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## **VOLUME 8, ARTICLE 14**

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## DID RASHI NOTICE A JANUS PARALLELISM IN EZEK 20:37?

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Ezekiel 20:1-37a speaks of how God chose Israel for himself, brought them out from Egypt where they polluted themselves with idols and God was angry with them and would have destroyed them. Yet, he gave them laws and festivals which they rebelled against and so he, in time, scattered them amongst the nations. Now he will bring them out, ruling over them with fury (20:33), from the lands of their captivity as he had before into a desert-like state. And he will (20:37) bring them once more under his rod and to his covenant, purifying them (20:38ff) of the rebels amongst them that they may thrive and return to their land.

Ezek 20: 37 is the transition point that moves the narrative from Israel's past failure and accompanying punishments into a vision of a restored covenant. God will thus repair the breaches that had occurred from the Exodus until the Exile.

I wonder if Rashi's comments on Ezek 20:37 disclose an intuitive grasp of "Janus parallelism." This term describes a feature in Scriptures that allows reading verses both in parallel and as progressions. It depends upon the author placing an ambiguous word-form with dual etymologies into the biblical passage. C. H. Gordon coined the term "Janus parallelism" to describe a literary phenomenon "that hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings: one meaning paralleling what precedes, and the other meaning what follows."<sup>1</sup> The argument that Rashi noted a Janus parallelism runs as follows.

Ezek 20:37: והעברתי אתכם תחת השבט והבאתי אתכם במסרת הברית  
Rashi: תחת השבט - שתהיו כפופים לי ולמוסרי  
במסורת הברית - בברית שמסרתי לכם

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<sup>1</sup> See C. H. Gordon, "New Directions," *Bulletin of the American Association of Papyrologists* 15 (1978), pp. 59–66 (59–60), available online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/basp/browse.html>. For a discussion on this device on Job and numerous other texts see Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (JSOTS, 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Rashi's understanding: I [have you pass] **beneath the scepter** [and I will bring you]: *that you become subject to (a) me and to (b) my band(s) [מוֹסְרֵי];*<sup>2</sup> [I will bring you] **by the masoret of the Covenant [commandments]:** *By the covenant [commandments] that I handed to you [but you ignored].*

The scepter is the symbol of the king's authority and his laws—so Rashi reads (comment on 37a) as if 37a and 37b are parallel—by making you kneel beneath the scepter you are now my subject and bound by my laws. So Rashi's first comment reads **מִסְרָת** as obligation (the extended meaning of fetter).<sup>3</sup> Greenberg got this translation exactly right although he need not have justified it by seeing **מִסְרָת** as **מֵאֲסָרָת** when **מוֹסֵר** (fetter, band) works more elegantly, with no need for hypothesizing a dropped א.<sup>4</sup> For all intents and purposes, they mean the same thing.<sup>5</sup> For Rashi the entire verse describes a kind of knighting ceremony where the subject kneels beneath the ruler's scepter—a ceremony of loyalty to God and his obligations. Rashi's wording suggests he sees the preposition **בְּ** prefixed to **מִסְרָת** as carrying a meaning often associated with the preposition **לְ** (i.e., **לְמוֹסְרֵי**), namely identifying obligations as the object of one's loyalty. In his comments to 37a Rashi paraphrases the entire verse.

But then Rashi reads the verse anew: 37b does not mirror back 37a but moves the action ahead: I will bring you [to full redemption] by means of the covenant that I have already delivered to you. Here **בְּ** signifies agency, “by the covenant.” The inheritance of the laws or of the covenant of land (I'm not sure which he has in mind) are not the just for the purpose of my choosing you to be my people but act also as the instrument by which I lead you forward. And you already have it—I gave it to you long ago. What makes this reading fortuitous is that it could serve as a subtle polemic to

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that Rashi's **מוֹסְרֵי** stands for **מוֹסְרֵי** “my instruction,” but such a reading of Rashi would change very little in terms of my argument about the presence of a Janus parallelism.

<sup>3</sup> Ancient sources note two senses here:

1. “Shut up” (δεσμοῖς)—Aquila (like “in an iron collar,” διὰ κλοιού in Symmachus) While Yehuda ibn Hayyuj proposes this meaning on the basis of an hypothetical reconstruction of a missing א in **מֵאֲסָרָת**, most likely these versions took it from **מוֹסֵר** (band, fetter). On ibn Hayyuj's proposal see David Kimhi's **ספר השרשים** “Book of Roots,” under the heading of **אסר** and M. Greenberg, “MSRT HBRYT, ‘The obligation of the covenant,’ in Ezekiel 20:37,” in Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor, eds., *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, 1983), pp. 37–46 (39) and bibliography cited there.

2. Another meaning found in an ancient OG version is “handed-down tradition” (παρὰδόσει)—Theodotion. Rashi incorporates these two meanings in his comments and find both senses embedded in the verse.

<sup>4</sup> See M. Greenberg, “MSRT HBRYT, ‘The obligation of the covenant,’ in Ezekiel 20:37.”

<sup>5</sup> See BDB 64a–b; under main heading **אסר**, subheading **מִסְרָת** which notes this usage of “moser” **מוֹסֵר** in Ezek 20:37.

undermine any notion that Ezekiel refers to a radically new covenant, as Christians may see it. Rather, he speaks of a renewed covenant, one which was given once and for all time at the occasion of the Exodus. For Rashi, **מְסֻרָתָא** looks backward in the verse to the “scepter of authority” (**שֵׁבֶט**) and forward to the eternal “covenant” (**בְּרִית**) the next word after **מְסֻרָתָא** already in hand.