

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Korach

5 Tammuz, 5786 – June 20, 2026

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Korach

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר ט"ז, כ"ב: וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-אֱלֹהֵי הַרְוּחַת לְכֹל בֶּשֶׂר הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יִחָטֵא וְעַל כָּל הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף:

רש"י ד"ה א-ל אל-הי הרוחות: יודע מחשבות. אין מדתך כמדת בשר ודם, מלך בשר ודם שסרחה עליו מקצת מדינה אינו יודע מי החוטא, לפיכך כשהוא כועס נפרע מכולם, אבל אתה לפניך גלויות כל המחשבות ויודע אתה מי החוטא:

רש"י ד"ה האיש אחד: הוא החוטא ואתה על כל העדה תקצוף. אמר הקב"ה יפה אמרת, אני יודע ומודיע מי חטא ומי לא חטא:

Bamidbar 16:22: They fell on their faces and said, "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?"

Rashi Heading - Hashem, the G-d of the spirits: (Hashem Who) knows the thoughts (of every man). Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country lapses does not know who the sinner is. Therefore, when he is angry, he punishes them all. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is.

Rashi Heading - if one man is the sinner, will You be angry with the entire congregation? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "You have spoken well. I know and will make known who sinned and who did not sin."

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Korach, tells us how Korach and his group attempted to rebel against Moshe and Aharon. Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to "separate themselves from this congregation, and I will destroy them in a moment." Moshe responded, "... Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" Rashi cites the words "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits" and explains that You are Hashem Who "knows the thoughts (of every man). Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country lapses does not know who the sinner is; therefore, when angry, he punishes them all. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is."

It seems as if Rashi is trying to tell us that here, the word "spirit" means "thought" rather than "soul," which is another possible definition. Hashem knows our thoughts, so, unlike a human king, he does not need to punish everyone, and he can punish only the guilty party.

However, this requires quite a bit of explanation. There does not seem to be any need for an analogy. Hashem knows everyone's thoughts and only punishes the guilty party - end of the conversation. If an analogy is needed, we understand that a just king will punish only after he first determines guilt. Additionally, why does Rashi use two different expressions? He first uses the word "*lapses*," then the word "*sinner*." Likewise, he first uses the plural, '*part of his country*', and then switches to the singular, 'the sinner'.

There is a more fundamental question that needs to be asked. The Torah discussed Korach and 250 men.

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However, Moshe speaks about one sinner. The explanation is that when a human king is confronted by a group of people who have lapsed, it does not mean they are all genuinely rebelling against him. Often, one (or more) real sinner, who is simply a rabble-rouser, entices others to follow him. A mortal king cannot necessarily distinguish between the real rebel and those who have merely lapsed. However, since Hashem knows each person's thoughts, He can punish the genuinely guilty.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Korach, tells the story of Korach's rebellion against Moshe and Aharon and how he persuaded many Jews to join him. Hashem told Moshe and Aharon¹ to "separate themselves from this congregation, and I will destroy them in a moment." Moshe responded,² "... Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" Rashi cites the words "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits," and explains that You are Hashem, Who "knows the thoughts [of every man]. Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country lapses does not know who the sinner is; therefore, he punishes them all when angry. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is."

What Rashi seems to be explaining is that the Hebrew word "רוח," translated as "spirits," can have several different translations³, including "souls." However, Rashi is telling us that here it means "thoughts." "G-d, the Lord of thoughts," means each man's different thoughts, as Rashi explains. This is the only way we can understand the connection between the first half of the verse - "Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh," and the second half, "If one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" As much as Hashem knows each person's thoughts, He knows to whom to direct His anger. However, if the Torah is saying He is the G-d of souls, why is that a reason for not being angry at the entire congregation for one man's sins?

Rashi continues, saying, "Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings ... but as for You ... and You *know* who the sinner is." This is why Rashi translates "רוחות" as "thoughts."

Further, Rashi cites the words from the verse "if one man" and explains that if one man "is the sinner, will You be angry with the entire congregation? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'You have spoken well. I know and will make known who sinned and who did not sin.' "

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Why does Rashi need to add the allegory of a mortal king to explain that G-d's attributes are not like those of earthly kings? It seems to be quite obvious. If this allegory is necessary, Rashi should have cited it earlier. There were

1. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:21.

2. Ibid, Bamidbar 16:22.

3. This word refers to something which is intangible; either something spiritual, such as a soul, or something of the physical world such as wind. It can also mean thought, which is also intangible. We find all of these various meanings throughout the Torah.

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other times that it would have been appropriate, such as when Avrohom pleaded on behalf of the people of Sodom, which is very similar. Yet when Avrohom says⁴, "Will you destroy the righteous together with the wicked?" Rashi makes no mention of this allegory.

Furthermore, a just earthly king will not punish many people for the sin of only one man. Even if he doesn't know the guilty party, he will certainly not punish anyone without first investigating the situation.

Rashi begins his allegory by saying, "A mortal king against whom part of his country *lapses*," and follows that up by saying, "he does not know who the *sinner* is." Why does he change from the word "lapse" to the word "sin?" Likewise, Rashi begins by saying that the guilty party is "part of his country," implying more than one person, and concludes with the words "the sinner," indicating a single individual.

The Torah said, "If one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?" What is added by saying if one man "is the sinner, and You ..." Nothing seems to be added to what the Torah already says. If Rashi is (somehow) explaining the words from the verse "will sin" and the words "will You be angry with the entire congregation," why does he not cite them in the heading of his commentary? At least he could allude to them by writing, etc., or something like that.

What does Rashi gain by adding the sentence to his commentary, "The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'You have spoken well? I know, and I will make known who sinned and who did not sin.'"

In response to Moshe's words, G-d responded, "Withdraw from the dwelling of Korach, Doston, and Avirom." The Torah then tells us the punishment given to the three of them. This is after Rashi told us that Hashem had said to Moshe, "You have spoken well." What was it that Moshe had spoken well? He said that if one person sins, G-d informs us that not one but three men sinned!

Rashi quotes Hashem's words, "I know and will make known who sinned and who did not sin." The words "I know" seem to be extra because the entire point is that he will make known who sinned.

There is a more general question, as well. The Torah tells us of a large group of people rebelling against Moshe. It says that⁵ "They confronted Moshe together with 250 men ... the assembled against Moshe and Aharon ..." Then "Moshe spoke⁶ to Korach and all of his company" Moshe rebuked⁷ "Korach and *his entire company who were assembled with him*." He told him that "*they* were against the Lord." Clearly, it was not just one person who rebelled; why did Moshe say that "if one person sins?"

4. Parshas Vayeiro, Bereishis 18:23.

5. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:2 – 3.

6. Ibid, Bamidbar 16:5.

7. Ibid, Bamidbar 16:11.

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The Explanation

In the verse⁸ "Korach assembled the entire congregation against them," Rashi explains that "all that night, Korach went to the tribes and said to them, 'Do you think that I am only concerned for myself? I am concerned for all of you. These people (meaning Moshe and Aharon) take all the high positions: the kingship for himself and the Kehunah for his brother.' Ultimately, they were all persuaded (to follow Korach)." In other words, Korach was the one who convinced those who were with him by persuading them that he was concerned for their benefit. The same applies to those at the forefront of the rebellion: Dason, Avirom, and the 250 men. Rashi explains, "The tribe of Reuvain (the tribe of Dason, Avirom, and the majority of the 250 men) was settled in the south when they camped. This made them neighbors of Kehos and his children, who also camped in the south. Therefore, they joined with Korach in his rebellion." In other words, on their own, they would have remained faithful to Moshe. It was only because Korach enticed them and steered them away from the truth that they became involved in the argument. He convinced them that his arguments were correct.

This is certainly not to justify anyone; it is never an excuse to proclaim that one was persuaded to do something wrong. One must stay clear of wicked people, be firm in conviction, and not be swayed by others. However, the fact is that they only became involved due to Korach's "campaign" against Moshe.

Rashi explicitly uses an allegory of "a mortal king against whom part of his country *lapses*⁹." Their conduct was a lapse, but not an intentional act of rebellion against the king. That is why Rashi says that the mortal king does not know who the sinner is; since a large group has lapsed, it is logical that at least one person among them sinned. This one person misled the others to misbehave. However, only he truly deserves to be treated as a rebel against the king. Therefore, an earthly king who cannot determine the genuinely guilty party punishes everyone; after all, they all lapsed. However, before Hashem, everything is revealed. Therefore, it would not make sense for those who merely lapsed to receive the same punishment as those who sinned.

Rashi explains this from the words of the Torah themselves, without using a separate heading¹⁰. "If one man *is the sinner* (but for the rest of the people, it was only a lapse), will You (Who knows all thoughts) be angry with the entire congregation?"

To this, Hashem responded that, despite your opinion that only Korach was the sinner, only he deserved punishment; I know and will make known that Dason and Avirom were equally liable.

8. Ibid, Bamidbar 16:19.

9. The Hebrew word which Rashi uses is סרוחה, which literally means malodorous or rotten. That is the point; the actions of this part of the country were unacceptable and wrong, but not a case of rebellion against a king for which one would be liable a death penalty.

10. In the original manuscripts, unlike the way it is printed in our versions of the Torah This is so in the manuscript and the first and second editions of Rashi. It is written there "if one man *he is the sinner*, with no period or separation between the words of the verse - "if one man" - and Rashi's words - "he is the sinner."

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A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Parshah tells us that Moshe called for Dason and Avirom, and they responded with great audacity, refusing to come. This should have made it evident that they were just as guilty and sinful as Korach. However, despite all this, Moshe Rabbeinu judged them favorably and declared that there was but one sinner.

This gives us a lesson as to the extent to which we must each work at acquiring the attribute of judging others favorably because each of us contains a "spark" of Moshe. Even if it seems that one's conduct does not allow him to be judged favorably, we must still judge him. As a result, we will also do everything within our power to return him to the proper path.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Korach 5731)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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