV-PARALLELISM: EXAMPLE: (Ex20-04) Don't POSSESS the gods of others Don't MAKE idols RASHI: So both POSSESSION & MAKING of idols are prohibited

Rule V-CONTRADICTION: EXAMPLE: (Nu04-03, Nu08-24a) Levites start Temple work at 25; Levites start temple work at 30. RASHI: They apprentice at 25 but start actual service at 30.

Rule VI-STYLE: RABBI ISHMAEL RULES: EXAMPLE: (Simple verses should be generalized): (Rashi Pesachim 6) (Dt25-04a) *Don't MUZZLE an OX while THRESHING* RASHI: Don't STOP any WORKING ANIMAL from eating

Rule VII-FORMATting: EXAMPLE (BOLD indicated by Repetition): Ex12-09c) COOK it in water (So COOKED-COOKED is understood the same way bold is understood by modern reader) RASHI: Preferred to COOK it in water; But COOK it at all costs(Even if you don't have water) **EXAMPLE: (BULLETS indicated by Repeating keywords)** (Ex03-11a) Who am I - **THAT** I should go to Pharaoh - **THAT** I should take the Jews out of Egypt RASHI: Repeated word **THAT** creates BULLET effect - Pharaoh was a difficult king (Bullet one) - Jews were not yet ready for freedom (Bullet two) **EXAMPLE (Climax assumed in any Biblical list):** (Dt19-11a) *If a man HATES, SPIES, CONFRONTS & KILLS.* RASHI: Bible identifies 4 stages to murder (indicated by capped words)

Rule VIII-DATABASE: EXAMPLE: *God spoke to Moses to say over* introduces about 7 dozen biblical commandments; *God spoke to Aaron to say over* only introduces 2 commandments. RASHI: (Lv10-03b) Aaron was silent when his sons died because they served in the Temple drunk; hence he merited that the commandment prohibiting priests to work in the Temple drunk, was given to him

Rule IX-NON VERSE: EXAMPLE: (Use of Algebra)(Ex38-26b) *Temple donations of silver were 100 Kikar and 1775 Shekel from 630,550 half-shekels* RASHI: So one Kikar of silver = 3000 Shekel.

Rule X: SYMBOLISM: EXAMPLE: (Use of puns) Moses made a copper snake for people to look up to when bitten by snakes (so they should pray and recover) RASHI: (Nu21-09a) The Hebrew root for copper and snake are identical (Cf. The English *copperhead*) Moses made the metal snake copper colored to symbolize the snake