

ParShaT *TsaV* One Pager Series

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[Background: We have been bringing controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we present an interdisciplinary refutation of an Ibn Ezra, using i) Rashi, ii) Sifrey, and iii) the Grammar of Cantillations.]

Rashi	#1a	Biblical	Text:
Lv08-14	<u>He</u>	placed hands on the offering,	Aaron and Sons
Lv08-18	<u>They</u>	placed hands on the offering,	Aaron and Sons

Ibn Ezra: #1a There is no difference between he placed and they placed. A very big grammarian who said that this implies that, "Aaron placed his hands first and afterwards all his children placed them together erred."

We now bring three totally different sources to refute the Ibn Ezra.

Malbim and Sifrey: The conflicting subjects he placed they placed implies that i) each person (Aaron and each son) placed hands by themselves.

Comments:

*Ibn Ezra correctly points out that *he placed* by itself would mean *they all placed their hands simultaneously*

*Malbim however, is additionally explaining the parallelistic contrast that both grammatical forms he placed, they placed are used together. When used together it means that *each person placed by themselves*.

Rashi Nu12-01: Biblical text: She spoke, Miriam and Aaron, about Moses' wife.

Rashi: She started the conversation with which Aaron participated.

Comments:

First note that *someone* had to start the conversation, contradicting the Ibn Ezra,

that a single verb implies all spoke simultaneously. Second, note the point that a plural subject can manifest itself in several ways: i) they do the act together, ii) they each do the act separately, iii) one person starts and the others follow. We begin to obtain, contrary to the Ibn Ezra, a heightened awareness of *nuances of plurality*. i) A general plural subject with a single verb indicates simultaneity (such as *he* [the entire Jewish people] *camped by the mountain* (Ex19-01) which as Rashi explains means *without divisiveness but rather in harmony*. (iii) A specific plural subject (e.g. two listed people such as Aaron and Miriam) with a single verb indicates that one initiated the act. ii) A two-verse description of a plural subject with a single and plural verb indicates each person doing the act separately.

Mordechai Breuer, The Rules of Cantillations, Edition 1, Paragraph 162:

Many people are unaware that the Cantillations (*teamim*) are grammatical punctuation marks. The following charming contrasts are brought by Breuer

Subject	Singular verb	Plural verb
Moses, Aaron	He left, Moses & Aaron Ex08-08	They came, Moses & Aaron Ex05-01
Moses, Aaron	He did, Moses & Aaron Ex07-06	They congregated, Moses & Aaron Nu20-10

The verbs in the right column represent a joint action. Contrastively, the verbs in the left column clearly indicate Moses was the primary person doing the activity while Aaron was following. In Ex08-08, the preceding verses show Moses talking to Pharoh; Moses requested Pharoh establish a time for removal of the frogs so that "Pharoh should know there is none like our God." Then *he left, Moses*, with Aaron tagging along. Similarly, in Ex07-06, the preceding verses show God speaking to Moses, "You will speak to Pharoh; Aaron will be your spokesperson."

Comments:

We again see the theme of a nuance approach to plural action. Questions must be answered before assigning verbs: i) Was a group acting as a unit; ii) Did each person in the group do the action separately; iii) was there an initiator.

Final Comments on Ibn Ezra: In refuting the Ibn Ezra it is important to emphasize what is gained. We gain a richer nuanced picture of meaning. Had we used Ibn Ezra's approach, the meaning would be there but oversimplistic.

