

Parsha Ponders

Beha'alosecha | June 20, 2024 | 15 Sivan 5784

*Paschal passivity perplexion*¹

וידבר יקוק אל-משה במדבר-סיני בשנה השנית לצאתם מארץ מצרים בחודש הראשון לאמר: ויעשו בני-
ישראל את-הפסח במועדו

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year since they left Egypt, in the first month [of Nissan], saying: “The Jewish people shall perform the *Pesach* offering, in its right time”²

Sefer Bamidbar starts in the second month of the Jews’ second year in the wilderness³. However, this week’s *parsha* begins talking about what happened in the *first* month, Nissan. It describes how the Jewish people brought the *Pesach* offering in the wilderness. Rashi asks⁴ the obvious question: Why wasn’t the Torah written chronologically? Why is this section written after the section describing the second month? He answers that really this description of bringing the *Pesach* offering is disparaging to the Jews. This is because for the entire forty years they were in the desert, this was the only *Pesach* offering they brought. Therefore, the Torah didn’t want to start *Sefer Bamidbar* on such a note.

Many ask⁵ on this comment of Rashi. Why is it disparaging that they didn’t bring the *Pesach* offering after this one time? We know why they didn’t bring it! Most of the Jews⁶ hadn’t performed *bris milah*. We know that if someone or their child hasn’t had *bris milah* they forbidden to consume the *Pesach* offering⁷. Therefore, they didn’t bring it. Now, why not ask, why didn’t they perform *bris milah*? The reason was because it was dangerous to do the procedure while traveling in the desert⁸. However, we are taught that there was a mystical “northern wind” which could have apparently helped them perform *bris milah*. Our Sages tell us⁹ that for the entire forty years they were in the wilderness, it didn’t blow. The Jews were in a state of excommunication, due to their sins¹⁰. This prevented the wind from blowing.

As a result, they weren’t able to perform *bris milah*¹¹. Why then is it considered disparaging that they didn’t bring the *Pesach* offering? One approach is that in truth, they didn’t sin for not bringing the *Pesach* offering. They were exempt, due to not having done *bris milah*. However, that in fact was what was disparaging. They were uncircumcised for forty years, which is not a very Jewish thing¹². Although,

¹ Based on various sources I found and collected

² [Numbers 9:1,2](#)

³ [Ibid 1;1](#)

⁴ [Ibid 9:1](#), quoting [Sifrei Bamidbar § 64](#), although it doesn’t say what was disparaging

⁵ [Tosafos to Kiddushin 37b s.v. הוואיל](#); [Da’as Zekeinim](#), [Moshav Zekeinim](#), [Omer Naka](#) (attributed to [Bartenura](#)), and [Mizrachi ad. loc.](#); [Chizkuni ad. loc.](#), brought by [Riva](#) to [Exodus 12:25](#). Some ask the same question on [Rashi](#) based on the second approach, presented below

⁶ See [HaMakneh ad. loc. s.v. י”ל שהיה רובם](#), who tries to work out how come most of them or their children weren’t circumcised, having just come out of Egypt a year earlier and performed a nationwide circumcision. See [Gur Aryeh](#) to [Numbers 9:1](#), who addresses how they brought the *Pesach* offering this time

⁷ [Exodus 12:48](#)

⁸ [Yevamos 71b](#)

⁹ [Ibid 72a](#)

¹⁰ [Rashi ad. loc.](#) says because of the sin of the golden calf. [Riva loc. cit.](#) as well. [Tosafos ad. loc.](#) says they were already forgiven for that. Rather it was because of the sin with the spies. See the *gemarra* there which gives another reason why there was no northern wind. [Riva](#)’s whole answer is based on this, that the disparagement was their sins caused the northern wind to stop. He doesn’t connect this to *bris milah* and the *Pesach* offering. Instead, he says that being excommunicated meant that they didn’t bring any offerings

¹¹ The *gemarra* actually seems to bring these two explanations, the difficulty of travel and the northern winds, as separate reasons why they didn’t circumcise themselves. The *Rishonim* only mention the northern wind approach

¹² [Tosafos loc. cit.](#), in their second answer. This seems to be their intent. [Mizrachi loc. cit.](#) suggests that according to [Sifrei](#), the reason they didn’t bring it was because they were lazy. Although [Tosafos](#) is right that they weren’t able to bring the *Pesach*

this stretches the words of Rashi a lot, who writes that it was disparaging that they only brought one *Pesach*.

A different approach is that, in fact, there was no obligation to bring the *Pesach* offering in the wilderness. Our Sages tell us¹³ that whenever the Torah says, “when you come to the land”, it means that the *mitzvah* didn’t apply until the Jews came to the land of Israel. The Torah says¹⁴, “when you come to the land” regarding the *Pesach* offering. So, they weren’t obligated! That’s why they didn’t bring it¹⁵. They only brought it this time because Hashem explicitly told them to. This strengthens the question on Rashi; what was so disparaging for not bringing it¹⁶?

The simple answer is that it didn’t have to be this way. They were poised to leave Mount Sinai and go straight into the land of Israel. They would have been obligated in the *Pesach* offering, and brought it as they were supposed to. What happened? The sin with the spies. They gave a false, negative report on the land, and the Jews believed them. As a result, they were sentenced to wander the wilderness for forty years. What’s disparaging is that they only brought one *Pesach* offering in forty years, due to their sins. They could have brought it every year, but their sins delayed their arrival to the Promised Land¹⁷.

The Maharal has a different explanation¹⁸, even if we say they were exempt while in the wilderness. He writes that we don’t need to say that their disparagement was that their sins delayed their entering the land of Israel. Just being exempt from *mitzvah*, whether through circumstances beyond one’s control, or due to a technical exemption, is itself disparaging. At the end of the day, for forty years they didn’t perform the *mitzvah*. Yes, we have a principle that someone who is in circumstances beyond their control is free of guilt, but that’s regarding a punishment. The *mitzvah* performance could have been a source of merit, and it’s disparaging that someone was exempt of that opportunity.

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offering due to being uncircumcised, the lack of a northern wind was due to their sins. This is what was disparaging. It’s unclear what he means that the Jews didn’t bring it because they were lazy, and simultaneously that they were exempt from bring it due to being uncircumcised. See also note 17

¹³ *Kiddushin* 37b

¹⁴ *Exodus* 12:25. See *Rashi ad. loc.*, quoting *Mechilta ad. loc.*

¹⁵ The first approach holds like the other opinion in *Kiddushin loc. cit.*, that “when you come to the land” is the Torah’s way of saying “perform this *mitzvah* so you merit to come to the land”

¹⁶ *Mizrachi loc. cit.* initially suggests that the two sources, *Mechilta* and *Sifrei loc. cit.* are arguing on each other. That would mean *Rashi* in *Exodus* is saying something mutually exclusive of what he writes in *Bamidbar*. This is a common approach of the *Mizrachi*. However, see *Ma’aseh Hashem Ma’asei Bereishis* Chapter 1, who says this general approach to *Rashi* is untenable. *Mizrachi* later suggests that *Sifrei* also holds like the *Mechilta*. *Riva loc. cit.* also suggests that the *Mechilta* and *Sifrei*, and thus the two *Rashi*’s, are at odds with each other. He sticks with this approach

¹⁷ *Tosafos loc. cit.*, in their first answer, *Da’as Zekeinim*, *Chizkuni* brought by *Riva*, and *Mizrachi loc. cit.* The language of *Tosafos* sounds like their second answer, that they weren’t circumcised, isn’t going with this approach that their sin is what caused their situation. They write that they weren’t circumcised, and that is what was disparaging. However, *Sifsei Chachamim ad. loc.* quote *Tosafos* that they weren’t circumcised, and what was disparaging is that their sin caused it. One would be tempted to say that he’s simply paraphrasing the *Mizrachi* (quoted earlier), as he often does. However, the *Mizrachi* doesn’t attribute this being uncircumcised approach to *Tosafos*. Instead, this seems to be *Sifsei Chachamim*’s interpretation of *Tosafos*. *Omar Naka loc. cit.* has a more confusing combination approach. He first asks that they weren’t obligated, since the obligation is only upon entering the land of Israel. Then he answers that really, they weren’t obligated because they weren’t circumcised, which was due to the lack of northern wind, which was due to their sins. This was their disparagement. He cites his approach from the *gemara*, which we don’t seem to have. Perhaps his intent is like *Sifsei Chachamim*. In fact, *Moshav Zekeinim loc. cit.* asks both according to the opinion they are obligated yet were uncircumcised, and according to the opinion that they weren’t obligated until they entered the land of Israel, and answers that their sins delayed their entering, which was their disparagement

¹⁸ *Gur Aryeh loc. cit.*