

"Contextual Reading": The Development of Peshat in Northern France 27

Jewish prayer and is a much-cherished ritual in rabbinic Judaism.³¹ However, its biblical antecedents are only suggestive and Rashbam claims as much in his commentary on Exod 13:9: *וְהִי לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל־יָדך וְלִכְרֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ* “And it shall be to you a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, in order that the Teaching of the LORD may be in your mouth—that with a mighty hand did the LORD bring you out of Egypt.”³² Rashbam interpreted what Rashi (and the rabbis of antiquity) had understood as the Torah’s first reference to *tefillin*—as simply metaphoric language:

לְאוֹת עַל יָדך: לְפִי עַומְקַ פִּשׁוּטוֹ, יְהִי לְךָ לְזִכְרוֹן תְּמִיד כְּאֵלֶיךָ כְּתֻובָה עַל יָדך.
כְּעַזְן: שִׁימְנִי כְּחֹותָם עַל לְבָנֶךָ.

For a sign on your hand—according to the depths of its contextual meaning, it should be for you as a continuous memorial, as if it were written on your hand. This usage is similar to *place me as a seal upon your heart* (Song 8:6).

Rashbam’s use of the expression “as if” (כְּאֵלֶיךָ) is testimony to his interpretation that Exod 13:9 is an idiomatic, metaphoric expression that describes what the nature of the Israelites’ remembrance of the Exodus ought to be, and is not a statement expressing concrete law or ritual observance.

Turning his eye to the biblical concept of “day and night,” Rashbam interprets Gen 1:5, “וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹּקֶר” “There was setting, there was dawning: one day”³³ as demonstrating that Scripture’s day begins at sunrise. This is a bold departure from rabbinic teaching that, for Jewish calendric purposes, a day begins the preceding evening:

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹּקֶר: אֵין כתיב כאן “וַיְהִי לִילָה וַיְהִי יוֹם”. אלא וַיְהִי עֶרֶב
שהערבי יום ראשון ושקע האור, ווַיְהִי בֹּקֶר, בוקרו של לילה, שעלה עמו
השחר—הרוי הושלם יום א’ מן ה’ ימים שאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא בעשרה
הדברות. ואחר כך התחיל יום שני: ויאמר אלהים ייְהִי רָקִיעַ. ולא בא הכתוב
לומר שהערב והבוקר יום אחד הם, כי לא הרצינו לפרש, אלא היאק הוי
ימים, שהבוקר יום ונגמרה הלילה, הרוי נגמר יום אחד והתחיל يوم שני.

31. See *b. Menah.* 32a–44a.

32. That this verse referred to *tefillin* was considered self-evident by Rashi, who commented: *וְהִי לְךָ לְאוֹת:* יציאת מצרים תהיה לך לאות על ידך וליכרין בין עיניך, שתכתבו בפה, הפרשיות הללו ותקשרן בראש וזרוע “And it shall be a sign for you—the Exodus from Egypt shall be a sign for you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes”—i.e., you should write these paragraphs, and fasten them on your head and arm.”

33. So SB; NJPS renders, “And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.”