

Rashi

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Shlomo Yitzhaki (Hebrew: רַבִּי שְׁלֹמֹה יִצְחָקִי; 22 February 1040 – 13 July 1105), in Latin: **Salomon Isaacides**, and today generally known by the acronym **Rashi** (Hebrew: ראשון, **R**Abbi **S**Hlomo **I**tzhaki), was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the *Tanakh*. Acclaimed for his ability to present the basic meaning of the text in a concise and lucid fashion, Rashi appeals to both learned scholars and beginning students, and his works remain a centerpiece of contemporary Jewish study. His commentary on the Talmud, which covers nearly all of the Babylonian Talmud (a total of 30 tractates), has been included in every edition of the Talmud since its first printing by Daniel Bomberg in the 1520s. His commentary on Tanach—especially on the Chumash ("Five Books of Moses")—is an indispensable aid to students of all levels. The latter commentary alone serves as the basis for more than 300 "supercommentaries" which analyze Rashi's choice of language and citations, penned by some of the greatest names in rabbinic literature.^[1]

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Rashi



16th-century depiction of Rashi

Born	February 22, 1040 Troyes, France
Died	July 13, 1105 (aged 65) Troyes, France
Resting place	Troyes
Residence	France
Nationality	French
Occupation	traditionally a vintner (recently questioned, see article)
Known for	writing commentaries, grammarian
Religion	Judaism

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Name

Rashi's surname, Yitzhaki, derives from his father's name, Yitzhak. The acronym is sometimes also fancifully expanded as **R**abban **S**hel **Y**israel which means the rabbi of Israel, or as **R**abbenu **S**he **Y**ichyeh (Our Rabbi, may he live). He may be cited in Hebrew and Aramaic texts as (1) "Shlomo son of Rabbi Yitzhak," (2) "Shlomo son of Yitzhak," (3) "Shlomo Yitzhaki," etc.^[2]

In older literature, Rashi is sometimes referred to as *Jarchi* or *Yarhi* (יִרְחִי), his abbreviated name being interpreted as **R**abbi **S**hlomo **Y**arhi. This was understood to refer to the Hebrew name of Lunel in Provence, popularly derived from the French *lune* "moon", in Hebrew יִרְחָ, ^[3] in which Rashi was assumed to have lived at some time^[4] or to have been born, or where his ancestors were supposed to have originated.^[5] Simon^[6] and Wolf^[7] claimed that only Christian scholars referred to Rashi as Jarchi, and that this epithet was unknown to the Jews. Bernardo de Rossi, however, demonstrated that Hebrew scholars also referred to Rashi as Yarhi.^[8] In 1839, Leopold Zunz^[9] showed that the Hebrew usage of Jarchi was an erroneous propagation of the error by Christian writers, instead interpreting the abbreviation as it is understood today: **R**abbi **S**hlomo **Y**itzhaki. The evolution of this term has been thoroughly traced.^[10]

Biography

Birth and early life

Rashi was an only child born at Troyes, Champagne, in northern France. His mother's brother was Simon the Elder, Rabbi of Mainz.^[11] Simon was a disciple of Rabbeinu Gershom Meor HaGolah,^[12] who died that same year. On his father's side, Rashi has been claimed to be a 33rd generation descendant of Yochanan Hasandlar, who was a fourth-generation descendant of Gamaliel the Elder, who was reputedly descended from the royal line of King David. In his voluminous writings, Rashi himself made no such claim at all. The main early rabbinical source about his ancestry, Responsum No. 29 by Solomon Luria, makes no such claim either.^{[13][14]}

Legends

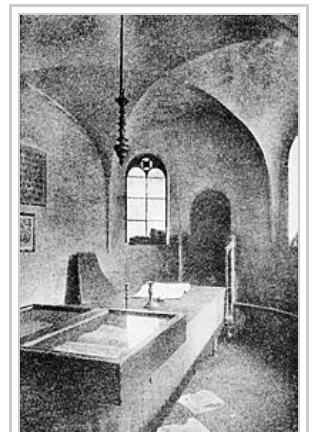
His fame later made him the subject of many legends. One tradition contends that his parents were childless for many years. Rashi's father, Yitzhak, a poor winemaker, once found a precious jewel and was approached by non-Jews who wished to buy it to adorn their idol. Yitzhak agreed to travel with them to their land, but en route, he cast the gem into the sea. Afterwards he was visited by either the Voice of God or the prophet Elijah, who told him that he would be rewarded with the birth of a noble son "who would illuminate the world with his Torah knowledge."

Another legend also states that Rashi's parents moved to Worms, Germany while Rashi's mother was pregnant. As she walked down one of the narrow streets in the Jewish quarter, she was imperiled by two oncoming carriages. She turned and pressed herself against a wall, which opened to receive her. This miraculous niche is still visible in the wall of the Worms Synagogue.^[15]

Yeshiva studies

According to tradition, Rashi was first brought to learn Torah by his father on Shavuot day at the age of five. His father was his main Torah teacher until his death when Rashi was still a youth. At the age of 17 he married and soon after went to learn in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yaakov ben Yakar in Worms, returning to his wife three times yearly, for the Days of Awe, Passover and Shavuot. When Rabbi Yaakov died in 1064, Rashi continued learning in Worms for another year in the yeshiva of his relative, Rabbi Isaac ben Eliezer Halevi, who was also chief rabbi of Worms. Then he moved to Mainz, where he studied under another of his relatives, Rabbi Isaac ben Judah, the rabbinic head of Mainz and one of the leading sages of the Lorraine region straddling France and Germany.

Rashi's teachers were students of Rabbeinu Gershom and Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol, leading Talmudists of the previous generation. From his teachers, Rashi imbibed the oral traditions pertaining to the Talmud as they had been passed down for centuries, as well as an understanding of the Talmud's unique logic and form of argument. Rashi took concise, copious notes from what he learned in yeshiva, incorporating this material in his commentaries.



Rashi Synagogue,
Worms

Rosh yeshiva

He returned to Troyes at the age of 25, after which time his mother died, and he was asked to join the Troyes *Beth din* (rabbinical court). He also began answering halakhic questions. Upon the death of the head of the *Beth din*, Rabbi Zerach ben Abraham, Rashi assumed the court's leadership and answered hundreds of halakhic queries.

In around 1070 he founded a yeshiva which attracted many disciples. It is thought by some that Rashi earned his living as a vintner since Rashi shows an extensive knowledge of its utensils and process, but there is no evidence for this.^[16] Most scholars and a Jewish oral tradition contend that he was a vintner.^[17] The only reason given for the centuries-old tradition that he was a vintner being not true is that the soil in all of Troyes is not optimal for wine growing grapes, claimed by the research of Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik. Earlier references such as a reference to an actual seal from his vineyard^[18] are said not to prove he sold wine just fermented his grapes for his own use.



Exterior of Rashi's Synagogue, Worms, Germany

Although there are many legends about his travels, Rashi likely never went further than from the Seine to the Rhine; the utmost limit of his travels were the yeshivas of Lorraine.

In 1096, the People's Crusade swept through the Lorraine, murdering 12,000 Jews and uprooting whole communities. Among those murdered in Worms were the three sons of Rabbi Isaac ben Eliezer Halevi, Rashi's teacher. Rashi wrote several *Selichot* (penitential poems) mourning the slaughter and the destruction of the region's great yeshivot. Seven of Rashi's *Selichot* still exist, including *Adonai Elohei Hatz'vaot*, which is recited on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, and *Az Terem Nimtehu*, which is recited on the Fast of Gedalia.

Death and burial site

Rashi died on July 13, 1105 (Tammuz 29, 4865) aged 65. He was buried in Troyes. The approximate location of the cemetery in which he was buried was recorded in *Seder Hadoros*, but over time the location of the cemetery was forgotten. A number of years ago, a Sorbonne professor discovered an ancient map depicting the site of the cemetery, which now lay under an open square in the city of Troyes. After this discovery, French Jews erected a large monument in the center of the square—a large, black and white globe featuring the three Hebrew letters of *רש* artfully arranged counterclockwise in negative space, evoking the style of Hebrew microcalligraphy. The granite base of the monument is engraved: *Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki — Commentator and Guide*.

In 2005, Yisroel Meir Gabbai erected an additional plaque at this site marking the square as a burial ground. The plaque reads: "*The place you are standing on is the cemetery of the town of Troyes. Many Rishonim are buried here, among them Rabbi Shlomo, known as Rashi the holy, may his merit protect us*".^[19]

Descendants

Rashi had no sons, but his three daughters, Miriam, Yocheved, and Rachel, all married Talmudic scholars. Legends exist that Rashi's daughters put on tefillin. While some women in medieval Ashkenaz did wear tefillin, there is no evidence that Rashi's daughters did or did not do so.^[20]



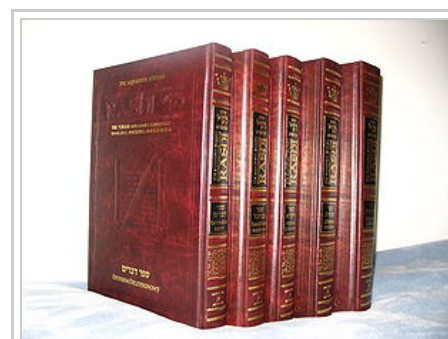
Monument in memory of Rashi in Troyes, France

- Rashi's oldest daughter, Yocheved, married Meir ben Samuel; their four sons were: Shmuel (Rashbam) (born 1080), Yitzchak (Rivam) (born 1090), Jacob (Rabbeinu Tam) (born 1100), and Shlomo the Grammarian, all of whom were among the most prolific of the *Baalei Tosafot*, leading rabbinic authorities who wrote critical and explanatory glosses on the Talmud which appear opposite Rashi's commentary on every page of the Talmud. Yocheved's daughter, Chanah, was a teacher of laws and customs relevant to women.
- Rashi's middle daughter, Miriam, married Judah ben Nathan, who completed the commentary on the Talmud Makkot which Rashi was working on when he died.^[21] Their daughter Alvina was a learned woman whose customs served as the basis for later halakhic decisions. Their son Yom Tov later moved to Paris and headed a yeshiva there, together with his brothers Shimshon and Eliezer.
- Rashi's youngest daughter, Rachel, married (and divorced) Eliezer ben Shemiah.

Works

Commentary on the Tanakh

Rashi's commentary on the Tanakh—and especially his commentary on the Chumash—is the essential companion for any study of the Bible at any level. Drawing on the breadth of Midrashic, Talmudic and Aggadic literature (including literature that is no longer extant), as well as his knowledge of grammar, halakhah, and how things work, Rashi clarifies the "simple" meaning of the text so that a bright child of five could understand it.^[22] At the same time, his commentary forms the foundation for some of the most profound legal analysis and mystical discourses that came after it. Scholars debate why Rashi chose a particular Midrash to illustrate a point, or why he used certain words and phrases and not others. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi wrote that "Rashi's commentary on Torah is the 'wine of Torah'. It opens the heart and uncovers one's essential love and fear of G-d."^[23]



A modern translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chumash, published by Artscroll

Scholars believe that Rashi's commentary on the Torah grew out of the lectures he gave to his students in his yeshiva, and evolved with the questions and answers they raised on it. Rashi only completed this commentary in the last years of his life. It was immediately accepted as authoritative by all Jewish communities, Ashkenazi and Sephardi alike.

The first dated Hebrew printed book was Rashi's commentary on the Chumash, printed by Abraham ben Garton in Reggio di Calabria, Italy, 18 February 1475. (This version did not include the text of the Chumash itself.)

Rashi wrote commentaries on all the books of Tanakh except Chronicles I & II. Scholars believe that the commentary which appears under Rashi's name in those books was compiled by the students of Rabbi Saadiah of the Rhine, who incorporated material from Rashi's yeshiva. Rashi's students, Rabbi Shemaya and Rabbi Yosef, edited the final commentary on the Torah; some of their own notes and additions also made their way into the version we have today.

Today, tens of thousands of men, women and children study "Chumash with Rashi" as they review the Torah portion to be read in synagogue on the upcoming Shabbat. According to halakha, a man may even study the Rashi on each Torah verse in fulfillment of the requirement to review the Parsha twice with Targum (which normally refers

to Targum Onkelos) This practice is called in Hebrew: "Shnayim mikra ve-echad targum". Since its publication, Rashi's commentary on the Torah is standard in almost all Chumashim produced within the Orthodox Jewish community.

Rabbi Mordechai Leifer of Nadvorna said that anyone who learns the weekly Parsha together with the commentary by Rashi every week, is guaranteed to sit in the Yeshiva (school) of Rashi in the Afterlife.^[24]

Commentary on the Talmud

Rashi wrote the first comprehensive commentary on the Talmud. Rashi's commentary, drawing on his knowledge of the entire contents of the Talmud, attempts to provide a full explanation of the words and of the logical structure of each Talmudic passage. Unlike other commentators, Rashi does not paraphrase or exclude any part of the text, but elucidates phrase by phrase. Often he provides punctuation in the unpunctuated text, explaining, for example, "This is a question"; "He says this in surprise," "He repeats this in agreement," etc.

As in his commentary on the Tanakh, Rashi frequently illustrates the meaning of the text using analogies to the professions, crafts, and sports of his day. He also translates difficult Hebrew or Aramaic words into the spoken French language of his day, giving latter-day scholars a window into the vocabulary and pronunciation of Old French.

Rashi exerted a decisive influence on establishing the correct text of the Talmud. Up to and including his age, texts of each Talmudic tractate were copied by hand and circulated in yeshivas. Errors often crept in: sometimes a copyist would switch words around, and other times incorporate a student's marginal notes into the main text. Because of the large number of merchant-scholars who came from throughout the Jewish world to attend the great fairs in Troyes, Rashi was able to compare different manuscripts and readings in Tosefta, Jerusalem Talmud, Midrash, Targum, and the writings of the Geonim, and determine which readings should be preferred. However, in his humility, he deferred to scholars who disagreed with him. For example, in Chulin 4a, he comments about a phrase, "We do not read this. But as for those who do, this is the explanation..."

Rashi's commentary, which covers nearly all of the Babylonian Talmud (a total of 30 tractates), has been included in every version of the Talmud since its first printing in the fifteenth century. It is always situated towards the middle of the opened book display; i.e., on the side of the page closest to the binding.

Some of the other printed commentaries which are attributed to Rashi were composed by others, primarily his students. In some commentaries, the text indicates that Rashi died before completing the tractate, and that it was completed by a student. This is true of the tractate Makkot, the concluding portions of which were composed by his son-in-law, Rabbi Judah ben Nathan, and of the tractate Bava Batra, finished (in a more detailed style) by his grandson, the Rashbam. There is a legend that the commentary on Nedarim, which is clearly not his, was actually composed by his daughters. Another legend states that Rashi died while writing a commentary on Talmud, and that the very last word he wrote was 'tahor,' which means pure in Hebrew - indicating that his soul was pure as it left his body.



An early printing of the Talmud (Ta'anit 9b); Rashi's commentary is at the bottom of the right column, continuing for a few lines into the left column.

Responsa

About 300 of Rashi's responsa and halakhic decisions are extant. These responsa were copied and preserved by his students. *Siddur Rashi*, compiled by an unknown student, also contains Rashi's responsa on prayer. Other compilations include *Sefer Hapardes*, edited by Rabbi Shemayah, Rashi's student, and *Sefer Haorah*, prepared by Rabbi Nathan Hamachiri.

Influence in non-Jewish circles

Rashi also influenced non-Jewish circles. His commentaries on the Bible circulated in many different communities especially his commentaries on the Pentateuch. In the 12th–17th centuries, Rashi's influence spread from French and German provinces to Spain and the east. He had a tremendous influence on Christian scholars. The French monk Nicolas de Lyre of Manjacorria, who was known as the "ape of Rashi",^[25] was dependent on Rashi when writing the 'Postillae Perpetuae' on the Bible. He believed that Rashi's commentaries were the "official repository of Rabbinical tradition".^[26] and significant to understanding the Bible. De Lyre also had great influence on Martin Luther. Rashi's commentaries became significant to humanists at this time who studied grammar and exegesis. Christian Hebraists studied Rashi's commentaries as important interpretations "authorized by the Synagogue".^[26]

Rashi's influence grew the most in the 15th century; from the 17th century onwards, his commentaries were translated into many other languages. Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch was known as the first printed Hebrew work. Many of his works were translated into English by M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silbermann in London from 1929 to 1934. Although Rashi had an influence on communities outside of Judaism, his lack of connection to science prevented him from entering the general domain and he remained more popular among the Jewish community.^{[25][26]}

Criticism of Rashi

Although Rashi's interpretations were widely respected, there are many who criticize his work. After the 12th century, criticism on Rashi's commentaries became common on Jewish works such as the Talmud. The criticisms mainly dealt with difficult passages. Generally Rashi provides the *pshat* or literal meaning of Jewish texts, while his disciples known as the Tosafot, criticized his work and gave more interpretative descriptions of the texts. The Tosafot's commentaries can be found in Jewish texts opposite Rashi's commentary. The Tosafot added comments and criticism in places where Rashi had not added comments. The Tosafot went beyond the passage itself in search of arguments, parallels, and distinctions that could be drawn out. This addition to Jewish texts was seen as causing a "major cultural product"^[27] which became an important part of Torah study.^{[27][28]}

Additionally Rashi was according to different scholars a corporealist, this could indeed be argued when one reads Rashi's commentaries on a sentence in the old testament: "And Pharaoh shall not listen to you, and I shall give My hand upon Egypt, and I shall take out my host, my people, the Children of Israel, from the land of Egypt, with great judgments". (Exodus 7:4)

Rashi comments (on the Pentateuch): "My hand"—An actual hand (yad mamash), with which to smite them. This is brought as one of several evidential cases to which one can conclude that Rashi was a corporealist.^[29] Alternatively, it could be understood to mean that an incorporeal Deity utilized a created physical hand. The fact

that the text does not say "Yado Mamash - His actual hand" is indicative that this reading is more likely. The issue has been debated for the past two decades (see Spring 2015 Dialogue).

Legacy

Rashi's commentary on the Talmud continues to be a key basis for contemporary rabbinic scholarship and interpretation. Without Rashi's commentary, the Talmud would have remained a closed book. With it, any student who has been introduced to its study by a teacher can continue learning on his own, deciphering its language and meaning with the aid of Rashi.

The Schottenstein Edition interlinear translation of the Talmud bases its English-language commentary primarily on Rashi, and describes his continuing importance as follows:

It has been our policy throughout the Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud to give Rashi's interpretation as the primary explanation of the Gemara. Since it is not possible in a work of this nature to do justice to all of the Rishonim, we have chosen to follow the commentary most learned by people, and the one studied first by virtually all Torah scholars. In this we have followed the ways of our teachers and the Torah masters of the last nine hundred years, who have assigned a pride of place to Rashi's commentary and made it a point of departure for all other commentaries.^[30]

In 2006, the Jewish National and University Library at Hebrew University put on an exhibit commemorating the 900th anniversary of Rashi's death (2005), showcasing rare items from the library collection written by Rashi, as well as various works by others concerning Rashi.

Supercommentaries

Voluminous supercommentaries have been published on Rashi's commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, including *Gur Aryeh* by Rabbi Judah Loew (the Maharal), *Sefer ha-Mizrachi* by Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (the Re'em), and *Yeri'ot Shlomo* by Rabbi Solomon Luria (the Maharshah). Almost all rabbinic literature published since the Middle Ages discusses Rashi, either using his view as supporting evidence or debating against it.

Rashi's explanations of the Chumash were also cited extensively in *Postillae Perpetuae* by Nicholas de Lyra (1292–1340), a French Franciscan. De Lyra's book was one of the primary sources that was used in Luther's translation of the Bible.

"Rashi script"



Raschihaus, Jewish Museum, Worms, Germany.

The semi-cursive typeface in which Rashi's commentaries are printed both in the Talmud and Tanakh is often referred to as "**Rashi script**." This does not mean that Rashi himself used such a script: the typeface is based on a 15th-century Sephardic semi-cursive hand. What would be called "Rashi script" was employed by early Hebrew typographers such as the Soncino family (<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=966&letter=S&search=soncino>) and Daniel Bomberg, a Christian

printer in Venice, in their editions of commented texts (such as the Mikraot Gedolot and the Talmud, in which Rashi's commentaries prominently figure) to distinguish the rabbinic commentary from the primary text proper, for which a square typeface was used.

The complete Hebrew alphabet in Rashi script [right to left].

Notes

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2. HaCohen-Kerner, Yaakov; Schweitzer, Nadav; Mughaz, Dror (2011). "Automatically Identifying Citations in Hebrew-Aramaic Documents". *Cybernetics and Systems* **42** (3): 180–197. doi:10.1080/01969722.2011.567893. "For example, the Pardes book written by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, known by the abbreviation Rashi, can be cited using the following patterns: (1) "Shlomo son of Rabbi Yitzhak," (2) "Shlomo son of Yitzhak," (3) "Shlomo Yitzhaki," (4) "In the name of Rashi who wrote in the Pardes"
3. Ockley, Simon (1707). *History of the Present Jews Throughout the World*. p. 74.
4. Abraham, Philip (1879). *Curiosities of Judaism*. p. 2.
5. *The Literary Churchman*. 1857. p. 286.
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16. Mayer I. Gruber. "How Did Rashi Make a Living?". the Seforim blog.
17. Maurice Liber, *Rashi*, trans. Adele Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1906), p 56; Irving Agus, *The Heroic Age of Franco-German Jewry* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1969), 173; Israel S. Elfenbein, "Rashi in His Responsa," in *Rashi, His Teachings and Personality*, ed. Simon Federbusch (New York: Cultural Division of the World Jewish Congress, 1958), p 67; Salo W. Baron, "Rashi and the Community of Troyes," in *Rashi Anniversary Volume*, ed. H. L. Ginsberg (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941), p 60. "Rashi was a vintner who grew grapes and sold wine."
18. Oxford Bodleian Ms. Oppenheim 276, p. 35a, cited by Grossman, *The Early Sages of France*, 132; 135, n. 45.
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21. Makkot 19b: "Our master's body was pure, and his soul departed in purity, and he did not explain any more; from here on is the language of his student Rabbi Yehudah ben Nathan."


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- Biography, the Legend, the Commentator and more (<http://www.rashi900.com/more.asp>) rashi900.com
- Article on chabad.org (<http://www.chabad.org/library/article.asp?AID=111831>)
- Family Tree (<http://www.loebtree.com/rashi.html#rashi>)
- Rashi's Daughters: A Novel of Life, Love and Talmud in Medieval France (<http://www.rashisdaughters.com>)
- In honor of the 900th anniversary of his passing (<http://www.rashi900.com/>)
- Rashi; an exhibition of his works, from the treasures of the Jewish National and University Library (<http://www.jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/mss/rashi/index.html>)
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Further reading

- Technique and methodology
 - rashiyomi.com (<http://www.rashiyomi.com/>)
- Full text resources and translation
 - Complete Tanach with Rashi (<http://www.chabad.org/article.asp?AID=63255>)
 - Chumash with Rashi (Judaica Press translation) (<http://www.chabad.org/dailystudy/default.asp?AID=6207>)

- Chumash with Rashi (Metsudah translation) (<http://www.mnemotrix.com/chumash/pardate.html>)
- Summarized text resources and translation
 - Illustrated Summary and Analysis of the Torah with selected Rashi commentary (<http://www.jsummary.com>)
- Textual Search
 - Lookup Verses (<http://www.rashiyomi.com/query1.htm>), rashiyomi.com
 - Complete Rashi script
-  Texts on Wikisource:
 - "Rashi". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). 1911.
 - "Rashi". *The Nuttall Encyclopædia*. 1907.

External links

- Works by or about Rashi (<https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28->



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- "Rashi: Teacher of All Israel," Video Lecture (<http://jewishhistorylectures.org/2012/11/18/rashi-teacher-of-all-israel/>) by Dr. Henry Abramson of Touro College South

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