

Rashi #1: Biblical Text: Nu33-16:18 [Background: The Torah lists the journeys, the places the Jews travelled throughout the wilderness]

Biblical Text They journeyed from Sinai (cf. Nu10-29:32, Jethro was there; he was only at Sinai and left afterwards);

*They encamped in Kivroth Taavah (cf. Nu11-34 which uses the same name)

*They journeyed from Kivroth Taavah;

*They encamped in Chazayroth (cf. Nu11-35 which uses the same name)

*They journeyed from Chazayroth; (cf. Nu12-16 which uses the same name; Note: Nu12-16 emphasizes: *afterwards* they want to Chazayroth (that is *after* the punishment of Miryam for slandering Moses in Nu12-01:15)

*They encamped in Rithmah (But Nu12-16 calls it the Paran Desert; raising the question of why the discrepancy)

[In passing: Avraham Grossman in his book on Rashi (p 99), explains that Rothem are a type of tree; he also cites 1Ki19:4-5 relating that Elijah sat under a Rothem tree; Grossman explains that Rothem coals are extremely hot (high temperatures)]

Rashi text: [(A) Rashi is implicitly asking why it is called Paran Desert in Nu12-16 but Rithmah in Nu33-18] ... (B) Because the spies slandered the land of Israel to the Jewish people (Nu13). (C) [Rashi now answers the question: Why is slander called Rithmah?] As it say Ps120-4 *What does a deceitful tongue [slander] give to you or add for you that you, O warrior, should have [word] arrows sharpened with Rothem coals* [Rashi's point is that this verse juxtaposes *deceitful tongue* [slander], *sharpened arrows*, and *Rothem coals* showing that Rothem coals correspond to slander]

Rashiyomi explanation-Names: Rashi deals with the *general* issue of *names*: Names of people, places, etc. The fundamental issue is whether names are simply names? Or, do names describe attributes of the person and city? It is interesting that Nechama Leibowitz thought *all names* had meanings (Parshah sheets Ex01). Leibowitz overlooked a more restrictive view in the Matnoth Kehunah (MK) commentary of the Bereishith Rabbah (BR), 10:25. The MK requires declaration of intention from the Bible that the name has meaning. A variety of methods exist: #1) The Bible *explicitly* says, "They nicknamed him.... Because..."; #2) MK interprets the biblical *called his name* as *nicknamed* and states that if the bible uses *nicknamed* it indicates an attribute (A contrastive biblical style is simply to say e.g. So and so's child is so and so without using any verb of calling.) To these two methods the MK notes #3) Perhaps also if the name comes from a known biblical root with a specific meaning. To these 2 to 3 methods I would add #4) If the Bible states the name in two places and the two statements are different. Here the parallelism points to an intention.

Application to this Rashi: Quite simply if one reads the biblical narrative, Nu33:16-18 one finds 1) Kivroth Taavah repeated identically from Nu11, 2) Chazayroth repeated identically from Nu11, 3) Paran repeated non-identically as Rithmah from Nu12. It is this non-identical repetition coupled with the fact that Rothem has a known meaning, a type of tree, that prompts or justifies Rashi in explaining the name as an attribute.

But why translate as slander: We have spent a great deal of time justifying the interpretation of the name as an attribute. But now we have to explain *what attribute*. Why does the Rothem tree known for its burning coals imply slander. Certainly, this cannot be justified by the poetry found in Ps124 (Part B of Rashi above) which was written much *after* the bible. Rashi simply cited that, not to *prove* it, but to illustrate the *acceptance* of the association.

Slander: Recall that one method of identifying symbolic meaning is a clear cultural pattern. The first act of slander in the bible occurred when the snake slandered God as being jealous and petty prohibiting Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of knowledge less the humans gain knowledge(Gn03)! Similarly, when the Jews slandered the food that God provided the Jews at Nu21-04:09 God sent the *burning serpents* into the nation. These incidents justify a cultural metaphor that *slander* is c like *burning snake venom*. It haunts the listener who thinks *why did they say this*; these haunting thoughts are like burning snake venom; they descend, they burn you from within, they paralyze you and as is consistent with the biblical conception of slander, may ultimately kill you. Rashi simply notes that *coals* which also *burn* can therefore refer to slander; the burning coal does not leave you alone; it demands attention; you cannot ignore it.

Summary: To sum up, the Bible identically repeats a series of journey stops but changes one from Paran to Rithmah. Rashi feels justified in reinterpreting the changed name as indicating an attribute and applies it to slander which happened just prior to Paran (with Miryam), and at Paran proper (with the spies). Rashi compares slander to snake venom based on Gn03, the slander of the snake of the tree and Gn21 the slander of the Jews of God's food. The idea of snake venom is apt because like the slander of the spies, the venom descended into the Jews, paralyzed them from going to Israel and caused their death.

Grossman: While I recommend reading Grossman's book, in this particular Rashi, he sees Rashi as having 'no exegetical justification. He suggests Rashi sometimes did not do exegesis but simply moral uplifting. Like Ibn Ezra he sees Rithmah as a name of a particular suburb of the Paran desert (which however would not explain why be specific in Masay and general in Shlach). As we show above, Grossman ignored the entire complicated topic of *biblical names*. Had he not ignored it he would have come up with Rashi's approach.