

## ParShaT *NoaH*- One Pager Series

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[Background: We devote this year's issues to defenses of Rashi from other commentators and bible scholars. Today we show a real drama: Ramban and Rambam come to the defense of Rashi against the Ibn Ezra]

**Rashi #1,2 Biblical Text: Gn11-28a** *Haran* [Abram's brother] died during his father's lifetime in the land of his birth in the *Casdim Furnaces* (the name of a city)

**Rashi: (1,2)** Rashi's translations are embedded in the text in courier font. Rashi continues: *A Midrash Aggadah states: Haran died because of his father who complained to King Nimrod that his children were monotheistic and therefore Abram cut up idols. Nimrod threw him into a furnace. .. And this is the translation Casdim Furnaces. However, Menahem (a grammarian) translates Casdim Valleys consistent with Honor God in the valleys (Is24:4) and On the pit of a snake a weaned infant waives his hand (Is11-08). Every valley and deep pit is called ur* (The Hebrew word that Rashi translated as *furnace/fire* and Menahem translates as *valley*)

**Ibn Ezra:** Cohen, a modern academic scholar, brings this example in his book *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor*. In this book, Cohen explains Ibn Ezra's position: "Ibn Ezra could believe in the furnace story; however his issue was whether the text itself told the story. He rebelled against Talmudic derash by insisting on certain grammatical standards. He used the phrase *no need* to indicate that there is *no need* to see this story in the text.

**Ramban:** Ramban cites the Ibn Ezra and comes to Rashi's defense using the *other verse* method: "Gn15-07 states, *I am God, who got you out of Casdim furnaces to give you this land as an inheritance.*" Ramban points out that in Hebrew as in English the idiom *got you out of* connotes saving a person from something bad.

**Rashiyomi comment:** A position of this newsletter is that Rashi defended *Midrash* as *Peshat* by being sensitive to tone. Ibn Ezra, a brilliant grammarian, consistently ignored tone-connotation in his commentary.

**Ramban & Rambam:** Ramban citing the Rambam that Abraham was imprisoned in a country called *Cuth*, Ramban suggests that the King did not want to make Abraham a martyr and expelled him to *Casdim Furnaces*.

**Rashiyomi comment:** This approach is consistent with the Rashiyomi approach which sees Rashis in 2 stages: 1) He was in some type of trouble, 2) A speculative fillin on what that trouble was: Perhaps he was thrown into a furnace; perhaps he was exiled there. Ibn Ezra although not noticing the tone of *got you out* could still demur, "Why say that *God got him out of the furnace?*"

**Ramban & Ibn Ezra & Me:** Ibn Ezra actually defends Rashi here since *ur* means *fire* (Is31-09). Ramban further defends Rashi against Menahem: "Valleys are not well lit; the inhabitants keep many flames around at night and hence these valleys are nicknamed the *urim*. I would explain Is11-08 *A weaned child waives his hand over the eyes of a snake* since snakes do not actually see but use *heat sensors* (hence their eyes are called *flames*)

**Rashiyomi comment:** Why say Abraham was thrown into a furnace? Because burnings as a means of discipline is common: Tamar (Gn38-24), Absalom (2S14-30), Delilah (Ju14-15), and Daniel (Chapter 3)

**Rashiyomi Figure of Speech(metonymy) Approach:** Recall that a city can metonymically refer to its inhabitants: *City X was heavily hit by COVID* really means *The inhabitants of city X were heavily hit*. Therefore the statement *Abraham was thrown into the Casdim Furnaces* means *Abraham, who preached monotheism was expelled (cf. Rambam, Ramban above) to Casdim Furnace city*. Most probably *Casdim Furnaces* was a manufacturing spot inhabited by blue-collar workers who didn't care to respond to Abraham's preachings. Abraham couldn't grow there until *God got him out* to Canaan where his preaching was well received. This explanation is consistent with the Agaddic language and with the important principle that *stories of the Patriarchs are relevant to the struggles of their descendants*. This story teaches us the importance of living in a community with scholars.