

ParShaT *NaSoH* 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-Ibn Ezra controversy]

Rashi #1a Biblical Text: Nu04-49 The Mesorah lists this as one of five verses where it is natural to interpret the text by deviating from the Masoretic text, substituting *as* (*ca'asher*) for *that* (*asher*).

Reading #1 (*that*, actual text)

By prophetic order, they [the Levites] were counted under Moses' order

each subtribe i) for its participation in the Temple service

ii) for its participation in the journeys

iii) and their appointments that God commanded Moses

Reading #2 (*as*, reasonable misreading of text)

By prophetic order, they [the Levites] were counted under Moses' order

each subtribe i) for its participation in the Temple service

ii) for its participation in the journeys

and their countings [were] as God commanded Moses

Rashi #1: This is one of the five verses where *that* (*asher*) can be reasonably misread as (*ca-asher*). [If so] The misread text, **Reading #2**, applies to the commanded countings from 30 to 50.

Ibn Ezra: The indented text in **Reading #1** which literally says, *each person*, means *each subtribe* (as indicated in the translation above).

Ramban: Ramban cites the Rashi above and then cites the Ibn Ezra. Ramban, had before him both the Rashi and Ibn Ezra texts. Ramban further supports Ibn Ezra by explaining item #(iii) in **Reading #1** above.

The appointments of the Levites are important since Biblically there was a severe prohibition against one Levite doing the job assigned to other Levites. And in fact, the Talmud relates the story of one Levite, a singer, attempting to assist the Levite door guard; he was stopped from assisting because of the severe prohibition.

Controversy or agreement: At first blush it certainly appears that Rashi and Ibn Ezra are in disagreement and that the Ramban took Ibn Ezra's side. But a closer examination shows complete agreement. Consider:

#1) **Rashi:** Rashi simply cited the Mesorah which provided 2 readings of the text. One of those readings was identified as a misreading of the text. While Rashi did clarify the plausibility of the misreading, there is no reason to believe that he was doing anything other than clarifying the Mesorah. Rashi clearly did not adopt a misreading.

#2) **Rashi vs. Ibn Ezra:** Rashi never clarified further the proper reading of the text. Thus the Ibn Ezra could not be disagreeing with Rashi since the Ibn Ezra is commenting on verse items on which Rashi was silent.

#3) **Ramban vs. Rashi:** The Ramban never (as he sometimes does) says that "This [Rashi] is not correct." Rather his style is "This is what Rashi said; Ibn Ezra said the following." There is no reason to assume that Ramban understood Ibn Ezra as disagreeing with Rashi.

#4) **Ramban vs Ibn Ezra:** Ramban does add to the Ibn Ezra interpretation by clarifying the importance of the Levite appointments. Clearly, here to, we have no controversy, but rather complementarity.

Conclusion: On this text, Rashi, without explaining the text, points out a possible reasonable misreading of the text as indicated by the Masoretic tradition. Rashi is silent on further commentary on the accurate reading of the text. Ibn Ezra explains this accurate reading. Ramban further supports the Ibn Ezra.

Thus on this verse, the three commentaries, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban complement and agree with each other without controversy.