

*Did ArtScroll Censor Rashi?**

By: YISRAEL ISSER ZVI HERCZEG

Bereishis 18:22 speaks of the departure of the angels who were sent to Avraham to inform him and Sarah of the impending birth of Yitzchak. The verse reads:

וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְאַמֹּרָהּם עֹדְנֵנוּ לַפָּנִי ה'.

The men turned away from there and went to Sodom, but Avraham was yet standing before Hashem.

The version of Rashi's comment to the verse that appears in all ArtScroll *Chumashim* with *Rashi* reads:

ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה'. והלא לא הלך לעמוד לפניו אלא הקב"ה בא אצלו ואמר לו זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה והיה לו לכתוב וה' עודנו עומד על אברהם אלא תיקון סופרים הוא זה.

But Avraham was yet standing before Hashem. But is it not true that he did not go to stand before Him; rather, the Holy One, Blessed is He, came to [Avraham] and said to him, "Because the cry of Sodom and Amorah is great."¹ It should have written, "And Hashem was yet standing before Avraham"! But this is a correction of scribes, i.e., authors and editors.²

A more popular alternative version of the text reads:

ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה'. והלא לא הלך לעמוד לפניו אלא הקב"ה בא אצלו ואמר לו זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה והיה לו לכתוב וה' עודנו עומד על אברהם אלא תיקון סופרים הוא זה אשר הפכוהו ז"ל לכתוב כן.

But Avraham was yet standing before Hashem. But is it not true that he did not go to stand before Him; rather, the Holy One, Blessed is He, came to [Avraham] and said to him, "Because the

* I thank Rav Reuven Butler, Rav Moishe Kimelman, and Rav Aryeh Sklar for reading earlier drafts of this essay and for their valuable comments.

¹ *Bereishis* 18:20.

² This version of the text is not exclusive to ArtScroll. I have before me a standard single-volume *Chumash* with *Rashi*, *Targum Onkelos*, *Toldos Aharon*, *Baal Ha-Turim*, and *Ikkar Sifsei Chachamim*. The only publication information it has is "New York, 5740 [1980]." It has the same version of the text as ArtScroll's. So does Koren's edition of *Chumash Bereishis* with *Targum Onkelos* and *Rashi* (Jerusalem, 2014).

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cry of Sodom and Amorah is great.” It should have written, “And Hashem was yet standing before Avraham”! But this is a correction of scribes, i.e., authors and editors, in which those of blessed memory inverted the verse this way.

This version of Rashi’s text appears, for instance, in the early editions of the Malbim’s commentary to *Chumash*, the *Torah Temimah*, and many more.

The idea of *tikkun soferim*, “correction of scribes,” as applied to Biblical verses does not originate with Rashi. *Midrash Rabbah*, *Midrash Tan-chuma*, and *Midrash Tebillim* all use this expression in interpreting this verse as Rashi does, and various Midrashim apply it to other verses, as well.

If taken literally, these Midrashim contradict Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:8):

האומר שאין התורה מעם ה' אפילו פסוק אחד אפילו תיבה אחת אם אמר משה
אמרו מפי עצמו הרי זה כופר בתורה.

One who says that the Torah did not come from G-d, even a single verse, even a single word—if he says that Moshe said it on his own, this person is a denier of the Torah.

According to the Rambam, the text of the Torah is sacrosanct. Even Moshe Rabbeinu himself could not have had a hand in its composition. How could “scribes” have corrected it?

Rashba deals with this problem in response to Christian claims that the Rabbis tampered with the text of the Torah. He writes:

When the Sages refer to Rabbinic correction of the Biblical text, it does not, Heaven forbid, mean that they appended even a single letter to it. Rather, it means that the Scribes examined the text with care, and found, based on the content and context of each of those verses [that they are described as correcting], that the immediate sense of the words is not their essential meaning. Something different is meant—it is written the way it looks only for euphemistic reasons. These are called “scribal corrections” only because it was the Scribes who examined the texts with care and explained that they are euphemisms.³

³ Translation of *Teshuvos HaRashba*, Prof. Chaim Zalman Dimitrovsky ed., *Mosad HaRav Kook*, vol. 1, no. 19. *Tosafos Rid* to *Nedarim* 37a also says *tikkun soferim* means that the “scribes” determined how to understand the words of Scripture, not that they altered the text. He says that the Gemara there that says that *ittur soferim* (“the adornment of the scribes”) is *halachah leMoshe miSinai* refers to *tikkun soferim*. (My thanks to Rav Aryeh Sklar for drawing this to my attention.) Here we have the idea stated explicitly by a student of the yeshivos of Ashkenaz in the century after Rashi.