

# Rashi's Introductions to his Biblical Commentaries<sup>1</sup>

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ויאמר אלהים אל-אברהם . . . כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע  
בקולה: למדנו שהיה אברהם טפל לשרה בנביאות. (רש"י, על פי  
תנחומא ומדרש שמות רבה א 1)  
הנה הסכים המקום ב"ה בזה לשרה וגם אמר דרך כלל כל אשר  
תאמר אליך שרה וגו' דמשמע: הן בדבר זה והן בדברים אחרים.  
(ספר באר יצחק, לוי יצחק הורוויץ)

It is a privilege for me to participate in this celebration of the life and work of Professor Sara Japhet. Although I never sat in her classroom, Sara has taught me in many ways, both in the realm of pure academics as well as through the supportive manner in which respected senior professors can help junior scholars become colleagues. I am grateful to consider myself her student.

In an essay entitled, "Rashi's Historiosophy in the Introductions to his Bible Commentaries,"<sup>2</sup> historian Ivan Marcus postulates that although Rashi did not write many introductions to his biblical commentaries, those he did write may be seen as embodying a collective statement about Rashi's views of God's role in relationship to the Jewish people:

- 1 I presented an earlier version of this article as an address to the Society for the Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, at the 38th International Congress on Medieval Studies, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in May 2003. I am grateful to the members of the SSBMA in attendance that day for their questions and challenges, which have led to refinements in this article. My thanks also to Edward L. Greenstein and Mordechai Cohen, who read through an earlier version and offered further suggestions and bibliographic references. It is a great honor for me to join with colleagues in paying tribute to the life and scholarship of Sara Japhet upon the occasion of her retirement from formal teaching.
- 2 Ivan Marcus, "Rashi's Historiosophy in the Introductions to His Bible Commentaries," *REJ* 157 (1998): 47–55.

In his commentaries to the Hebrew Bible, Rashi of Troyes (ca. 1040–1105) generally did not write any introductions. There are three exceptions: the beginning of the Pentateuch, the Book of Zechariah, and the Song of Songs. If one asks why he wrote some kind of introductory comments on just those three books, it appears that each of them deals with an aspect of Jewish history viewed as a theosophical statement. Arranged in the sequence, Pentateuch, Song of Song, and Zechariah, the three comments provide a statement about God’s loving relationship to the Jewish people from the creation of the world, throughout historical time, and towards the messianic future.<sup>3</sup>

Marcus’s last point is central to his thesis; he refers to it again in the conclusion of his essay:

Together, Rashi’s three introductions constitute a continuous story about Israel’s sacred history, focused on God’s special relationship to Israel. Rashi is saying that, in Scripture, God is telling his readers that Israel is at the center of world history. God created the world for the sake of Israel (the Torah); throughout present history God loves Israel and longs to return to her (Song of Songs); and in the end of time, God will redeem Israel (Zechariah).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, for Marcus, the identification of Rashi’s introductions is crucial: if these three are properly categorized as introductions, and are Rashi’s *only* introductions to contain themes that relate to God’s relationship with the Jewish people, then indeed one may reasonably infer that they make the kind of complete statement of historiography that Marcus wishes to find. However, if other introductions may be identified that do not further contribute specifically to this philosophy of history, this discovery might undermine Marcus’s argument to some degree. To be sure, complete consistency is not required on Rashi’s part for him to convey the theme of God’s love for the Jewish people—that he strongly believed in this love requires no demonstration, as is self-evident to anyone who reads through his commentaries. However, what is at issue is the degree to which Rashi chose the forum of introductions to his commentaries as the venue through which specifically to stress this theme. To properly assess Marcus’s thesis, we shall first review the three texts classified by Marcus as introductions, and then

3 Marcus “Rashi’s Historiosophy,” 47.

4 Marcus “Rashi’s Historiosophy,” 54.

look elsewhere among Rashi's biblical commentaries to see if still other introductions may be discovered.

In determining that Rashi in fact wrote only three introductions to his biblical commentaries, Marcus builds on the work of earlier scholars<sup>5</sup> and employs a single criterion to identify an introduction: whether or not the first comment is directed at explicating the first verse of the book. Where Rashi's first comment is focused on an exegetical problem in the first verse, Marcus does *not* consider it to be an introduction. However, whenever Rashi opens his commentary by addressing any issue *other than* that of the first words of the first verse, Marcus takes the position that we may assume the comment to be not essentially exegetical, but rather introductory, in character.<sup>6</sup>

By applying Marcus's own criterion, one can build a strong case that Rashi wrote *more* than three introductions. If this indeed proves to be true, and if the content of these other introductory comments touches on issues other than that of a universal chronology, then we must call into question a major portion of Marcus's thesis, namely, that the three introductions to Genesis, Song of Songs and Zechariah constitute, for Rashi, a complete statement of "the patterns of Israel's sacred history, down to his own time and beyond."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, if we can identify other criteria to denote comments of an introductory character, we may conclude that Rashi's agenda is perhaps more complex than that for which Marcus allows. Before proceeding with new readings, let us first review the ground covered by Marcus. Let me assert at the outset that I accept all three of the comments examined by Marcus as authentic introductions. The first of these is Rashi's opening remarks on Genesis:

אמר רבי יצחק: לא היה צריך להתחיל את התורה אלא *מהחדש הזה לכם*, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה ישראל. ומה טעם פתח בבראשית? משום *כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים*. שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל "לסטים אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים," הם אומרים להם: "כל הארץ של הקב"ה—הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו; ברצונו נתנה להם, וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו."

5 Marcus refers to essays by Alexander Marx, Edward L. Greenstein, Nechama Leibowitz and Moshe Ahrend, and others; see the notes to "Rashi's Historiosophy," 47–48.

6 Marcus "Rashi's Historiosophy," 48.

7 Marcus "Rashi's Historiosophy," 49.

Said R. Isaac: He ought not have begun the Torah<sup>8</sup> [from any place other than] *this month shall be for you [the beginning of the months]* (Exod 12:2), for that is the first commandment that Israel was commanded. And what is the reason that he began with *bereshit*? On account of *the strength of His deeds he has declared to his people, to give to them the inheritance of the nations* (Ps 111:6). For should the nations of the world say to Israel, “You are robbers, for you have conquered the lands of the seven [Canaanite] nations,” [Israel] could say back to them, “The whole world belongs to the Holy One, Blessed be God. God created it, and gave it to them for whom it was fit in his eyes. According to His will did He give it to them, and according to His will did He take it from them and give it to us.”<sup>9</sup>

It is patent that in this brief composition, Rashi does not address the exegetical difficulties inherent in the first verse or verses of Scripture. Indeed, the fact that Rashi follows this pericope with three interpretations of Gen 1:1, two based on midrashic methodology and the third with a contextual, linguistic approach, makes it clear that this specific text is homiletic, even polemical in character.<sup>10</sup> There is some literary evidence for linking the two midrashic interpretations with the opening section that I am considering to be the true introduction. As Abraham Berliner suggested almost 150 years ago, variants of the two sections are found together in one

8 Generally understood as “the Torah ought to have begun only with . . .”

9 All translations of Rashi’s commentaries are my own.

10 The two midrashic interpretations on Gen 1:1 (before which Rashi prefaces the remark *אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני*, “this scriptural verse says nothing other than ‘expound me’”) are: *ובשביל*; *ובשכר*; *ובשכר דרכו*; *ובשביל התורה שנקראת ראשית דרכו*; *ובשביל* “This is as our rabbis have taught: [the verse means that God created the world] for the sake of the Torah, which is called *the beginning of his way* (Prov 8:22); and [God did so as well] for the sake of Israel, which is called *the first of his produce* (Jer 2:3).” The contextual interpretation (before which Rashi prefaces the remark *וואם באת לפרשו כפשוטו כך פרשהו*; “and if you wished to explain this passage according to its contextual meaning, this is how you should explain it”) is: *בראשית בריאת שמים וארץ, והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך [על פני תהום]. . . ויאמר אלהים יהי אור. אף כאן אתה אומר בראשית ברא אלהים וגו’ כמו בראשית ברוא* “In the beginning of the creation of heaven and earth—and the earth was howling waste, and darkness [was on the face of the deep]; . . . then God said, ‘Let there be light!’ Here, too you should understand *bereshit bara Elohim* as ‘in the beginning of God’s creating.’ . . .” These three interpretations are, in fact, Rashi’s opening comments on the Torah; the paragraph that precedes them is therefore, according to the criterion outlined above, an introduction.

of the late midrashic *Yalqut* compilations.<sup>11</sup> If the two are in fact to be regarded as one extended introductory unit, encompassing both the shorter piece presented above plus the two midrashic interpretations beginning with *אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני* “This scriptural verse says nothing other than ‘expound me,’” we would be forced to conclude that while the extended comment might still be considered to be an introduction, our criterion for identifying it as such—i.e., that it not address the opening verse(s) of the book exegetically—would have to be reconsidered.

Elazar Touitou has demonstrated the probability that this introduction—and here he apparently has in mind the shorter comment, ending before the midrashic interpretations—was written as a reaction against the call for the First Crusade, in 1096.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, assuming this is the case, then it is all the more likely that this passage is not part of Rashi's exegetical treatment of the first sentence in Scripture but, as I have long suspected, may rather be an independent homily, later inserted at the beginning of the commentary to serve as a kind of introduction to the whole work.<sup>13</sup> For, given Rashi's likely chronology, he had been teaching Genesis each year for many years before 1096, when his articulation of the enduring claim of the Jewish people upon the Land of Israel would have been a timely consolation to folk considered by the Christian majority to be a lowly and despised nation.<sup>14</sup>

11 Abraham Berliner, ed., *Rashi on the Torah: The Commentary of Solomon B. Isaac* (Berlin, 1866), 182 n. 1 (Hebrew). Berliner writes: *”ויראה כי גם מה שכתב רש”י “בסמוך אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני שייך לדברי רבי יצחק”* “it appears that what Rashi wrote, ‘this Scripture says nothing other than “expound me,”’ also belongs to the words of R. Isaac.” A variant of the passage is also found in one of the versions of *Tanḥuma*; see Betsal’el Mayani et al., eds., *Pentateuch with Rashi Hashalem* (Jerusalem: Ariel United Israel Institutes, 1986), 2 nn. 1–2 (Hebrew).

12 Elazar Touitou, “Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1–6 in the Context of Judeo-Christian Controversy,” *HUCA* 61 (1990): 159–83; idem, “The Historical Background of Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 1,” in *Rashi Studies* (ed. Zvi Arie Steinfeld; Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 97–105 (Hebrew). Touitou attributes the idea to D. Louys; see “Historical Background,” 102 n. 18, for the bibliography he cites there.

13 There is, I must admit, no textual evidence to support my hypothesis.

14 The consensus opinion is that Rashi had completed at least the first recension of his Torah commentary by the age of thirty; given his chronology of 1040–1105, this would be well before the onset of the Crusades. See Benjamin J. Gelles, *Peshat and Derash in the Exegesis of Rashi* (Etudes Sur Le Judaisme Medieval 9; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 136–43.

In fact, the composition may be polemical in another regard, as well. For Rashi's opening comment addresses the very essence of Torah: contrary to the Christian charge that Jews slavishly and carnally adhered to the Law and missed the allegorical meaning of Scripture (which bespoke Christianity),<sup>15</sup> Rashi avers that the Torah is Divine *Instruction* (הוראה) which includes far more than law alone—specifically, in this comment, the sacred, instructive narrative of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus.<sup>16</sup> Marcus next considers Rashi's opening comment to the Song of Songs to be an introduction, and not in and of itself to be an exegesis of the first verse; again, I would agree. In fact, the comment is one of Rashi's most complete methodological statements. As in his celebrated methodological comment on Gen 3:8,<sup>17</sup> Rashi here provides a coherent and concise presentation of the ancient rabbinic allegory that the book's true message celebrates the unbroken love between God and the Jewish people:

15 I.e., the idea that the “Old Testament” pointed to the Christian messiah. See Anna Sapir Abulafia, “Jewish Carnality in Twelfth Century Renaissance Thought,” in *Christianity and Judaism*, edited by Diana Wood (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 59–75.

16 See Rashi's second comment on Gen 22:2 (“ד”ה “ארץ המריה”): Jerusalem is called “Moriah” because from there did instruction go forth to Israel (על שם שמשם יצאה (הוראה לישראל ארי מציון תיפוק אוריתא ... (מירושלם).

17 There is a long history of slight variations in the transmission of this important statement; I adopt here an eclectic choice among the variants, presenting my best sense of what Rashi may have intended: וכבר סדרום רבותינו, יש מדרשי אגדה רבים, ובשאר מדרשים. ואני לא באתי אלא לפשוטו של מקרא, ולאגדה המיישבת על מכונם בבראשית רבה ובשאר מדרשים. דברי המקרא ונמשמעו, דבר דבור על אפניו: “There are many homiletical midrashim (on these verses), and the rabbis have long ago arranged them in their proper place in *Genesis Rabbah* and the other midrashim. Whereas I have only come to explain Scripture according to its contextual [*peshuto*] understanding, and according to the aggadah that reconciles the words of Scripture and its sense, each word understood according to its character.” For a somewhat different variant, cf. Menachem Cohen, ed. *Mikra’ot Gedolot ‘Haketer’: A Revised and Augmented Scientific Edition of ‘Mikraot Gedolot’ Based on the Aleppo Codex and Early Medieval Mss. Genesis, I* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1997), ad loc. Other variations appear in the apparatus in the first edition of Berliner, *Rashi on the Torah*, ad loc. For a study of Rashi's methodology, specifically the methodology articulated at Gen 3:8, see Edward L. Greenstein, “Sensitivity to Language in Rashi's Commentary on the Torah,” in *The Solomon Goldman Lectures* (ed. Mayer I. Gruber; Chicago: The Spterus College of Judaica Press, 1993), 51–71.

אחת דבר אלהים שתיים זו שמענו. מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים, וסוף דבר: אין לך מקרא יוצא מידי משמעו. ואעפ"י שדברו הנביאים דבריהם בדוגמא, צריך ליישב הדוגמא על אופנה ועל סדרה, כמו שהמקראות סדורים זה אחר זה. ראיתי לספר הזה כמה מדרשי אגדה, יש סדורים כל הספר במדרש אחד, ויש מפוזרים בכמה ספרי אגדה, מקראות לבדם, ואינן מתיישבין על לשון המקרא וסדר המקראות. ואמרתי בלבי לתפוס משמע המקראות, ליישב ביאורם על הסדר, והמדרשות—רבתינו קבעום מדרש ומדרש במקומו.

אומר אני שראה שלמה ברוח הקדש שעתידין לגלות גולה אחר גולה, חורבן אחר חורבן, ולהתאונן בגלות זו על כבודם הראשון, ולזכור חבה ראשנה אשר היו סגלה מכל העמים, לאמר: אלכה ואשובה אל אישי הראשון כי טוב לי אז מעתה. ויזכירו את חסדיו, ואת מעלם אשר מעלו ואת הטובות אשר אמר לתת להם באחרית הימים. וייסד הספר הזה ברוח הקדש בלשון אשה צרורה אלמנות חיות, משתוקקת על בעלה, מתרפקת על דודה, מזכרת אהבת נעוריה אליו. גם דודה צר לו בצרתה, ומזכיר חסדי נעוריה ונוי יפייה וכשרון פעלה אשר נקשר עמה באהבה עזה, להודיעה כי לא מלבו ענה, ולא שילוחיה שילוחין, כי עוד היא אשתו והוא אישה.<sup>18</sup>

*One thing has God spoken; two have we heard* (Ps 62:12). One scriptural verse yields many meanings, and the end of the matter is that no scriptural verse ever escapes the hold of its sense. And even though the prophets spoke their words in allegory [דוגמא],<sup>19</sup> one must reconcile the allegory according to its characteristics and its order, just as the verses of Scripture are ordered one after the other. I have seen for this book [Song of Songs] many homiletical midrashim, for some of which the entire book is arranged in one midrash, whereas others are scattered in many books of midrash, on individual verses. But these are not reconciled according to the language of Scripture or the order of the verses. I have intended to capture the sense of the scriptural verses, to reconcile their explanations according to the order. And as for the midrashim—the rabbis have fixed them, each midrash in its place.

I say that Solomon saw, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, that in the future [the Israelites] would be exiled in exile following exile, destruction following destruction; and would mourn in this exile over their former glory;

18 I have presented the Hebrew transcription of JTSA Lutzki MS 778, as found in Sarah Kamin and Avrom Saltman, eds., *Secundum Salomonem: A 13th Century Latin Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1989 [Hebrew and Latin]). The English translation is my own.

19 See Sarah Kamin, "דוגמא in Rashi's Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Tarbiz* 52 (1983): 41–58 (Hebrew). Reprinted in *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible*, (ed. Yair Zakovitch; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1991), 13–30.

and would remember the first love when they were treasured above all peoples; and would say: *I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now* (Hos 2:9); and would call to mind God's loving acts, and their betrayal with which they betrayed [God], and the bounties that He said He would give them in the End of Days.

And he [Solomon] established this book through the agency of the Holy Spirit in the language of a woman bound in living widowhood, yearning for her husband, longing for her beloved, calling to mind the love of her youth for him. Even so her beloved is troubled by her trouble, and makes mention of the loving acts of her youth, and the splendor of her beauty, and the fitness of her actions wherein he was attracted to her in a fierce love;<sup>20</sup> and he informs her that it is not His intention that she be afflicted, nor is there a true separation between them,<sup>21</sup> for she is yet his wife and he her husband.<sup>22</sup> There are three things at play in this long comment, none of them exegetical per se, certainly not pertaining to the first verse. The first paragraph is the functional equivalent of the methodological portion of Rashi's comment on Gen 3:8. Rashi addresses an exegetical tradition that does not permit a surface sense of the text to emerge; rather, since "the prophets spoke their words in allegory," he will seek to create a coherent, contextualized interpretation of their figurative language. Moreover, he faces the fact that aspects of the rabbinic allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs are scattered about the ancient rabbinic literary corpus (e.g., *Midrash Hazit*, the continuous exegetical midrash on the Song of Songs, as well as the midrashic interpretation of individual verses from the Song of Songs found in other midrashim and the two talmudim). Rashi's response to this situation is to order these allegorical midrashim in a verse-by-verse treatment of the

20 See Song 8:6.

21 Literally, "nor are her castings-off, castings-off."

22 For a different translation, cf. Michael A. Signer, "God's Love for Israel: Apologetic and Hermeneutical Strategies in Twelfth-Century Biblical Exegesis," in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth Century Europe* (ed. Michael A. Signer and John Van Engen; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 123–49, pp. 131–32). In this essay, Signer treats several of the introductory comments and has drawn conclusions that somewhat overlap my own. In particular, he writes that "in the first few sentences of his commentaries on [each of the books of the Pentateuch], he offers arguments that cumulatively assert that God's law and love for Israel are one and the same" (133; see 148 n. 57).

book as a whole, so that the individual midrashic interpretations are presented organically, in one exegetical composition.

In what I have marked as the second paragraph of the introduction, Rashi presents general exegetical principles that will guide the reader in approaching the book as a whole. Rashi sees the book not, of course, as an anthology of erotic love poetry, but as a sacred poetic narrative of the history of the Jewish people, stretching backward to the slavery and the Exodus and forward to the Messianic Redemption and the End of Days.

The third paragraph repeats the same type of consoling elements that are found in Rashi's introduction to the Torah: God has loved, and continues to love, the Jewish people. Contrary to the teachings of the Church, God has not rejected the people, even though God had felt spurned and betrayed by them. Alongside momentary anger there is everlasting and abiding love, and the declaration that God's people's continuing suffering is not God's doing or intention. Thus armed, the reader can proceed to Rashi's interpretation of the book, knowing that Scripture speaks of a continuing and active relationship between God and the Jewish people.

Marcus's final example is Rashi's introduction to the book of Zechariah. While I would agree that the comment is introductory, it does not seem to me that Rashi's major interpretive concern is eschatological. Instead, in the main this comment addresses the exegetical difficulties faced by any reader of the book: the prophet's obscure language makes the text exceedingly difficult:

נבואת זכריה סתומה היא מאד, כי יש בה מראות דומות לחלום הניתן לפתרון, ואין אנו יכולים לעמוד על אמיתת פתרונו עד יבא מורה צדק. ולפי היכולת אתן לב ליישב המקראות אחד אחד מן הפתרונות הדומים לו, ואחר פתרונו של יונתן.

The prophecy of Zechariah is most obscure, for there are in it visions that are similar to a dream that requires explanation, whereas we are unable to establish the truth of the explanation until there shall come a Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>23</sup> And to the best of my abilities I will attempt to reconcile the scriptural verses one by one, from the explanations that best fit each, and [as well] according to the explanation of [*Targum Ps.-Jonathan*].

Rashi's use of one of his key technical expressions, "ליישב המקראות,"<sup>24</sup> "to reconcile the scriptural verses," telegraphs to the reader that Rashi is

23 Rashi adapts the prophetic language of Hosea 10:12.

24 See Gelles, *Peshat and Derash*, 14–19; Sarah Kamin, *Rashi's Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash*

thinking along methodological, and not exegetical, lines. He is articulating his intention to interpret as closely as he can according to the language of Scripture, relying for guidance both on his keen intuition and (in the case of Zechariah) on the Aramaic rendering of the Targum.

Up to this point, we have reviewed the three introductions examined by Marcus. In moving on to consider additional examples, let us recall that Marcus's criterion in identifying a comment as introductory is whether or not the comment itself illuminates the reader's understanding of the initial verses of the biblical book; if not, then the comment may be seen as introductory and not exegetical. However, how would it affect our understanding of an initial comment as introductory if there might be a thematic connection among introductory comments to several books, whether or not the comments themselves interpret the first verse?

By way of responding to this question, let us consider Rashi's opening comments on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.<sup>25</sup> In each of these passages, Rashi does indeed devote at least part of his effort to clarifying the opening words of the biblical book. However, as we shall see there is a thematic link among all of the comments that has nothing really to do with a contextual exposition of the first verses of the book. Observe Rashi's initial comment on Exodus:

ואלה שמות בני ישראל : אע"פ שמנאן בחייהן בשמותם, חזר ומנאן במיתתן, להודיע חבתן שנמשלו לכוכבים, שמוציאן ומכניסן במספר ובשמותם, שנאמר: המוציא במספר צבאם לכולם בשם יקרא.

*These are the names of the Israelites:* Even though [Scripture] counted them during their lives by their names, it repeats and counts them at their deaths, to declare [God's] love for them, in that they were compared to the stars, for [God] takes them out and brings them in according to their number and their names, as it is said: *He brings out their host according to number, calling them all by name.* (Isa 40:26)

Here Rashi's main exegetical goal is to clarify why the Torah would enumerate the names of the Israelites at the beginning of Exodus, when Genesis had accomplished that very task near the book's end (see Gen 46:8–27). Rashi answers that God did so out of the love that He feels for the Jewish people. The connection between *counting* and *love* is not self-

(Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1986), 59–60, n. 13 (Hebrew).

25 I have already presented Rashi's introductory comment to Genesis, above, p. xx.

evident, but is an idea earlier expressed by midrashic texts.<sup>26</sup> The word that Rashi employs to express God's feeling is חֶבֶד, a word denoting fondness and affection, and not any abstract notion of love that might be considered from a philosophical or theological point of view.

Indeed, if we look at the next selection, Rashi's first comment on Leviticus, we see the same word and point of view expressed in the comment on Exodus. Here, however, it is not *counting* that indicates God's חֶבֶד, God's affection for Israel, but rather *calling*:

ויקרא אל משה: לכל דברות ולכל אמירות ולכל צוויים קדמה קריאה, לשון חבה, לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו, שנאמר: וקרא זה אל זה. אבל לנביאי האומות עכו"ם נגלה אליהן בלשון עראי וטומאה, שנאמר: ויקר אלהים אל בלעם.

*And he called to Moses:* For all speech-acts and for all sayings and for all commandings, a “calling” came first, the language of affection, the language which the ministering angels use, as it is said: *And one called to another* (Isa 6:3). But with regard to the gentile prophets, God is revealed to them in the language of happenstance and defilement, as it is said: *And God happened [to appear] to Balaam* (Numbers 23:4; see also 23:16).

Once again, while there is nothing inherently logical about either *counting* or *calling* to connote God's affection for the Jewish people, Rashi takes the meaning of both of these terms as self-evident, supported by some rather creative midrashic use of scriptural prooftexts.<sup>27</sup> As we see, the comment on Leviticus 1:1 contains the additional polemical aspect of providing a contrast to God's loving call to Israelite prophets, namely, the association of God's call to gentile prophets with ritual defilement: when God makes God's own self manifest to Balaam, the Torah employs the verb ק-ר-י, meaning, ‘to happen [to do something]’. However, this biblical Hebrew verb also is used by the rabbis to refer to the ritual impurity of nocturnal sexual emissions.<sup>28</sup>

26 See Solomon Buber (ed), *Midrash Tanhuma* (Jerusalem: Eshkol, 1971), *Shemot* 2 (Hebrew). See the extended discussion in Mayani, *Rashi Hashalem*, 4:2–5, nn. 1–2.

27 For example, Rashi lifts the expression לשון חבה, “(this is) affectionate language,” out of its midrashic context in *Leviticus Rabbah* 2:8 (where it expounds the word “man” in Lev 1:2) and applies it instead to the significance of God's “calling out” to Moses before “speaking” to him in Lev 1:1, an interpretation which he has learned from the *Sifra*.

28 See Rashi on Num 23:4. There, concerning the biblical expression ויקר, “(God) encountered (Balaam),” he comments: לשון גנאי, לשון טומאת קרי, “(this is) the language of disgrace, the language of the impurity of a sexual discharge.”

Perhaps as well, the term may be understood to have connotations of hostility, as in the biblical Hebrew term קרי, 'hostile', which is found repeatedly with that meaning in such texts as Leviticus 26.

It should come as no surprise that Rashi sees fit once again to use the term חבה, expressing God's affection for Israel, in his opening comment on the book of Numbers.

וידבר . . . במדבר סיני באחד לחדש : מתוך חיבתן לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה : כשיצאו ממצרים מנאן ; וכשנפלו בעגל מנאן, לידע מנין הנותרים ; כשבא להשרות שכינתו עליהם מנאם, באחד בניסן הוקם המשכן, ובאחד באייר מנאם.

*And [God] spoke in the Wilderness of Sinai on the first of the month:* On account of God's love for them does God count them at every moment. When they left Egypt, God counted them; and when they fell on account of the calf, God counted them, to know how many remained; when God came to cause His presence to indwell among them, He counted them, on the first of Nisan the Tabernacle was erected, and on the first of Iyyar He counted them.

Here, too, we see that Rashi takes for granted the midrashic notion of 'counting' as an expression of God's love for the Jewish people. As we turn to the last book of the Torah, we must admit that Rashi does not make an intimate connection between the book's opening and God's חבה for the Jewish people. Instead, he is faced with a different, midrashically-inferred reality. In biblical Hebrew, the word דברים in this context means 'words' (as in "these are the words that Moses spoke. . ."; Deut 1:1). However, in the world of midrash, the word דברים connotes תוכחה, or '(words of) rebuke'.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the midrashic approach would understand the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy as "these are the rebuking words that Moses spoke to Israel. . . ." In this situation, Rashi evidently could not completely clear the deck of negative connotations and find in the verse an expression of God's love for the Jewish people. However, he does manage somewhat to save the day:

אלה הדברים : לפי שהן דברי תוכחות, ומנה כאן כל המקומות שהכעיסו לפני המקום בהן, לפיכך סתם את הדברים והזכירן ברמז, מפני כבודן של ישראל.

29 See *Sifre Devarim* 1:1: "These are the words that Moses spoke: This teaches that they were words of rebuke." And so also *Targum Ps.-Jonathan* to Deuteronomy 1:1: "These are the words of rebuke that Moses spoke."

*These are the words:* Since they were words of rebuke, and he [Moses] enumerates here all of the places where the Israelites caused God to be angry with them, therefore he obscured the words and mentions them [i.e, the places] in hint [only], out of concern for the honor of Israel.

One cannot but be impressed with the ease with which Rashi turns what might have been a midrashically-induced nightmare for the Jewish reader into yet another comforting text. Reading the list of sites visited by Israel on her journey out of Egypt (“Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab”), some of which are otherwise unidentified or at least have unexplained roles in the narrative of Israel’s desert wanderings, Rashi assumes that this very lack of clarity is sign of Moses’s (and by extension, God’s) concern for Israel’s honor.

If we may summarize our findings to this point, we see that there is a thematic connection among all of Rashi’s introductions to the Five Books of Moses—including, we should stress, the opening comment in the Genesis commentary. All five of these comments (and for that matter, we may also consider here the introduction to Song of Songs) stress God’s unique and timeless love, favor and affection for the people of Israel. This comforting message, while developed in most of the examples through the interplay of midrashic proofs, seems to override any apparent contextual exegetical goal.

In contrast to all of the comments examined thus far, other introductory texts seems to be less interested in homiletical, consoling messages, and rather more in a variety of what we may term more authentically contextual concerns. The first text in this group that we will consider is Rashi’s opening comment on Samuel.<sup>30</sup> We should recall Marcus’s criterion for identifying comments as introductory, for it will serve us well in the present context: we may consider a comment to be introductory as opposed to exegetical if it addresses concerns that are not textually specific to the first verse, but are rather more general in nature. Rashi’s first comment on Samuel is a case in point. The first verse of Samuel identifies the father of the hero of the book: ויהי איש אחד מן־הרמתים צופים מהר אפרים ושמו אלקנה בן־ירחם בן־אליהוא בן־תחו: בן־צוף אפרתי, “There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.” Rashi’s first comment does not in

30 I am happy to acknowledge my former student, Rabbi Ryan Dulcan, who first proposed to me that Rashi’s opening comment in Samuel is introductory in nature.

any way attempt to explicate this verse (indeed, that will be the job of Rashi's subsequent comments). Instead, Rashi concerns himself with the flow of the narrative from the end of Deuteronomy up to this point in Scripture; put differently, he is interested in the chain of Torah tradition:

הכל לפי הסדר: משה מסר את התורה ליהושוע, ויהושוע לזקנים, ושופט מסר לשופט, עד שהגיע לעלי, וממנו לשמואל, כמו ששנינו: "זקנים לנביאים."

Everything [goes] according to order: Moses passed the Torah to Joshua; Joshua to the Elders; each Judge passed to another Judge; until it arrived to Eli, and from him to Samuel, as we have taught: "And the elders to the prophets." (*M. Avot* 1:1)

Rashi here addresses a specific narrative fact: while there is a fairly smooth transition between Deuteronomy and Joshua, the book of Judges interrupts that flow to a certain degree (even though Joshua's death is recapitulated in *Judg* 2:6–9), and there is absolutely no explicit connection between the end of Judges and the beginning of Samuel. Rashi therefore brings to bear his rabbinic training, and presents a gloss inspired by the Mishnah.<sup>31</sup>

Rashi has to do some fancy footwork, however, in terms of both the biblical narrative and the claims of the rabbinic text. First, note the narrative interruption between the elders and the judges, in Rashi's comment. Whereas the Torah makes explicit the transmission of the Torah by Moses to the priests and the elders (*Deut* 31:9), the Mishnah completely overlooks any role of the priests and has the elders conveying the Torah directly to the prophets. Rashi, however, has to consider the important biblical role played by the judges, and after them Eli (who *is* a priest!) and Samuel. This Rashi does deftly, through a citation of the Mishnah that must be understood elliptically, as though it were written "from the elders [via various Judges and priests] to the prophets," represented first by Samuel. Since the narrative flow of Scripture after Samuel is uninterrupted through the rest of Samuel and Kings, down to the Destruction (and even beyond, through Ezra and Nehemiah), Rashi needs to preserve the Torah's transmission at its weakest (literary) biblical link—the beginning of Samuel. In any case, Rashi's opening comment on the book of Samuel may be considered introductory

31 *Mishnah Avot* 1:1: משה קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושוע, ויהושוע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרו לאנשי כנסת הגדולה Sinai and passed it to Joshua, and Joshua [passed it] to the Elders, and the Elders [passed it] to the Prophets, and the Prophets passed it to the Men of the Great Assembly."

since it does not reflect specific exegetical concerns relative to the first verse of that book.

A similar case obtains with Rashi's first comment on the book of Psalms. Contrary to the representations of most of the editions in rabbinic bibles, Rashi's opening does not address the book's initial words, "אשרי האיש," "Happy is the man," but is concerned with more general issues pertaining to the entire canonical collection of Psalms:

בעשרת לשוני זמר נאמר ספר זה: בניצוח, בניגון, במזמור, בשיר, בהלל, בתפילה, בכרכה, בהודאה, באשרי, בהללוה. כנגד עשרה בני אדם שאמרוהו: אדם, מלכי צדק, אברהם, משה, דוד,<sup>32</sup> שלמה, אסף, ושלושה בני קרח. חלוקין על ידותון: יש אומרים אדם היה, כמה שכתוב בדברי הימים; ויש אומרים אין ידותון שבספר הזה אלא על שם הדת והדינין של גזירות שעברו עליו ועל ישראל.

This book uses ten expressions for "song" [each identifiable by a characteristic introductory expression]: leading, instrumentation, psalm, song, praise, prayer, blessing, thanksgiving, "happy is," Hallelujah. These correspond to the ten people who said them [i.e., the Psalms]: Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph, and three sons of Korah. There is a dispute concerning Jeduthun. Some say that he [Jeduthun in the titles of Ps. 39:1; 62:1; 72:1] was the person who was written about in [1] Chronicles [16:38] while others explain that Jeduthun in this book is only [an acronym] referring to the judgments, i.e., the tribulations, which overtook him [King David] and Israel.<sup>33</sup>

Addressing the almost intractable problem of the technical language found in the superscriptions of most of the Psalms, Rashi makes a connection between ten specific headings found in the Psalms (translated by Mayer Gruber as "genres") and ten of their putative authors. While Rashi does not explain any of those superscriptions (at least here, in this comment), he does

32 The Hebrew text of MS Vienna 220 transcribed by Mayer Gruber (see the following footnote) omits David from this list, whereas the version provided by Menahem Cohen in *Mikraot Gedolot Haketer*, based primarily on MS Parma de Rossi 181, does include the attribution to David. As the rabbinic tradition, most famously represented by the baraita in *b. Bava Batra* 14b, is virtually unanimous in ascribing at least most of the book of Psalms to David, the omission of his name by certain manuscript traditions is most curious. I am grateful to Mayer Gruber for much fruitful correspondence on this subject.

33 For a different translation of Rashi's introductory comment on Psalms, cf. Mayer I. Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (The Brill Reference Library of Judaism 18; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 165.

presume to associate them with specific authorial voices. Thus we may say that in his opening comment on Psalms, Rashi is not concerned with answering any specific exegetical question in the first verse, but rather in establishing the basis for determining who wrote the Psalms.

Precisely this concern—i.e., who wrote the composition—animates the first part of Rashi's opening comment to the book of Lamentations:

ירמיה כתב ספר קינות, היא המגלה אשר שרף יהויקים על האח אשר על האש.<sup>34</sup> והיו בה שלש אל"ף ביתו"ת—איכה ישכה!; איכה יעיב!; איכה יועם! שוב הוסיף עליו אני הגבר, שהוא שלש אל"ף ביתו"ת, שנאמר: ועוד נוסף עליהם דברים רבים כהמה, שלש כנגד שלש.

Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations,<sup>35</sup> that is the scroll that Jehoiakim burned *on the fire in the brazier* (Jer 36:23). And it consisted of three [chapters of] alphabetical acrostic: [the chapter beginning] *How [solitary does the city] sit!* (Lam 1:1); [the chapter beginning] *How [has the Lord] shamed [Fair Zion]!* (Lam 2:1); [the chapter beginning] *How [does the gold] grow dim!* (Lam 4:1). Moreover, [later] he added to it [the chapter beginning] *I am the man* (Lam 3:1), which is itself three alphabetical acrostics, as it is written: *moreover, there were added to them many words like those* (Jer 36:32), three corresponding to three.<sup>36</sup>

Rashi immediately presents the Talmudic tradition that Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations.<sup>37</sup> But he goes well beyond that; he establishes the specific “historical” context in which the book was composed. Moreover, he calls attention to the main literary device in the book, namely, the alphabetical acrostic, and points to an internal structure of three individual acrostics (chapters 1, 2 and 4) corresponding to the triple acrostic contained in chapter 3. While Rashi does not account for the final chapter, which is not an alphabetical acrostic, he has to his own satisfaction identified the author of the book and has determined the internal organization or structure of the work as a whole.

34 The citation as found in Rashi's commentary in the standard rabbinic Bible is likely a corruption of the MT.

35 Rashi uses the descriptive title for the book, ספר הקינות, literally, “the Book of Laments.” However, the biblical book is more commonly known nowadays by the Hebrew *incipit* of the book, איכה, literally, “How [does the city sit solitary]!”

36 I.e., chapter 3 contains a triple alphabetical acrostic that corresponds to the three other single alphabetical acrostics in chapters 1, 2 and 4.

37 *B. Bava Batra* 15b.

When we consider the brief comment opening Rashi's exegesis of the book of Proverbs, we do not see Rashi take any step towards identifying the author—who, after all, is identified by the biblical book itself!—but rather we see a concern for genre somewhat analogous to that of his introduction to Psalms. Once again, we note that the exegete does not concern himself with explicating any problem in the first verse, but rather makes a general statement about the overall character of the book:

כל דבריו דוגמות ומשלים. משל התורה באשה טובה ומשל עבודה זרה באשה זונה.

All of his words are in allegories and proverbs. He allegorized the Torah as a good woman and he allegorized idolatry as a lewd woman.

In two sentences, Rashi has first identified the genre of the book—we might say he terms it “an allegorical wisdom composition”—and then offered a general interpretation of the allegory. Solomon the wise is not simply speaking about the virtues of a young man keeping company with “a woman of valor” rather than a “woman of the street.” Rather, he is employing those images to represent the eternal struggle between a life of Torah and the folly of idolatry.

With regard to the book of Ezekiel, Rashi is faced with the rabbinic tradition that the prophet did not compose his own book—most likely due to the fact that Ezekiel spent most of his life in Babylonia, and the rabbis had a tradition that the books of the Bible were all composed in the Land of Israel.<sup>38</sup> Instead, Rashi addresses the peculiarity in the first four verses of the book:

ויהי בשלשים שנה: סתם הנביא דבריו ולא פירש שמו מי הוא ולא פירש למנין מה מנה. לפיכך הפסיקה רוח הקדש את דבריו בשני מקראות הסמוכין לזה, ללמד מי הוא הנביא וללמד למנין מה מנה, שנאמר: *בחמשה לחודש היא השנה החמישית*, וגו'—אין אלה דברי הנביא, שהרי כבר אמר שבחמשה לחדש היה עומד. ועוד שמתחלה אמר נבואתו בלשון עצמו: *ואני בתוך הגולה . . . ואראה מראות אלהים*, וכן בסוף: *וארא והנה רוח סערה*, וגו'. ואלו שני מקראות מפסיקין דבריו כאילו אחר מדבר עליו: *היה היה דבר ה' אל יחזקאל . . . ותהי עליו שם יד ה'.*

*And it happened in the thirtieth year:* The prophet obscured his words and he did not make explicit his name, who he is, nor did he make explicit according to what numbering he counted. Therefore the Holy Spirit interrupted his words in these two verses juxtaposed to this one, to instruct

38 Moreover, the rabbis imagined specific circumstances under which the Divine revelations that animated the composition of those books might have taken place outside of the Land of Israel. See *Mekhilta Bo* 1 and Radak on Ezek 1:3.

who the prophet is and to instruct according to what numbering he counted, as it is said: *on the fifth of the month, that was in the fifth year* (Ezek 1:2)—these are not the words of the prophet, for he had already said that on the fifth of the month he was standing. Moreover, from the beginning he had said his prophecy in first person language: *And I was in the midst of the exile . . . and I saw visions of God*, and also at the end: *And I saw and, behold, a stormy wind* (Ezek 1:4). And these two verses interrupt his words, as though another person were speaking about him: *The word of YHWH came, it surely came to Ezekiel . . .* (Ezek 1:3).

One could, of course, argue in favor of excluding this text from our consideration, since it does address the exegetical issue of accounting for the changes between the first person narrator of 1:1, 4 and the third person narrator of 1:2–3. I will not make a “capital case” out of this example, but would like nevertheless to consider it here, for the following reason: Rashi does not address such obviously exegetical questions in these four verses as, for example, the difficulty in determining what the “thirtieth year” refers to or what the relationship is between this “thirtieth year” and the “fifth year” referred to in v. 3. Moreover, Rashi goes well beyond the specifically exegetical need to attribute the two verses intervening between the first person narration of Ezek 1:1 and Ezek 1:4 to some author or another. Rather, Rashi addresses compositional issues relating to the creation of a biblical book. In attributing Ezek 1:2–3 to the direct disclosure of the Holy Spirit, Rashi is taking what may be described as a safe route. Indeed, it is here that a student of Rashi’s grandson Rashbam, R. Eliezer of Beaugency, specifically opines that these two verses emanate from the redactor who edited the words of the prophet.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Rashi succeeds in pointing out the problem in the narrative, and even though he resolves the problem by literally bringing in a *deus ex machina* (!), he does point out that this Divine supplement is presented “as though another person were speaking about him.” Thus again in this opening comment, even though Rashi does address some specifically exegetical issues, he is at the same time considering such general issues as the nature of a biblical book, and may be said to be adumbrating the later medieval concern with articulating the redactional process.

39 See Edward L. Greenstein, “Medieval Bible Commentaries,” in *Back to the Sources* (ed. Barry Holtz; New York: Summit, 1984), 212–59 (249); Robert A. Harris, “Awareness of Biblical Redaction among Rabbinic Exegetes of Northern France,” *Shnaton* 13 (2000): 289–310 (294 n. 13) (Hebrew).

## Conclusion

It cannot be gainsaid that in Rashi's exegesis, we do not find the kind of sophisticated examples of the *accessus* tradition found in Christian and Jewish exegetical literature of the 13th–15th centuries. These later forms, comprehensively described and analyzed by such scholars as A. J. Minnis, are complex in ways that can hardly be anticipated by Rashi's introductions.<sup>40</sup> However, brevity need not be taken as simplicity: Rashi's introductions, while not consistent in form or substance, and thus not necessarily yielding precisely Marcus's conclusion that Rashi's finds in Tanakh any "unifying historiosophy based on a divine plan,"<sup>41</sup> reflect instead an eclectic array of homiletical and literary, as well as historiosophic, interests. We are, however, indebted to Marcus for raising the interesting and pertinent question of whether there might be some coherent message or theme in the introductions that Rashi composed. In occasionally pausing before taking up the exegetical pen to consider broader issues than those that lay immediately before him, Rashi—as he did when he took the first, pioneering steps away from an authoritative ancient tradition of midrashic exegesis and towards the independent, intuitive approach that in subsequent generations came to be known as contextual, *peshat* reading—cleared the path for later commentators to see even more clearly than he.

Excursus: Rashi's Introduction to Parshat Mishpatim (Exodus 21–24)

Notwithstanding the suggestion in Rashi's introduction to Genesis that, were the Torah to be considered as only a legal composition, it should have begun with the law of Passover in Exodus 12, it is clear that the nature of Torah changes more significantly in Exodus 21. It is in this chapter that a fundamentally narrative composition gives way to law; the majority of the remainder of the Torah is, primarily, a legal text. It is, therefore, worthwhile to consider whether Rashi's initial comment in Exodus 21 might be

40 Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984). See also Eric Lawee, "Introducing Scripture: The *Accessus Ad Auctores* in Hebrew Exegetical Literature from the Thirteenth through the Fifteenth Centuries," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 157–79.

41 Marcus, "Rashi's Historiosophy," 55.



and prepared to be eaten from [is placed] before a person. *Before them*: And not before gentiles. For even were you to know that one law by which they judge is like the law of Israel, do not bring [a case] before their courts, for one who brings a case involving Jews before a gentile court is like one who desecrates the Divine Name and accords esteem to the name of idol worship, to give it importance, as it is said: *for not like our Rock is their rock, and our enemies are judges*<sup>43</sup> (Deut 32:31)—when [we let] our enemies be our judges, that is testimony to the superiority of their faith.

Let us first acknowledge that this text is thoroughly exegetical, in a way unlike any of the previous introductions we have considered. In a comment replete with midrashic citations and allusions, Rashi picks the verse apart and offers an interpretation of virtually every aspect. However, this attention appears to have a full agenda that far exceeds the immediate exegesis of the verse and that seems to address the kind of polemical concerns that we conjectured might be found in his opening comment on Gen 1:1. In his initial explication of the verse, Rashi is apparently troubled by the prefixed *vav* at the beginning of the word ואלה. Rashi adduces and adapts a number of midrashim in this first comment,<sup>44</sup> and weaves them together into a coherent whole; ostensibly, he observes that this particle determines that the laws in Exodus 21–23 are a continuation of the “law of the altar” (פרשת המזבח) in Exod 20:19–23, which is itself a continuation of the laws (the Decalogue) given in the narrative of Exodus 19–20. Yet this is no simple midrashic arithmetic. This teaching is a powerful polemic against the Christian doctrine that the Pentateuchal laws had been superseded by Jesus, and that only the laws in Exodus 20, the so-called “Ten Commandments,” remained valid. Relying on the midrash, Rashi counsels to the contrary: just as the “Ten Words” revealed on Mount Sinai (the Divine source of which was acknowledged by both Christians and Jews) were God’s commands, so too were the laws of the Covenant Code (Exodus 21–23; see 24:7).

As he explains the phrase “that you shall place before them,” Rashi first turns his attention to the word ‘place’ (תשים): what is the precise significance of this term? Rashi responds, as it were, to this question, by finding in it the

43 The meaning of the last two words of the Hebrew verse, ואויבנו פלילים, is elusive. I have translated here according to the tenor of Rashi’s comment. For a brief historical-critical evaluation of the phrase, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 310–11.

44 See *Genesis Rabbah* 12:3; *Mekhilta Mishpatim* 1.

justification for linking the “Written Torah” of Scripture with the “Oral Torah” of rabbinic literature. These two must be studied together, and thoroughly at that. The notion that Scripture could be understood, particularly in its legal sections, without extensive recourse to the classical rabbinic sources, is something that only barely entered Rashi’s consciousness.<sup>45</sup> In other words, Rashi precisely contravenes the claims of the Christian Church that Scripture could only be understood within the context of Christian doctrine and institutions.

The anti-Christian nature of his comment is, of course, most clearly stated in the final part of his comment. When Rashi expounds the pronominal suffix of the Hebrew word לפניהם (‘before *them*’), as “and not before gentiles,” he is not simply adducing a talmudic explanation.<sup>46</sup> Rather, he uses this pretext to polemicize against Jews who would bring their legal cases before a Christian court, presumably be it civil or ecclesiastical. For Rashi, the idea that a Jew would bring a case before a gentile court would be nothing less than “giving testimony to the superiority of their faith”—and is not to be countenanced.

Thus, Rashi seizes the opportunity of expounding Exodus 21:1 to mount a well-articulated polemic against Christian claims against the validity of Torah law, and against any Jew who would act in such a way as to weaken Jewish interpretive authority. This much seems clear. However, that he does so at the very moment in the Torah when the nature of Torah composition essentially changes from narrative to law is, I believe, no coincidence. Rashi writes a content-oriented introduction to the legal material, adumbrating (and perhaps influencing) his grandson’s methodological introduction, found at the very same place in Scripture.

45 That Rashi occasionally interpreted legal texts against the classical rabbinic position is well-known; see, e.g., his comment on Exod 23:2. For further reflection, see Gelles, *Peshat and Derash*, 34–42; Elazar Touitou, “Rashi and His School: The Exegesis on the Halakhic Part of the Pentateuch in the Context of the Judeo-Christian Controversy,” in *Bar-Ilan Studies in History IV: Medieval Studies in Honour of Avrom Saltman* (ed. Bat-Sheva Albert, Yvonne Friedman and Simon Schwarzfuchs; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1995), 231–51 (Hebrew).

46 *B. Gittin* 48b.