

ParShaT **MaTToS MaSSeY** 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 Rashi-Ramban controversy]

Rashi #1 Biblical Text: Nu33-55 *If you don't conquer the inhabitants of the land [Canaan] from before you then those you leave over [will be]*

* *Thorns in your eyes*

* *Briers in your side*

* *They will encircle/plunder you on your own land*

Rashi and Ramban Text: We present Rashi and Ramban in the following table

Verse Phrase	Rashi	Ramban	Rashiyomi comment
Thorns in your <u>eyes</u>	Like knives in your eyes	Interpreted metaphorically: They will lead you religiously astray	Rashi and Ramban agree. Ramban is explaining Rashi further
Briers in your <u>side</u>	Rashi emphasizes <u>eyes</u> vs <u>side</u> . Hence, <i>they will surround you with thorns constricting you</i>	Ramban didn't notice <u>eyes:sides</u> and just emphasizes they will be thorns:briers, painful	The parallelism has 2 parts: <u>thorns:briers</u> and <u>eyes:sides</u> . Rashi interprets both aspects of the parallelism; Ramban only interpreted one aspect leading us to suspect an oversight.
They will <u>encircle/plunder</u> you on your own land	They will <u>plunder</u> you	They will <u>encircle</u> you in military fashion	The biblical word used refers to both <u>encircling</u> and <u>plundering</u> . Rashi who interpreted <i>briers on your side</i> as <u>encircling</u> interprets this verse as <u>plundering</u> ; Ramban who had not yet interpreted <u>encircling</u> does it here

Issue #1 – Metaphor: There are two tasks to do in explaining thorns in your eyes:

i) the biblical word for thorns had to be clarified as meaning thorns (It also means

knives); ii) but no one placed thorns in anyone's eyes; therefore this had to be explained as a metaphor meaning they will blind you and lead you astray.

Task (i) was accomplished by Rashi; task (ii) by Ramban. Ramban cites numerous verses where *be led astray* is depicted as *blindness*. Since no one placed thorns in anyone's eyes, there is no reason to assume Rashi disagreed with this metaphoric approach. Rashi and Ramban simply had different tasks to do.

Issue #2 – Parallelism: The table below depicts the parallelism

They will be	Thorns	In your eyes
	Briers	In your side

The parallelism occurs at two places:

- Rashi explains *briers in your side* as constriction, a hedge preventing free movement
- Ramban apparently did not notice this dual aspect: He interprets *thorns in eyes* as religious blindness while *briers on ones side* as pain

Issue #3 – Climax: Whenever there is a sequence of similar phrases they should be interpreted as increasing in intensity (climatically). Thus we have for the three phrases in this verse [see previous page]:

- Rashi: i) lead you astray, ii) constrict you, iii) plunder you
- Ramban: i) lead you astray, ii) cause you pain, iii) constrict you

As we explained, because Ramban did not notice the word side he interpreted the second phrase as “causing pain” and hence the 3rd phrase as “constricting.”

Importantly, as we said in the table, the biblical word used, *tzareru*, can mean both encirclement, and plundering. So the dictionary will not solve this; it is rather climax itself that creates and endows meaning.