

## ParShaT *VaYaYTzaY*- One Pager Series

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[**Background:** We continue to bring controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Sometimes we disagree with modern scholars. Today we bring an example where their scholarship aids in appreciating Rashi.]

**Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn29-27a** [Laban had just double-crossed Jacob who worked 7 years to marry Rachel. Laban arranges that Jacob marry Rachel's sister Leah. Jacob protests. Laban agrees to let Jacob marry Rachel also provided a condition is met. There are several possible readings of the biblical text]

**Reading #1:** We will give you Rachel *if you fulfill this coming week of years* [7 years]

**Reading #2:** We will give you Rachel *if you fulfill the week of this one (Leah) whom you just married* [In other words Jacob can have Rachel provided he doesn't reject Leah]

**Rashi Text:** Reading #2 is correct [Jacob can marry Rachel provided he doesn't double cross Leah and leave that marriage into which he was tricked]. [Rashi now gives two reasons why Reading #1 is rejected:]

**Objection #A:** Recall that in Hebrew, words, including nouns and adjectives have gender. *Week* is masculine. But the demonstrative pronoun *this* is feminine. So, *this* cannot be referring to week (of either days or years). It must refer to a feminine noun.

**Objection #B:** In Hebrew the two juxtaposed words *week, this* can either mean i) *this week* or ii) *the week of this one*. In English we recognize that *week of* is in the construct state, that is, it cannot stand alone but must be completed; that is *week of something*. We recognize the construct by the word *of*. Hebrew does not create the construct with the word *of* but rather achieves it by punctuation. *Shevua* means *week of* while *Shavuah* means *week*. Since the biblical word *week* is punctuated in the construct state, we must use Reading #2, not reading #1.

**Summary:** According to Rashi, Laban double crossed Jacob, not so much to get an extra week of work (after all, he worked for Laban 6 years after his second marriage anyway), but to assure that Jacob did not take out the double cross on Leah by not further completing the marriage

**Modern Scholarship:** The following comes from Cohen's book, *The Rule of Peshat* (2021), Chapter 5. Cohen starts out by noting that many Jews have heard of the *Leqax Tov* commentary. It turns out this commentary, was written by Tobia Ben Eliezer in the Byzantine empire. Although the *Leqax Tov* commentary is filled with many Midrashim, it begins to examine the biblical text using philological and grammatical tools. This grammatical approach is the hallmark of the *peshat* tradition that was being developed in France and Spain (As we have explained many times, Rashi was not a member of the *peshat school*; he emphasized *tone, innuendo, figures of speech, and reading literacy*. The emphasis on grammar was not his main focus)

We should clarify further Cohen's remarks. The French and Spanish commentators (*Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radaq, Rashbam*, etc.) had access to a rich grammatical tradition which had developed immediately after finalizing the Mesorah, the recording of the punctuation of the biblical text which happened in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The famous grammar-dictionaries of Menahem and Dunash created during this period influenced all future scholars in Spain and France. Although *grammar* as a subject in its own right, as a source of explanation of biblical exegesis, is accepted today, it was the pioneering work of *Ben Asher* the great scholar that finalized the *Crown of Aram Tzovah*, the first complete Bible with punctuation marks consistent with the Mesorah, that encouraged the creation of grammar as a subject in its own right. However, the Byzantine school was unaware (did not have access) to the pioneering works of Menahem and Dunash. They developed grammar independently. Although their system is much cruder than that of the French and Spanish schools, it is instructive to compare their exegesis both for overlap and differences with other commentaries.

Cohen continues by pointing out that the Byzantine Jewish tradition is not always heard of as much as the Sephardic (Spanish) and Ashkenazic (German-French) tradition. Nicolas de Lange in 1996 began publishing commentaries found in the Cairo Genizah from Byzantine which also show the beginnings of a grammatical approach. Among those published are the commentary of Reuel and the Scholia, a collection of notes on Genesis and Exodus. Cohen further elaborates on the importance, contribution, and possible influences of the Byzantine school

**Rashi vs. The Scholia:** Cohen cites from the Scholia notes on Gn29-27a. He points out that the Scholia presents Objection #A above but not Objection #B. He uses this example to show the advanced nature of Rashi's knowledge of Grammar.

**A Final Rashiyomi Comment:** Cohen points out that Rashi emphasizes the punctuation of the text, a punctuation which allows Rashi to infer that the construct is being used. The Rashiyomi one-pagers emphasize that the Mesorah, which provides punctuation, was a major force for Rashi. It enabled him to independently derive grammar from the numerous forms found in the bible.