

## **Meet and Greet the Exegete Rashbam – Is the Torah the Source of the Torah's Laws?**

*R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) was Rashi's grandson (his father, Meir, was Rashi's son-in-law) and the older brother of Rabbenu Tam. He was born ca. 1080 and died ca. 1160. He spent his whole life in France, and studied Torah with his father and other scholars, especially his grandfather Rashi, in whose house in Troyes he grew up. He studied Torah and Talmud with Rashi and occasionally took issue with Rashi's interpretations of the Torah. After Rashi's death in 1105 he returned to his father's home in Ramerupt. Rashbam also wrote a commentary on the Talmud and composed halakhic rulings, only some of which have been printed.*

### **Methodology**

#### **1. Commentary to Bereshit 1:1**

בראשית ברא אלקים – יבינו המשכילים כי כל דברי רבותינו ודרשותיהם כנים ואמתים. וזהו האמור במס' שבת הוינא בר תמני סרי שנין ולא ידענא דאין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוט. ועיקר ההלכות והדרשות יוצאין מיתור המקראות או משינוי הלשון שנכתב פשוטו של מקרא בלשון שיכולין ללמוד הימנו עיקר הדרשה, כמו "אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם" ודרשו חכמים באברהם מאריכות הלשון שלא היה צריך לכתוב בהבראם

The enlightened will understand that all of the words of our rabbis and their derivations are true and genuine. This is what is stated in Tractate Shabbat: "I was eighteen years old, but I did not know that the verse never loses its simple meaning." The essential laws and derivations are based on extraneous verses or variations in the syntax; the simple meaning of the text has been written in a language which lends itself to be expounded in this way. For example, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created (be-hibaram)" (Bereishit 2:4) is understood by the Sages to teach "be-Avraham" based on the wordiness of the text since that word is superfluous. Now, I will explain the commentaries of the early authorities to this verse, to let people know why I did not explain as they did. (Bereishit 1:1)

#### **2. Commentary to Bereshit 37:2**

ישכילו ויבינו אוהבי שכל מה שלימדונו רבותינו כי אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוט, אף כי עיקרה של תורה באת ללמדנו ולהודיענו ברמיזה הפשט ההגדות וההלכות והדינים על ידי אריכות הלשון ועל ידי שלשים ושתים מידות של ר' אליעזר בנו של ר' יוסי הגלילי ועל ידי שלש עשרה מידות של ר' ישמעאל.

The lovers of enlightenment may understand and be enlightened by what the Rabbis have taught us, namely "that no verse loses its simple meaning." This is true even though the essence of the Torah comes to teach us and to edify us with lore, law, and legislation, by way of allusions in the simple meaning and the verbosity of the text, as well as the thirty-two hermeneutical principles of R. Eliezer son of R. Yosei the Galilean and the thirteen principles of R. Yishmael.

והראשונים מתוך חסידותם נתעסקו לנטות אחרי הדרשות שהן עיקר, ומתוך כך לא הורגלו בעומק פשוטו של מקרא...  
The earlier authorities, due to their piety, dealt with derivations from the text, which are the essence; because of this, they were unaccustomed to the simple meaning of the text...

וגם רבנו שלמה אבי אמי מאיר עיני גולה שפירש תורה נביאים וכתובים נתן לב לפרש פשוטו של מקרא, ואף אני שמואל ב"ר מאיר חתנו זצ"ל נתווכחתי עמו ולפניו והודה לי שאילו היה לו פנאי היה צריך לעשות פרושים אחרים לפי הפשטות המתחדשים בכל יום.

Rabbeinu Shlomo, my mother's father, Illuminator of the Exile, who explained Tanach, took care to explain the simple meaning of the verse. And I, Shmuel, son of his son-in-law R. Meir, of blessed memory, argued with him and before him and he conceded that had he the time he would have written other comments according to the simple meanings which arise anew daily.

## Narrative

### 3. Genesis 49:3

ראובן בכרי אתה כחי וראשית אוני יתר שאת ונתר עז:

Re' uven, thou art my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the superiority of dignity, and the superiority of power:

### 4. Rashi there

יתר שאת. ראוי קייית להיות יתר על אחיך בכהנה, לשון נשיאות פנים:  
ויתר עז. במלכות

**Superiority in dignity** — Since you were the first-born it was proper that you should be superior to your brothers by being endowed with the priesthood.

**Superiority in power** — meaning in royal rank

### 5. Rashbam there

כחי וראשית אוני יתר שאת ויתר עז – דיבור אחד הוא. דרך המקראות לכפול את דבריהם

This is one statement. It is the manner of the text to repeat itself.

### 6. Genesis 37:25, 28

וישבּוּ לֵאכֹל־לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיִּרְאוּ וַהֲגִהוּ אַרְחֹת יִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמַלֵיהֶם נִשְׂאִים נִכְאֹת וְצָרִי נָלַט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרַיִמָּה... וַיַּעֲבְרוּ אַנְשֵׁי מִדְיָנִים סְחָרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף לְיִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִצְרַיִמָּה:

And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Yishme'elim came from Gil'ad with their camels bearing gum balm and ladanum, going to carry it down to Mizrayim... Then there passed by Midyanim, merchants; and they drew and lifted up Yosef out of the pit, and sold Yosef to the Yishme'elim for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Yosef into Mizrayim.

### 7. Rashbam there

ויעברו אנשים מדינים – ובתוך שהיו יושבים לאכול לחם ורחוקים היו קצת מן הבור לבלתי אכול על הדם וממתינים היו לישמעאלים שראו וקודם שבאו הישמעאלים עברו אנשים מדינים אחרים דרך שם וראוהו בבור ומשכוהו ומכרוהו המדינים לישמעאלים.

While the brothers had been sitting down to consume their meal, having distanced themselves somewhat from the pit into which they had thrown Joseph in order not to be guilty of “eating while spilling blood,” they were waiting for the Ishmaelites whom they had seen in the distance, to arrive. During this period the Midianites, coming from a different direction had passed there, saw Joseph in the pit, pulled him up, and proceeded to sell him to the Ishmaelites.

## Legal

### 8. Shemot 13:9

וְהָיָה לָךְ לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְךָ וּלְזִכָּרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ כִּי בְיַד חֲזָקָה הוֹצֵאתָ אֶת מִצְרָיִם:

“And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead—in order that the Teaching of the LORD may be in your mouth—that with a mighty hand the LORD freed you from Egypt.

### 9. Rashbam there

לאות על ירך – לפי עומק פשוטו: יהיה לך לזכרון תמיד, כאלו כתוב על ירך. כעין, שימני כחותם על לבך.

According to the depth of the meaning: an exhortation that this memory should be with you permanently, as if the subject matter had literally been inscribed on your hand.

### 10. Bereshit 1:5

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

### 11. Rashbam there

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר – אין כתיב כאן ויהי לילה ויהי יום, אלא ויהי ערב, שהעריב יום ראשון ושיקע האור, ויהי בוקר, בוקרו של לילה, שעלה עמוד השחר, הרי הושלם יום א' מן השישה ימים שאמר הקב"ה בעשרת הדברות, ואח"כ התחיל יום שני, ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע. ולא בא הכתוב לומר שהערב והבקר יום אחד הם, כי לא הוצרכנו לפרש אלא היאך היו ששה ימים, שהבקר יום ונגמרה הלילה, הרי נגמר יום אחד והתחיל יום שני.

**And it was evening, and it was morning** – It is not written here, “And it was night, and it was day”, but rather, “and it was evening, and it was morning” – the first day became evening and the sun set, and it became morning, the morning following the night, for the dawn broke” – behold, one day was completed from the six that Hashem spoke of in the Ten Commandments, and afterwards began the second day: “God said, ‘let there be a firmament’”. The text does not come to state that the evening and the morning are part of a single day, for it only needs to explain how there were six days – that the morning broke and the night was finished: behold, one day was completed and another day began.

### 12. Rashbam 1:8

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שני – שנטה היום לערוב, ואח"כ ויהי בקר של יום שני. הרי נגמר יום שני מששת הימים שאמר הקב"ה בעשרת הדברות, והתחיל עתה יום שלישי בבקר.

**And it was evening, and it was morning, a second day** – the day inclined toward evening, after which was the morning after the second day, behold, the second of the six days spoken of by the Holy One in the Ten Commandments, and now the third day began that morning.

### 13. Iggeret Hashabbat

It was mid Friday night, the fourteenth day of the month of Tevet, in the year 4919. I, Abraham the Spaniard, known as “Ibn Ezra,” was in one of the cities of the island that is called “Edge of the Earth,” which is in the seventh zone of the inhabited zones of the earth. I was asleep and my sleep was sweet to me. I dreamt that what appeared to be a man stood before me with a sealed letter in his hand. He spoke up and said to me: “Take this letter that the Sabbath sends you.” I prostrated myself and bowed before God and I blessed the God who gave us the Sabbath for honoring me so. I took hold of the letter with both my hands and my hands dripped with myrrh. I read the letter and it was sweet as honey to my mouth. However, as I read the last lines my heart became agitated and my soul almost failed me. I asked the one who stood before me: “What is my iniquity and what is my sin? From the day that I knew the revered God who created me, and I learned his commandments, I have always loved the Sabbath. I would go out to greet her with a full heart even before she arrived, and I would send her forth when she departed with joy and song. Who among her servants is as faithful as I? Why did she send me this letter?” It read as follows:

“I am Sabbath, the crowned law for the dear ones, fourth of the Decalogue. I am a sign of an eternal covenant between God and his children. With me the Lord concluded all of his tasks, as it is written in the first of the books. Manna did not fall on the Sabbath day in order that I serve as a sign for forebearers. I am a joy for those living on earth and tranquility for those who dwell in graves. I am a pleasure for both male and female; old and young rejoice in me. Mourners do not mourn in me nor eulogize the death of the righteous. Male-servant and maid-servant find quiet in me, and the strangers who are within the gates. All domesticated animals rest, as horses, donkeys and oxen. Every intelligent person sanctifies me over wine, the lowly perform the Havdala service as do Nazarites. Gates of understanding exist on any day, but on my day a hundred gates are opened. My day is honored by not traveling, seeking one’s needs, nor speaking words. I protected you all the days so that you would carefully observe me from the days of your youth. In your old age a fault has been found in you, for books were brought into your house in which is written to profane the seventh night. How do you remain silent and not vow to compile letters of truth and send them in all directions.”

The messenger of the Sabbath responded and said to me: “She was told that yesterday your students brought books of Biblical exegesis into your house in which is written to violate the Sabbath. Therefore, gird yourself on behalf of the Sabbath’s honor to fight the Torah’s battle with Sabbath’s enemies. Do not favor any person.” I awoke with my spirit pounding within me and my soul very troubled. I arose and my anger burned within me. I dressed, washed my hands, and took the books outside to the moonlight. There was written the following interpretation for the verse “there was evening and there was morning” (Genesis 1:5): “With dawn of the second day one full day ended, for nighttime follows daytime.”

I almost tore my garment and also that commentary, saying: “It is better to violate one Sabbath so that Israel will not violate many Sabbaths, if they should see this evil interpretation. We would also all be a mockery and a scorn in the eyes of the uncircumcised.” However, due to the honor of the Sabbath I restrained myself.

I vowed that I would not allow sleep for my eyes after the conclusion of the holy day until I wrote a lengthy letter explaining when the Torah’s day begins, thereby removing a

stumbling block, a snare and a trap. For all of Israel, both the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Karites), know that the only reason for writing the portion of Creation relating God's actions each day is so that adherents of the Torah will know how to observe the Sabbath. They should rest as revered God rested, counting the days of the week. Now, if the sixth day ended with the morning of the seventh day, we should observe the following night. This interpretation will mislead all of Israel, those in the east and those in the west, those near and those far, both the living and the dead. God should avenge the Sabbath from one who believes this disturbing interpretation. The tongue of one who reads it aloud should cleave to his palate. Also, the arm of the scribe who writes this commentary to Scripture should wither and his right eye weaken.