

[Background: We continue to bring controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we examine a famous argument for textual criticism]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Gn36-35a *These are the kings that reigned in Edom before Israel had a kingHadad-son-of-Bedad who smote Midyan in the Fields of Moab*

Rashi Text: From this text we infer that Midyan and Moab were enemies (Edom aided Moab). But (Nu24)they (Midyan and Moab) made peace in the days of Bilam (they joined together to get Bilam to curse Israel their common enemy)

Rashi inference: It is clear from this Rashi that Hadad reigned *before* Bilam a non-Jewish prophet in the time of Moses. So contrary to modern scholarship this text is not enumerating Edomite kings that reigned prior to Saul King of Israel.

Modern Scholarship: Modern scholarship and already medieval commentators perceived this biblical text as anomalous. For they interpreted “prior to a King reigning in Israel” to refer to Saul. As a consequence of this incorrect interpretation the Biblical text appeared to list *future* Edomite kings (that is kings that reigned until Saul and hence after the close of the bible.). The alternatives to explain this anomaly were either that a) an author other than Moses placed this historical record in the bible, b) Moses through the prophetic spirit knew the names of the Edomite kings that would reign after his death. Interpretation a) is equivalent to modern textual criticism in that it denies that Moses was the sole author of the Torah. Interpretation b) while *possible* is problematic since this would be the only time that an entire biblical paragraph referred to the future! Why? (See Cohen (2021) who cites several medieval commentators and how they approached this)

Rashi’s interpretation: The biblical text is easy to understand once we recall that according to Jewish law, Moses had the status of a king. So the text is simply saying that these 8 Edomite kings reigned prior to Moses appearing. This is also consistent with the Rashi comment on Gn36-35a. Thus there is no problem of future descriptions in the bible. The text is describing the history prior to the Torah!

More, Symbolic interpretation of names: However, we can gain more insight if we interpret the names. There is a question whether interpreting names to refer to characteristics of people or periods is *peshat* or *derash*. Nechama Leibowitz opined that it is not *peshat* but a traditional approach of the Midrash. However, as I have pointed out, Nechama (in this instance) was ignorant of a Midrash Rabbah (Gn10-25). The *Matnoth Kehuna* explains that the phrase *called his name such and such* really means *nicknamed him such and such* which invites interpretation of the name (according to the *peshat*). The opinion is also mentioned there that if the name *has a blatant biblical meaning* then the name should be regarded as a nickname reporting characteristics of the person or period.

Does that apply here? We read about King, *Luxury*, whose wife was nicknamed *How-Good-God-is*, the daughter of *Busy-Busy*, the daughter of *Sea-of-Gold*. Clearly, the verse is describing a monarchy emphasizing *Luxury* and wealth (clearly this is *peshat*).

Cyclical History: Recall for example, that Egyptian monarchs had names but the bible calls *each of them*, Pharaoh. We argue that the 8 kings here describe a *historical cycle of Edomite kings*. This historical cycle first happened before Moses but then repeats itself throughout history. The bible tells us this historical cycle to enable the Jewish people to deal with their enemies by judging where in the cycle they are.

Saladin, An Example: Very often our enemies are viewed as murderers. These days because of intermarriage, *Esaav*, part of *Ishmael*, and *Edom (Rome)* exemplify our enemies. Saladin the great is an excellent example of someone who was not only known as a mighty warrior but also known for his love of poetry and gardens and for being a generous and noble leader. With this background we examine the 8 kings.

The Cycle of 8 Edomite Kings and their Symbolism: See the next table for a concise account.

8 Edomite Kings	King #1	King #2	King #3	King #4	King #5	King #6	King #7	King #8
King Name	<i>Belah, son of Beor</i>	<i>Yovav son of Zerach</i>	<i>Chusham</i>	<i>Hadad, Son of Bedad</i>	<i>Samlah, from Masraykah</i>	<i>Saul from wide river</i>	<i>Baal Channan son of Achbor</i>	<i>Hadar, ...bath may zahav</i>
English translation	Devour by Fire	Announcements; citizenship	Mastery, Quickness	War cry, double cross	Garments from Comb-land	Loans from spacious colonies	Master of tolerating the “mice”	Luxury; wife ...daughter of Sea of Gold
Good example	Hitler	Achasveirosh (Conquest for assimilation)	Chinese masters		Fashions	Loans; infrastructure	Class distinctions; tolerance of workers	Pure luxury

Comments: The cycle starts with Hitlerian ruthlessness (#1); the next generation sees no point in total destruction but prefers conquest for colonization (#2). This is followed by a lull in military operations which is replaced by “mastery” of physical skills (#3). Finally, there is a period when wars are used instead of diplomacy to settle local battles (#4). The cycle continues with a kingdom of fashions (#5), a kingdom of loans (#6), in order to build infrastructure which requires class distinctions (mice and nobles) with tolerance of mice (#7), followed by the kingdoms of great luxury(#8)

Biblical Interpretation: The above approach is filled with relevance. The Bible presents the cycle of our enemies from Hitlerian ruthlessness to Saladin-like luxury and class. This enables Jews in each era to deal with their enemies according to where they are.

🤗Praise Be Him who Chose Them and Their Learning🤗