

ParShaT *BeShaLaCh* One Pager Series

<https://www.Rashiyomi.com/rule3613.pdf> Adapted from The Rashi Newsletter,

(c) Rashiyomi.com January 2022, Dr. Hendel, President,

Full statement of copyright is found at www.Rashiyomi.com/copyrights.htm

[Background: We continue to bring controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Many of you know Hebrew grammar well. Today we bring a beautiful Rashi on aspects of grammar you probably did not know. We also get to explore whether Rashi was “rebellious” against the Talmud by establishing a Peshat school. We need two pieces of grammatical background]

Grammatical Background #1: It is important to distinguish between a *conjugation* and its *meaning*. *Conjugation refers to spelling (letters and vowels)*. For example, if you look at a biblical root like Shin-Vav-Resh (*to sing*) then the future conjugation (3rd person singular) would add two yuds, Yud-Shir-Yud-Resh (*Yashir-will sing*). So *conjugation* simply refers to the rules of letters and vowels used in spelling certain grammatical forms.

Grammatical Background #2: The man in the street thinks that every conjugation has a unique *meaning*. However, in Hebrew a conjugation (a spelling of a verb form) can have multiple meanings. In Hebrew, the future conjugation (*yashir*) can refer to *future activity*. However, it can also refer to *habits*. Consider the simple sentence, *When I am happy, I sing*. In this sentence the word *sing* refers to a habit of mine, something I always do when happy. It can refer to past events, present events, or future events. We say that *sing* has the meaning of the *habitual present*. Rashi brings several examples from the Bible where the future *conjugation* has the *meaning* of the habitual present. It is interesting, that while Hebrew indicates the habitual present with a future conjugation (*yashir*) English uses a present conjugation (*When I am happy, I sing*). This helps clarify that there is an interaction of conjugation (spelling) and meaning.

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Ex15-01 [Background: The Jews just exited the Reed Sea and saw Egypt buried in the sea. The text continues] Then Moses and the Jewish people *will sing* (*Yashir*).

Rashi Text: The text uses the future conjugation (Yashir). There are 3 possible uses of the future conjugation.

Rashi Text – Possibility #1: The future conjugation can mean the future! Thus this verse indicates that Moses and the Jewish people will be resurrected one day and sing in the future to God. However, it is unlikely that the text which is describing the Exodus is all of a sudden discussing the resurrection.

Rashi Text – Possibility #2: The future conjugation can also indicate the habitual present. The text would then mean *Whenever the Jews saw Egypt died, they sang to God*. However, there is no habit here. It is not something always done. They only saw Egypt drown once; they only sang this once. So we reject this meaning.

Rashi Text – Possibility #3: The future conjugation can indicate *a wish or hope*. The verse would then mean *Upon seeing the Egyptians drown Moses and the Jews wished to Sing to God*. Rashi brings several verses where the future conjugation refers to a wish.

The future conjugation as meaning *wish*: This requires some explanation. Why should the future conjugation mean a *wish* and *hope* to do something? The answer lies in the nature of conjugations. In the Indo-European languages conjugations refer to points of time: Past, present, future. However, in many semitic languages conjugations refer to levels of completeness. The past conjugation refers to something that has been completed (for example because it was done in the past). The future conjugation refers to something that has not yet been completed: One possibility of non-completion is because it *will* be done; but another possibility is because it is only a *wish*. Many difficult biblical verses can be understood using this idea of completeness vs. incompleteness.

Rashi Text – Summary: Rashi brings three uses of the future conjugation: 1) future activity (resurrection), 2) habitual activity (which does not apply to something that happens once), 3) and a wish which makes the most sense in this verse. Rashi was not rebelling against the Talmudic position; it is in fact unreasonable that anyone believed this verse refers to the resurrection. Rather Rashi was listing 3 possibilities and showing which one made the most sense.