

Discussion 1: Moses and the Parting of the Red Sea

The topic of our first discussion is one the best known of all Biblical stories: Moses' parting of the Red Sea. Archaeologists, historians, and Biblical scholars have tried for many years to find evidence that this event (and the flight of the Israelites from Egypt to "the Promised Land") actually occurred but it has been an elusive quest. To date no consensus has been reached on such questions as:

- When did the Exodus take place (if at all)?
- How many people fled Egypt?
- Was Moses a real person?
- Did the Israelites cross the Red Sea? If so, where and how?

For our discussion we will examine three sources that focus on the last question. As we analyze these sources one of the goals will be to think carefully and critically about the evidence presented and assess the credibility of the conclusions. The purposes of this handout are: (1) to give you some background / context to the story, and (2) to provide some guidance on what to think about as you read / watch the material.

The Context of the Story: As told in the Bible, the Israelites were slaves in ancient Egypt. Moses was born an Israelite but raised as an adopted son by the pharaoh's daughter (who found Moses, as an infant, floating in a basket in the Nile). Moses was forced to leave Egypt after he killed an Egyptian and he settled in a land called Midian where he farmed and raised a family. Eventually, however, he was persuaded by God (in miraculous ways involving a burning bush) to return to Egypt and help the remaining Israelites escape to "the Promised Land" of Canaan. The pharaoh initially refused to let the Israelites leave, but after God inflicted a series of plagues on the Egyptians he decided to let them leave. Moses and the Israelites left immediately, guided by a pillar-like cloud during the day and by a pillar of fire at night. Soon afterwards the pharaoh changed his mind about freeing the Israelites and sent his army to recapture them. This is when Moses supposedly parted the waters of the Red Sea allowing the Israelites to escape and drowning the Egyptian soldiers.

What to Do (before our discussion on Monday):

- (1) Read carefully the relevant section of the Bible (**Exodus 14**) and write down any clues (words or phrases) that could shed light on where or how Moses parted the Red Sea. You are looking for descriptions of how rapidly the crossing occurred, physical phenomena that occurred, etc. For each clue include the line number in Exodus (so we can compare different translations).
- (2) Read the research article (in your reading pack) by **Nof & Paldor**. Portions of this article are very technical but you don't need to get bogged down in the details.
- (3) Read the short ABC News article (in your reading pack) by Amanda **Onion**. This article is a for-the-general-public summary of a study similar to the one by Nof & Paldor and also includes some discussion about other Biblical stories and miracles.
- (4) Watch the 27 minute YouTube video: "**Revealing God's Treasure: The Red Sea Crossing**" (ArkDiscovery.com) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaN2acVMGC8> The first ~11 minutes are background; the more relevant material starts after that.

As you read / watch each of the above focus on the following:

- What aspect(s) of the story are the authors seeking to explain? This will not be the same in all cases: some sources focus on where the Israelites crossed, others on how the waters were parted.
- What explanation(s) or answers are proposed?
- What evidence is presented? This is particularly important. You will need to make a list (particularly while watching the video). For each piece of evidence note whether you find it convincing or not. If not, why not? Would more information be helpful? If so, what information? For the video it will be helpful to note the time when the evidence is mentioned so we can replay segments in class.

Please write (or type) your answers to the above questions and bring these notes along with the readings and a copy of the Bible (or print out of Exodus 14) to class on Monday.

In class on Monday we will discuss these and some related questions. After these discussions I will ask you to write a **concise opinion paper** that summarizes your views on whether these sources provide credible explanations for where and/or how the Israelites might have crossed the Red Sea. I will be looking for evidence that you can justify your views with quotes from Exodus, and material from the discussions and readings. Your paper should be 2-3 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, in a 12-point Times Roman font with 1" margins. Be sure to spill-czech (and proof-read!) what you have written. This assignment will be **due at the start of class on Friday (Sept 23rd)**.