

ParShaT *BeQhuKoSaI* 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 examine a Ramban-Rashi controversy - we show they agree.]

Rashi #1a Biblical Text: Ex13-12 Separate all openers of animal wombs (first born) for God; all openers of animal wombs that belong to you, the males, are to God

Biblical Text: Lv27-26 ...A firstborn who became firstborn to God among animals: a person may not sanctify it; [because] it belongs to God

Biblical Text: Dt15-19:20 All firstborn born in your flocks and herds, that are male, sanctify to God your Lord [by] i) not working [in the fields] with the firstborn oxen, ii) not shearing the firstborn flocks, iii) annually eating it [the firstborn] in the presence of God in the place chosen by God

Rashi Text [Lv27-26]: A person may not sanctify [dedicate for offering] a firstborn animal for some other occasion, because the animal is not his [it is God's]

Ramban Text [Lv27-26]: [Rambam first cites Rashi and then continues] The proper way would be [for Rashi] to say, "There is no need to sanctify it [the firstborn] since it already belongs to God." And in Deuteronomy it says that the firstborn should be treated as holy by i) not working, ii) not shearing, iii) annually consuming it before God.

Rashiyomi approach: We have two goals. Each goal is a the teaching of a principle that applies to many Rashis and is useful to know. The first goal is to emphasize the importance of citing all relevant verses when studying a Rashi. Rashi himself cited no extra verses; Ramban cited one other verse from Deuteronomy; Rashiyomi cited two other verses listed above. For indeed, to understand this Rashi one must know and address all three verses. The second goal is to show that even though it *appears* that Rashi and Ramban are disagreeing, they are really complementing each other. Each commentator mentions a different aspect of the interpretation of the 3 biblical verses.

Four Forms of Animal Sanctification: First recall that to say an *animal is holy* simply means that it can only be consumed as an offering. There are however four nuances of animal holiness

i) Automatic: The animal can automatically be *holy* without any action on the owner's part

ii) Vows, Verbal designation: For example, suppose I am overjoyed with a success in a business deal and wish to share my happiness. So I verbally designate an animal of mine as *holy, for a peace offering*. The animal then acquires holy status. It can be eaten by me, my family, the priests, and the Temple Fire in Jerusalem.

The verb used to make the animal holy is *sanctify the animal*

iii) Special treatment: But that exact same phrase, *sanctify the animal*, can also mean *to treat it as a holy animal*: e.g. not to eat it except in Jerusalem in the Temple, not to do labor with the animals etc.

iv) Holiness specificity: If I for example verbally designate an animal for sacrifice I can't use that animal for any secular purpose (e.g. an ordinary meal) but can use it for any holy purpose (e.g. to fulfill a vow of mine to thank God with an offering). However, certain sanctities are specific. True, a firstborn animal is *holy* but it is not *generally holy*; rather it is *specifically holy* as a firstborn. The firstborn animal cannot be used say to fulfill my vows such as a vow to thank God for success in a business deal.

Ramban Revisited: The Ramban gives the straightforward meaning of the 3 verses cited above all-together

- * The Ex verse says that firstborn are *automatically* dedicated to God, in other words
- * One does not have to *verbally designate* them, as it says in the Lev. verse
- * But the Deuteronomic verse explicitly says *sanctify it [the firstborn] to God*. This appears to require *sanctification* or *verbal designation*. So Ramban explains that *sanctify it* in the Deuteronomic verse refers not to verbal designation but to special treatment (don't work with these animals and consume them before God.)

Rashi Revisited: Rashi agrees with the above but is commenting on another aspect of the verse. While Deuteronomy says *sanctify it to God*, Leviticus says *the firstborn that because a firstborn to God*. Leviticus gives specificity; the firstborn is not just holy, but specifically holy as a firstborn. Hence the Rashi comment, "It can't be used for other vows"

Conclusion: Important in analyzing these texts is the first step of gathering all 3 verses speaking about the firstborn. Ramban then explains the overall combination of these 3 verses while Rashi explains a specific contrast of phrases. To fully understand the verses, we need *both* Rashi and Ramban and we must perceive them as complementing each other not as disagreeing.