

ParShaT **BaLaQ** One Pager Series

<https://www.Rashiyomi.com/rule3713.pdf> Adapted from The Rashi Newsletter,

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

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

[Background: We have been bringing controversies between Rashi and either academic scholars or other Jewish commentaries. Today we examine a Ramban-Rashi controversy]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Nu24-20

Amalayk is the first among nations

His last days are destruction

Rashi-Onkelos: Amalayk was the first nation to attack the Jews when they left Egypt and his end will be that Israel destroys them (Dt28-19)

Ramban: *First of nations* simply means *the best of nations*; Amalayk was a world leader among nations. This is the straightforward (*peshat*) meaning of the text.

First Appearance: It appears that this is a classic controversy between those commentators that seek the straightforward meaning of the text (*peshat*) and those that seek to read homilies into the text.

Rashiyomi approach to Peshat: In my book on Rashi, www.Rashiyomi.com/Rashibook.htm I show that Rashi believed that the straightforward meaning of the text, the *peshat*, is the spontaneous, instant reaction of a literate speaker knowledgeable of the situation being spoken about to the spoken or written text (Rashi, Gn-03-08).

Secular Example: Consider the following sentence:

The stupid mayor finally allowed the building permit.

There are two *peshats*, *spontaneous, instant* reactions, to this sentence:|

- i) The building permit was allowed
- ii) The Mayor is stupid.

So we see that *peshat* is not about primary intended meaning; rather it is about our spontaneous reactions to words. We also see that *peshat* can include inuendoes and that there can be two *peshats* to a sentence.

Revisiting the verse: *Amalayk is the first of nations; but his last days are destruction.*

- Ramban is certainly correct that the spontaneous reaction to the phrase *first of nations* means Amalayk is the *choicest* of nations.
- But Rashi is certainly correct that the contrastive pair of words *first – last* evokes in a literate person knowledgeable of Israelite desert history the inuendo that although Amalayk was the first nation to attack us, and although throughout history Amalayk has hurt the Jews as happened through Haman, the Amalaykite who sought to destroy the Jewish people, nevertheless the biblical command to destroy Amalayk, Dt28-19, will at last triumph and they will be destroyed.

An alternate explanation: Alternatively we can suggest that Rashi and Ramban were commenting on two different aspects of the verse:

- Ramban was commenting on the word *first*; he explains it means *choicest* and best
- Rashi was commenting on the word pair *first-last* which creates an innuendo: *first to attack but at last will be destroyed*

Summary: Rashi and Ramban are not disagreeing. They are each giving one of the two *peshats* in the verse. They are each commenting on a different aspect of the verse. There is complete harmony among them.