

Rashi #1: Biblical Text: Dt01-08c [Background: Moses is giving his farewell speech]

Biblical Text See, I (God) have given you the land [of Israel]; come and conquer the land that God swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give to them.

Rashi text: Why does the text add to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob after already saying your forefathers? To emphasize that Abraham's merit alone is sufficient, Isaac's merit alone is sufficient, and Jacob's merit alone is sufficient.

How Not to Read Rashi: One traditional approach to reading this Rashi focuses on the extra words. Rashi is reinterpreted to mean that instead of saying *to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* it instead could have said *to your forefathers*. This approach points out that the Bible is of Divine origin and therefore each word that God used must have some meaning. The approach of extra words is called omniscience, *all is significant*. It has been rightly attacked by several scholars. As a simple critique on this method, Rashi's answer - *each patriarch's merit is sufficient* – explains why the three patriarchs are mentioned but does not explain why *your forefathers* is mentioned.

A Better Way to Read Rashi: The Rashiyomi approach emphasizes two other ideas in reading this Rashi. 1st) Instead of asking how many words are used (which is shallow and not determinative) instead ask what alternatives occur in the Bible. 2nd) (Coupled with this 1st approach) we do not look at one verse but rather look at all verses where the forefathers are mentioned. This is called the *database* approach. The *database* approach was actually introduced by the Masorites a millennium prior to the creation of modern database theory.

The Database View: It turns out there about 2 dozen mentions of the forefathers in the Bible. There are 3 styles each with about 1/3 the verses. The three styles are I) *Your forefathers*, II) *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob*, III) *Your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob*. We therefore ask the alternative question: "What does each of these styles I, II, III mean."

A Note About Sequence Rashis #2,3: Biblical Text: Both Nu27-01b and Nu36-11 mention the five daughters of Zelafchad who were involved in an inheritance law. Two different sequential orders listing the five daughters are given: a) Machlah, Tirzah, Chaglah, Milkah, Noah and b) Machlaw, Noah, Chaglah, Milkah, Tirzah. **Rashi Texts:** Rashi makes two comments on the two verses: A) Use of a different order indicates equality. B) Use of a different order indicates equality: In one verse they list them by age (relevant to marriages) while in the other verse they list them by scholarship (relevant to inquiring about a law). **Rashiyomi comment:** Rashi approaches the commentary by layers. At layer one the different sequences indicate equality; at layer two there are *several aspects* of order such as *age* and *scholarship*.

Application to the forefather Rashis: Rashi #4: Biblical Text: Lv26-42b lists the patriarchs in the following order: *Jacob, Isaac, Abraham*. The usual order is of course their birth, *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob*. Applying the principles of **Rashis #2,3** we see that the interpretive implication is that all the patriarchs are equal. However, what Rashi actually says on **Rashi #4** is that *The merit of Jacob, the youngest patriarch, is sufficient for this and if not the merit of Isaac is sufficient and if not the merit of Abraham*. Thus, Rashi states the equality but in slightly different language. Curiously, this is the same language Rashi uses in Dt01-08. In other words, Rashi explains that the text says, *your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob*, to emphasize that they are all equal; he formulates this as *the merit of each one is sufficient*.

Different aspects: In our discussion of **Rashis #2,3** we showed two layers of interpretation: First there is the layer where we assert equality. Then there is the layer where we assert *several aspects* such as *age* and *scholarship* for Zelafchad's daughters. We can apply this to the *forefather* Rashi. Each forefather represents a different right to Israel: i) Abraham brought God to the masses: In conquering Israel we brought God to those who surrendered such as the Givonites; ii) Isaac taught balance of power – at any given time Jacob or Esau will be ascendant: This applies to Israel since for many centuries there was conflict with cyclical ascendance of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, implying even when Jews fight amongst each other, they still have the right to Israel; iii) Unlike Isaac who taught the cyclicity of power, Jacob taught the coexistence of powers – even though his children fought, they still co-existed: We certainly have the right to Israel when we all work together in harmony with cyclical power struggles. Thus, the verse presents 3 situations under which we still have rights to Israel.

Why Forefathers: Rashi has explained why *each* of the forefathers had to be written. But why mention the general category of *forefathers*? This is answered by the famous Rashi commenter, *sifsei chachamim*, on Ex06-02: *Because children automatically (without a fight) inherit their parents; so, an oath of possession to the forefather automatically entitles the child*. In fact, Rashi explicitly says this on the sister Rashi comment on this verse **Rashi #5: Biblical Text: Dt01-08:** Come, inherit the land. **Rashi Text:** No one is contesting, and you do not need to fight.

Rashi #6: Biblical Text: I [God] appeared to Abraham Isaac and Jacob as *Kayl Shatai* **Rashi Text:** The forefathers. **Rashiyomi comment:** Everyone wants to know what the meaning of the Rashi comment is. I would suggest it is contrastive. *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* were the only prophets who had promises that they did not see in their lifetime. Contrastively, Noah, Joseph, Adam, Kayin, all had prophecies or dreams that they saw fulfilled in their lifetime. Rashi emphasizes that *the forefathers* had a special status of prophecy.

The Three styles: We can now answer our original question of why there are three styles, I, II, III. *Forefathers*, emphasizes a legal right of inheritance; the *three Patriarchs* emphasize several aspects/environments under which we might find ourselves.