

THE RED SEA AND THE KING OF THE NORTH

In this week's study, we're going to look at a passage out of the Torah portion called Beshalach. Pharaoh has just allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt. So two million of them have headed out to the great unknown led by Moses, Pharaoh's former adopted son, and their ancient God has just reintroduced Himself to them in the most epic display of power the earth has ever seen. We will be covering two important topics in this article so put your seatbelt and scuba gear on and let's start by diving into the Red Sea!



THEY NEVER CROSSED THE RED SEA

In Exodus 13, we see how "...God led the people around by the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea" (Exo. 13:18). The next chapter details one of the most well-known miracles this world has ever seen: the crossing of the Red Sea. But was it the Red Sea the Israelites crossed? The answer is, in fact, no. The Hebrew in that passage is *Yom Suph*, which means "Sea of Reeds" and is not the Red Sea at all. This fact is well known among all biblical scholars. The phrase "the Red Sea"

actually comes from the Greek Septuagint. This misstep from the original Hebrew has caused much misunderstanding on the topic through the ages. Papyrus reeds are grown all throughout the region along the banks of seas, lakes, and rivers. The Hebrew phrase "yom suph" could mean any body of water that has reeds in it. This does not mean that the main body was shallow and the entire Egyptian army was drowned in a few feet of water, a miracle that would have been larger than the parting itself. It simply means that the area or body of water was known to contain reeds. Scholars are not in agreement as to which body of water the scriptures refer. Some say it was a large lake. Others say it was a part of the Mediterranean Sea which was near the Israelite camp. In any case, it is important for the bible student to know that the Israelites did **not** cross the Red Sea or either of its two northern arms: the Gulf of Suez or the Gulf of Aqaba. The most important point is that whatever body of water **was** crossed, it currently holds the remains of an entire Egyptian army and Pharaoh himself.

This story is a *remez* (a hint), and a foreshadowing of what will happen at the end of time. According to Revelation 20, the evil Pharaoh of the underworld, who has taken much of mankind into bondage, will finally be thrown into the lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10). The pattern is clear: The evil enemy takes advantage of God's people. God's people cry out for help. Yahweh comes to rescue and redeem them while simultaneously destroying the ones hurting them.

Now that we understand that the Israelites crossed some body of water that was known in the ancient world as the sea of reeds, let's keep moving through the text to see what else we can find.

LORD OF THE NORTH

There is an often-overlooked passage in chapter 14 that is **HIGHLY** significant in understanding what Yahweh's motivation was in having the Israelites camp where they did and why they crossed the sea of reeds in that area. Let's read to learn.

Exodus 14:1-2 *"Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon. You shall camp before it by the sea.'"*

Although those locations are unknown today, what *is* known is that Migdol means "Tower" and Baal Zaphon means "Lord of the North." And this is what I want to unpack. Why is this significant? In order to answer that question, it's important to know that the Israelites did not operate in a vacuum. The authors of the scriptures as well as Yahweh Himself were very well-versed in the gods and the religions of their time and this is one of those times where knowing that culture brings the text to life.

Ephesians 6:12 says that we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of this present darkness. In other words, there is a spiritual war going on in and around us with Yahweh and His angels on one side and the devil and his angels on the other. Since the fall, the entire bible has been the earthly manifestation of this war. If we look carefully throughout the text, we will find glimpses of this war represented by the "gods" of the then-known world. For instance, Baal was one of the chief gods of the Canaanites, second only to El. He ran all of El's affairs and is why he is called "king of the gods" in Ugaritic texts. As Dr. Michael Heiser notes

in his book *The Unseen Realm*, Baal's home was a "holy" mountain called Jebel al-Aqra', which was located to the north of Ugarit. In ancient times it was simply known as Tsaphon ("north").

With all this in mind, whenever the ancient Israelites heard "Baal Zaphon," they immediately associated it with the mountain that was dedicated to the "king of the gods" which was north of Ugarit on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This Baal Zaphon of the Exodus was most likely a southern replication of the original Baal Zaphon of the geographic north. It was likely another mountain with the same religious significance as the original as it was dedicated to Baal, the chief of all the gods of the underworld. Today, we know who that "chief of the gods" actually is: Satan himself!

As we put all this together, we can see Yahweh's incredible genius in choosing this location as the place where he trounces the main hirelings of that ancient serpent who masquerades as a god among men. Yahweh has His people camp "opposite of Baal Zephon," right in plain view of the "king of the gods" and all those that worship him. And again, the writer draws close attention to this in Exodus 14:9 when he says that the "Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea besides Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zaphon." It was as if Yahweh wanted His former top-angel-turned-demonic-general to have a front row seat as the best of the best of his human army was defeated by just the breath of the Most High God, Yahweh. He was, in effect, declaring by this mountain dedicated to Baal, before all the gods of this world, in that moment, that **Yahweh** was the *true* god of the North. As a matter of fact, we see this exact concept hinted at again in Psalm 48. Read the following through the eyes of the ancient Israelite who is declaring to the pagan world who the true god actually is.

Psalm 48:1-2 *Great is Yahweh and greatly to be praised. In the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King."*

Can you see the connection the author is making to the "holy mountain" of Baal, the "king of the gods," whose dwelling place is in the north? The word "on" is in italics in your bibles because it is not found in the original text. The text should actually read "...is Mount Zion, the sides of the north..." The word "sides" is the Hebrew word "yereykah" and can be translated "border, side, parts, quarter and even coasts." The original Baal Zaphon is on the coast, the side of the Mediterranean Sea in the north and was well known in ancient times as the city of the great Baal. So you can easily see the entendre here as the writer is declaring that Mount Zion is the real "city of the north" and the real "city of the great King." Up until this point, Baal, the ancient serpent of old, was the self-proclaimed god of this world. But now that the people of Yahweh were freed from his grip, the great war was on. God versus god. Creator verses creature. But instead of making it just a spiritual holy war of the good angels verses the former sons of God, these high-ranking angels that fell from their lofty positions, Yahweh would utterly humiliate them as He used mere men to carry out a plan to take back the earth from the fallen ones. This plan would eventually be fulfilled in Yeshua, who would fill those men with His Spirit, calling them "beney elohim" (sons of God), a direct slap in the face to the original sons of God, the high-ranking angels who were once part of the council of Yahweh. These new sons of God, made of human flesh and empowered by the Most High Yahweh, would be the ones to tear down the altars of

Baal and build the kingdom of God on the earth without ever being in their glorified form. What a beautiful thought! *We* are the ones that get to be part of the high council of God, ruling and reigning with the Most High and His blessed Messiah!

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Oftentimes, we look at something as magnificent as the crossing of the "Red Sea" and marvel at the power our God holds and just how incredible He is. But we sometimes miss the nuances behind what He's doing that lead up to such a miracle. We see the miracle but we don't realize what it took for Him to lead up to that point. Think about it. Moses leads these people out of Egypt and into the Wilderness. They have no idea where they're going and it's clear that Moses doesn't have a clue, either. And as if that's not enough, Yahweh says that He purposely forced them to go the way He did so that Pharaoh would think they were confused and didn't know which way to go.

How often in our lives does God seem to be leading us in directions that seem to make no sense at all? The instructions don't pass the fifth grade test of logic and you're sure that it's all going to end in disaster. No one understood that during the Israelites' exodus from Egyptian captivity that Yahweh was also fighting a spiritual war that He wanted to shove in the face of Baal right in front of his unholy mountain. Moses knew the Wilderness. He knew this was likely going to end up with them trapped with the Sea on one side and the Wilderness on the other. But He trusted the voice of His Master. He did not lean on his own understanding. He acknowledged Him in all his ways, and Yahweh certainly directed his path.

When we choose to put our trust in Him despite what we feel or see with our natural eyes, we are giving the Maker of heaven and earth full authority to create a miracle in our midst. I'm convinced we don't see enough miracles because we simply don't allow Him to do any. We're too busy trying to fix our situations ourselves! I heard it said recently that a miracle demands a difficult situation. But a great miracle demands an impossible situation. Are you in a difficult or impossible situation? If so, I will leave you with what Moses said to the people in Exodus 14:13-14:

"Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh, which He will accomplish for you today...Yahweh will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

Be still and know He is the God of YOUR north...and He's on His way to part your sea the moment you give up and let Him.

Shalom!

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