THE REED SEA VS. THE PHILISTINE HIGHWAY

Z. Edinger

Exodus 13:12 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said: 'Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.' (18) But God led the people about, by the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea, and the children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

Jews (and Christians) have taken the story of the Exodus from Egypt described in the Bible as a matter of faith for millennia. Beginning in the early Nineteenth Century archaeological discoveries were often seen as scientific evidence for various biblical stories including the Exodus. Through much of the Twentieth century, scholars took for granted that an Exodus event occurred which to greater or lesser degree is described in the Bible.

Beginning in the 1980’s, however, some scholars began to severely challenge the historical value of the Biblical account. Direct archaeological evidence for the dramatic exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt does not exist. In fact, no clear archaeological evidence exists for the Hebrews being in Egypt at all! For these reasons a scholarly minimalism has arisen that doubts the historicity of the Exodus tale at all.

I am of the opinion that there is little value in seeking archeological evidence to prove (or disprove) events described in the bible. However, archeology can be a great tool to help us understand the context of our biblical stories. One such example is found in this week’s parasha. God leads the people away from the Philistine Highway and instead takes them through the Yam Suf—the (Red) Reed Sea. The biblical text tells us that God didn’t want the people to “see war” and return to Egypt. Why is God ‘worried’ that the people will turn back when they see war on the Philistine road?

Archaeology may not be able to tell us about the Exodus directly, but it does shed light about the coastal route of the Philistine Highway. Among the many relics depicted at the Karnak temple complex in southern Egypt are some related to the military exploits of the pharaoh Seti I. One of these relics (depicted below) is described as the Way of Horus, a main military road used by the Egyptians. The hieroglyphic descriptions accompanying the relief have led scholars to identify this road as the Philistine Highway from our parasha (Derekh Eretz Piluhim).

The relief depicts Seti I returning from a military campaign against the Shasu (bedouins). Prisoners of this campaign are being marched in front of Pharaohs chariot. Several forts line this military road (they are lettered B, C, D, E & G in this image.) There are ten forts listed on the hieroglyphics accompanying the reliefs at Karnak, and many of these have been identified archeologically.

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

The Sisterhood’s Mishloah Manot Initiative
Want to send Mishloah Manot to your fellow congregants for Purim this year? Take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to send special Purim greetings and to reach out to our Shearith Israel community. This project will support the Sisterhood’s many projects. If you have not yet received an email with instructions and wish to participate please contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lirohde-csi@yahoo.com or Mrs. Carla Schein at scheinc6@gmail.com.

Women’s Megillah Reading
Sunday, March 12 | service begins at 8:00 am
We are looking for volunteers 12 or over to read Megillah. If you are interested, please contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde at lirohde-csi@yahoo.com. Assignments are as short as 3 verses and all audio is available on the synagogue website. It’s easy to learn and is a great way to participate this Purim!

Purim Dinner
Saturday night, March 11
Following 7:15 pm Megillah reading
Immediately following the Megillah reading, registered guests are invited to a festive family-style meal in Levy Auditorium. In addition to a tasty dinner, guests will enjoy our annual children’s costume parade. Register at shearithisrael.org/purimidinner.

Purim Morning Breakfast
Sunday, March 12 | Following 8:00 am services
Immediately following the 8:00 am readings of the Megillah, congregants are welcome to enjoy a festive breakfast. To sponsor, go to shearithisrael.org/purim-breakfast.

WEEKDAY JUDAIC EDUCATION
For details go to: shearithisrael.org/judaic-education

Sunday
◊ Saadiah Gaon’s Book of Beliefs and Opinions | Simon den Holland | 8:45 am

Tuesday
◊ Katzap Class and Breakfast | Following Morning Services
◊ Feasts and Fasts: The Festivals in Jewish Thought - A Class for Women | Rabbi Soloveichik | 9:00 am | Spring semester is sponsored anonymously in memory of Debby Neumark
◊ Talmud Class: Tractate Sanhedrin | Rabbi Soloveichik | 7:00 pm

Wednesday
◊ Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Shearith Israel: A Monthly Q & A | Z. Edinger | 7:00 pm | On select Wednesdays | Next class on February 15 | Email questions to zedinger@shearithisrael.org.

Monday, Wednesday, & Thursday
◊ Habruta (Paired) Learning | 5:15 pm - 7:15 pm | Before and after evening services, Rabbi Chaim Yanetz and rabbinical students from YU are available in the Elias Room to study in habruta with congregants of all ages.

To sponsor a single class or an entire semester, go to shearithisrael.org/sponsorclasses

To find out when your favorite class is held, canceled or for special topics, go to shearithisrael.org/join-our-mailing-lists to select which emails you’d like to receive.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS
Mazal Tov to Olalla Levi on becoming a bat mitzvah. Congratulations to her parents Alex and Amanda Levi and to her grandmother Hindy Schachter.

Welcome Moshe Frances, his wife Celia, and son, Isaac, who are with us this Shabbat.

Welcome students from Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Tampa, Florida who are joining us this Shabbat.