

In Praise of Eretz Yisrael?

Based on a shiur by Rav Alex Israel

Source 1: Devarim Ch. 8

(ו) כִּי יִקְנֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִבְּיָאֵךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ גַּחְלִי מַיִם עֵינַת וְתַהֲמֹת יִצְאִים בִּבְקָעָה וּבְהָר :
(ח) אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וְשֹׁעֵרָה וְגִפּוֹן וְתֵאֵנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ־זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדָבָשׁ :
(ט) אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּמִסְכָּנֶת תֹּאכַל־בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא־תִחְסֹר כָּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבַנֶּיהָ בְּרֹזֶל וַיִּמְהַרְרֶיהָ תַּחֲצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת :
(י) וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וַיְבָרַכְתָּ אֶת־יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־הָאֶרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לָךְ :

- 8:7 God your Lord is bringing you to a good land - a land with flowing streams, and underground springs gushing out in valley and mountain.
- 8:8 It is a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates - a land of oil-olives and honey-[dates].
- 8:9 It is a land where you will not eat rationed bread, and you will not lack anything - a land whose stones are iron, and from whose mountains you will quarry copper.
- 8:10 When you eat and are satisfied, you must therefore bless God your Lord for the good land that He has given you.

Source 2: Devarim Ch. 11

(ו) כִּי הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בֹּא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ לֹא כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הִוא אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֲתֶם מִשָּׁם אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ וְהִשְׁקִיתָ בְּרִגְלֶךָ כְּגֹן הַיָּרֵק :
(יא) וְהָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֶרֶץ הָרִים וּבִקְעֹת לְמִטָּר הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁתַּחֲמִים :
(יב) אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ דִּבֶּשׁ אַתָּה תִּמְיִד עֵינֶי יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מִרְשִׁית הַשָּׂנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה : ט

"For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There, the grain you sowed had to be watered by your foot, like a vegetable garden, but the land you are about to

cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, is watered by the rains of the heaven. It is a land on which the Lord your God always keeps his eye, from year's beginning to year's end."

- How is Egypt/Mizraim presented in the Torah?
- What does Egypt have that Canaan/Israel DOES NOT have?
- Is it ever an alternative to Canaan?

Source 3: Bamidbar Ch. 14

(א) וַתִּשָּׂא כָּל־הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת־קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ הָעָם בְּלֵילָה הַהוּא :
 (ב) וַיִּלְלֵנוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם כָּל־הָעֵדָה לוֹ-
 מָתָנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אוֹ בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לוֹ-מָתָנוּ :
 (ג) וְלָמָּה יְקֹזֵק מִבֵּיא אֲתָנוּ אֶל־הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְנָפֹל בַּחֶרֶב נַשִּׁינוּ וְנָטִיפוּ יָהִינוּ
 לָבוֹז הָלֹוא טוֹב לָנוּ שׁוּב מִצְרָיִמָּה :
 (ד) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֶחָיו נִתְּנָה רָאשׁ וְנָשׁוּבָה מִצְרָיִמָּה :

"Why is the Lord taking us to that land to fall by the sword? ... It would be better for us to go back to Egypt! - And they said to one another - Let us head back to Egypt"

Source 4: Bamidbar Ch. 16

(יב) וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן וּלָאֲבִיָּה בְנֵי אֶלְיָאָב וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נַעֲלֶה :
 (יג) הַמַּעֲט כִּי הָעֲלִיתָנוּ מִאֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ לְהַמִּיתָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי־
 תִשְׁתַּחֲרַר עָלֵינוּ גַם־הַשְׁתַּחֲרַר :

"Is it not enough that you have brought us OUT FROM a land flowing with milk and honey..."

Source 5: R. Yosef Bechor Shor

(י) **לא כארץ מצרים היא:** שהיא ארץ המישור ואין בה הרים, אלא כמו בקעה אחת, צה להשקות שדהו, בא אל שפת-הנהר, ופתח-גידודי הנהר שכנגד שדהו ברגלו, והמים נמשכים מן-הנהר על פני-השדה, ומשקהו, וחוזר וסותם פתח הגידוד, של ישטפו מים את הזרע, כמן שעושין בגני-הירק שעושין על שפת-הנהר.

"Egypt is a valley with the Nile flowing through it. When a person needs water for his field he goes to the riverbank adjacent to his field and makes an opening in the wall of the river using his foot and the water pours into his field. Then he closes the hole before the field is flooded..."

Does this give Egypt an advantage or disadvantage vis-à-vis Israel?

Source 6: Yalkut Shimoni Perashat Ekev

[רמז תתנז] לא כארץ מצרים היא [יא, י], ארץ מצרים שותה מימיה, ארץ ישראל שותה מי גשמים, א"י שותה נמוך וגבוה, ארץ מצרים נמוך שותה גבוה אינו שותה, ארץ מצרים גלוי שותה שאינו גלוי אינו שותה, ארץ ישראל שותה גלוי ושאינו גלוי, ארץ מצרים שותה ואחר כך נזרעת, ארץ ישראל (נזרעת ואחר כך שותה) שותה ונזרעת נזרעת ושותה, ארץ ישראל שותה בכל יום ונזרעת בכל יום, ארץ מצרים אינה נזרעת אם אינו עמל בה בפסל וקרדום ונודד שנת עיניו עליה ואם לאו אין לו בה כלום, וארץ ישראל אינה כן אלא הן ישנין על מטותיהן והקב"ה מוריד להם גשמים,

"In the Land of Egypt, if one does not work with spade and shovel, giving up his sleep for the water, then he will have nothing; but in the land of Israel it is different - they sleep in their beds and God makes the rain fall"

*What is the advantage of Israel's system of irrigation given its disadvantages?
See Devarim 11:12 (above)*

משל למלך שהיה מהלך בדרך ראה בן טובים מהלך אחריו ומסר לו עבד אחד לשמשו, שוב ראה בן טובים אחד מעודן ומפונק ועסוק בפעולה ומכירו לו ולאבותיו אמר גזרה שאין אתה עושה בידך ואני מאכילך, כך כל הארצות ניתנו להן שמשים לשמשן, מצרים שותה מן הנילוס, בבל שותה מן נהר יובל, אבל א"י אינה כן אלא הן ישנים על מטותיהם והקב"ה מוריד להן גשמים, ללמדך שלא כמדת בשר ודם מדת הקדוש ברוך הוא, בשר ודם קונה לו עבד שיהא זן ומפרנס אותו, אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם קונה לו עבד שיהא הוא זן ומפרנס אותו,

"A king toured his kingdom. He came across a person of noble descent (who had fallen upon hard times) and he gave him a servant to assist him. Later he met another man of noble descent who (had come upon hard times) and was engaged in menial labor. This man was a personal friend and he knew his family well. He told

him, 'I promise you that I will personally supply you with all your needs and you will have no need to work.' Likewise, all lands were given 'servants': Egypt drinks from the Nile, Babylon from the Euphrates. But the Land of Israel is different; they sleep in their beds and God makes the rain fall for them."

Source 7: Devarim Ch. 11

(יג) וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּן אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לֵאמֹר לֹא תִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעַבְדּוֹ בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם :
 (יד) וְנָתַתִּי מִטֶּר-אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֶה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאִסַּפְתִּי דְגָנְךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהַרְךָ :
 (טו) וְנָתַתִּי יָעֹשׁ בְּשַׁדְךָ לְבִהְמֹתֶךָ וְאָכְלָתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ :
 (טז) הַשְׁמִירוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסִרְתֶּם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם :

"If you listen to the Lord... I will give the rain in its correct season ... if your hearts are tempted, and you stray, serving other gods ... I will close the heavens and there will be no rain and the land will not give its produce..."

Source 8: Professor Eliezer Schweid – The Land of Israel. National Home or Land of Destiny?

" ... it is clear that the riverlands more closely approximate the image of the Garden of Eden, which brings forth its fruits by itself. Even if irrigation demands effort, the continual abundance of soil that is fertile and easy to work, and of water, gives man a feeling of complete security. It is as though he holds the guarantee of his future sustenance in his own hands. He can ensure himself against want. This is not so, however, of a land watered by rain. There nature gives no guarantees. All depends upon the grace of rain, over which man has no control. In the riverlands there can thus develop a culture based upon man's aspiration for complete mastery over the primary factors that condition his existence and his well-being. In the mountainous country, however, this is not so. There, even the illusion of mastery cannot survive. One who lives in that land knows that he is dependent upon a force over which he has no control ...

But is this not the very opposite of what we said above? The land of the mountains, it would seem, enslaves those who work in it, in contrast to the mastery and freedom of those who dwell in the riverlands. The Bible, however, sees things differently: it is the very illusion of mastery, in contrast to the awareness of dependence that enslaves. It is precisely

the desire for sovereignty over the conditions of human existence that produces an idolatrous culture, and the essence of such a culture is that ambition for complete human mastery which turns these lands into giant tyrannies and houses of bondage. On the other hand, awareness of the dependence that limits human sovereignty is the foundation for a culture of faith, the culture of free men. It is precisely on this account that the land of Israel is appropriate to the chosen people which is subject to constant divine supervision and is always aware of being commanded by God."

Rav Alex Israel: Professor Schweid wishes to claim that the river-lands breed a power culture that stresses man's supremacy. In that culture man's energy is devoted to total control of his environment. **But how does Schweid see this as connected to slavery and idolatry?**

Paganism is a system that uses religious ritual to exert influence on the gods. Man wishes to win a war, to have children, to be financially successful. In the idolatrous culture, man is not jolted by crisis into a state of introspection. Man feels little need to adjust his own conduct or repair his behavior. In a system of paganism, one's fortune is not dependent upon one's moral state but rather on one's state of favor with the gods. Hence the pagan will engage in a ritual of sorts whose aim is to harness god desires to man's wishes. Through the gift that one bestows to god, one gains his favor. In this way, man has a controlling hand even in the area of the divine.

In a similar manner, it is slavery which ensures the elevated status of the inside few over the outsiders. Society's biggest fear is that some outside unknown element might destroy the artificial "secure" environment. Hence, mammoth energies are poured into securing the insecure and keeping any threat out of harm's reach. To this end, the river-land society knows only of master and mastered, controller or controlled.

The society that craves total control over its future is unwilling to tolerate feelings of insecurity and the existence of the unknown. But in the desire for security, this society is in its essence, insecure. This is a society of luxury and indulgence alongside fear, selfishness and exclusion.

Source 9: Bereishit Ch. 12

- י** וַיְהִי רָעָב, בְּאֶרֶץ; וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרָיִם לָגוּר שָׁם, כִּי-כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ.
- יא** וַיְהִי, כַּאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לְבֹא מִצְרָיִם; וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ, הִנֵּה-נָא יֹדַעְתִּי, כִּי אִשָּׁה יֶפֶת-מְרֹאֶה אָתִי.
- יב** וַהֲיָה, כִּי-יֵרְאוּ אֹתָךְ הַמִּצְרִים, וַאֲמָרוּ, אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת; וַהֲרָגוּ אֹתִי, וְאֹתָךְ יַחֲיוּ.
- יג** אָמַרְתִּי-נָא, אֲחֹתִי אָתָּה--לְמַעַן יִיטֵב-לִי בְּעַבְדֶּיךָ, וַחֲיִיתָ נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְגָּל.
- יד** וַיְהִי, כְּבֹא אַבְרָם מִצְרָיִם; וַיֵּרְאוּ הַמִּצְרִים אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה, כִּי-זָכָה הִוא מְאֹד.
- טו** וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שָׂרֵי פַרְעֹה, וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה; וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה, בֵּית פַּרְעֹה.
- טז** וַיִּלְאַבְרָם הַיֵּטִיב, בְּעַבְדֶּיהָ; וַיְהִי-לּוֹ צֹאן-וּבָקָר, וַחֲמֹרִים, וְעַבְדִּים וְשִׁפְחוֹת, וְאִתְנָת וְגַמְלִים.
- יז** וַיִּגַּע יְהוָה אֶת-פַּרְעֹה בְּנִגְעִים גְּדֹלִים, וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ, עַל-דְּבַר שָׂרִי, אִשְׁתֵּי אַבְרָם.
- יח** וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה, לְאַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר, מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי; לָמָּה לֹא-הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי, כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הִוא.
- 10** And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was sore in the land.
- 11** And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife: 'Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon.
- 12** And it will come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they will say: This is his wife; and they will kill me, but thee they will keep alive.
- 13** Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake, and that my soul may live because of thee.'
- 14** And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.
- 15** And the princes of Pharaoh saw her, and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.
- 16** And he dealt well with Abram for her sake; and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels.
- 17** And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.
- 18** And Pharaoh called Abram, and said: 'What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

19 Why saidst thou: She is my sister? so that I took her to be my wife; now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.'

20 And Pharaoh gave men charge concerning him; and they brought him on the way, and his wife, and all that he had.

- Story of Yosef in the house of Potiphar...
- Avraham leaves where to travel where in לך לך?

Source 10: Bereishit Ch. 13

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar.

11 So Lot chose him all the plain of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the LORD exceedingly.

Source 11a: Shemot Ch. 15

מִן אֵלֶּי יִשְׁרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה
הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־
נָתַתָּה נָאָה סוּם וְרָכְבוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם: ב עָזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה

11b) Commentary of R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, Ha'amek Davar

סוֹם וּרְכָבוֹ רַמָּה בַּיָּם . זֶה תַּמְצִית הַשִּׁירָה כְּמוֹכֵן
 מִשִּׁירַת הַנָּשִׁים . וְהַעֲנִין לְנִחְשָׁמָהּ סוֹם וּרְכָבוֹ כִּלְלָהּ
 הַכֹּל . דְּכֻמוֹ הַסּוֹם הַמּוֹכֵן לְמַלְחָמָה נִשְׁמַע לְרוֹכְבוֹ קִי
 הַאִישׁ חֵיל הוּא כְּסוֹם לְאִדּוּיוֹ לְהַתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאֵשׁ וּבַנִּים .
 וְהַגְדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ הוּא כְּסוֹם לְשֵׁר הָאֵלֶף . וְשֵׁר הָאֵלֶף
 לְרֹאשׁ שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת עַד פְּרָעָה עֲלָמּוֹ . וְגַם כִּלְלָהּ בְּזֶה
 הַשֵּׁר הָעֲלִיּוֹן הַחֹכֵם עַל הַמַּעֲרָכָה הָעֲלִיוֹנָה שֶׁל פְּרָעָה .
 וּלְאַחֲרָיו הַשֵּׁר הָעֲלִיּוֹן הַרִי כֹל הַמַּעֲרָכָה נִחְשָׁבָה כְּסוֹם וְכֹל
 אֵלֶּה רַמָּה בַּיָּם . וְזֶהוּ כִּי גָאָה גָאָה . גָּאָה עַל כֹּל
 הַגָּאִים . וּבְזֶה יִבְאֵר מִקְרָא בְּשֵׁ"ס לְפָסְחֵי צִרְכְּבֵי
 פְּרָעָה לְמִיחִיד רַעִיתִי . כְּמוֹ הַסּוֹם צִרְכְּבֵי פְּרָעָה כִּלְלָהּ
 בְּזֶה הַגְּהֵנָה הַמְּלוּכָה כִּלְלָהּ . כִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִמָּה סוֹם שֶׁל
 הַקֶּבֶ"ה כִּי שֵׁ"ס מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם וְהַשְׁגָּחָה שְׁעֲלִיהֶם מוֹהִיג
 הָעוֹלָם . וְכִדְכָחִיב רֹכֵב שָׁמַיִם בַּעֲזָרָךְ . וְכֹאשֶׁר יִבְאֵר
 צְבָאוֹת הָאֵל הַגּוֹמֵר עָלַי : (ב) עֲזִי וּנְסִרָתִי יְהוָה .

Source 12: from Foreign Affairs: Israel's Border and Security Problems

By Major-General Moshe Dayan FROM OUR JANUARY 1955 ISSUE

SEVEN years after its war of independence the State of Israel still faces a security problem of unusual complexity. The area of the country is only 8,100 square miles. But owing to the configuration of its territory there are 400 miles of frontier. Three-quarters of the population of Israel lives in the coastal plain, running from north of Haifa to south of Tel Aviv, with a slender salient branching off to Jerusalem. This densely settled area has an average width of no more than twelve miles between the Mediterranean and the Jordanian border. From the Israel Parliament buildings in Jerusalem the armed sentries of the Jordanian Arab Legion can be seen a few hundred yards away. The headquarters of the Israel General Staff in the coastal plain are within clear view from the hills which mark the Jordan frontier. The country's main roads and railways are exposed to swift and easy incursion. Scarcely anywhere in Israel can a man live or work beyond the easy range of enemy fire. Indeed, except in the Negev, no settlement is at a distance of more than 20 miles from an Arab frontier.

Thus the term "frontier security" has little meaning in the context of Israel's geography. The entire country is a frontier, and the whole rhythm of national life is affected by any hostile activity from the territory of neighboring states. On the other hand, the Arab states are in no such position. Border tensions affect a narrow fringe of their territories, beyond which stretch deep hinterlands entirely remote from the hazards and strains of frontier life. An American citizen who can cross a vast continent without seeing a foreign, let alone a hostile, face may require an unusual measure of imagination and humility to understand the unique vulnerability which geography imposes upon the people of Israel. The effects of geographical vulnerability are aggravated by the fierce antagonism directed against Israel across her embattled frontiers. There is no other state in the world community whose very right to existence is so persistently challenged by all its contiguous neighbors. This is not the classic pattern of international conflict in which neighboring peoples recognize each other's statehood but are divided by specific disputes which they have failed to reconcile. The hostility of the Arab Governments towards Israel is more fundamental. It has passed through three phases: first, before 1948, there was a determination to prevent the establishment of an independent Israel; second, in 1948, there was an unsuccessful attempt to destroy Israel's independence at its birth by armed assault; and third, in the period 1948-1954, there has been an attitude of inveterate revenge based on non-recognition and the undying hope of Israel's extinction. The elementary duty of members of the United Nations to recognize each other's right to sovereignty and integrity has never found any reflection in the relations of the Arab world with Israel.

Rav Israel: Interestingly enough, the rain issue is not the only way in which Israel experiences an existential feeling of instability. Israel is situated geo-politically, at the crossroads of continents. It is the land that lies between the two great river-land centres of ancient civilisation: Egypt and Mesopotamia. Thus from the perspective of national security, the land of Israel, by its very geographic location, is in a precarious and fragile position. Once again - and this is borne out throughout the Biblical history of Israel - the big issues are a direct outgrowth of this insecurity. Does Israel attempt to artificially secure its own lot in the volatile regional scene, or does Israel trust in God and follow its own unique way of living? And culturally, does Israel absorb the majority culture or will it retain its own slightly unusual way of looking at the world?

The Torah describes the maturation of the Jewish people from a slave people to an independent nation in their sovereign land. It is at this juncture that we are reminded to be wary of our priorities and our understanding of that which is the key to our national success. The Israelite is to realise that it is not "My own power and the might of my own hand who have won this wealth (lit. might) for me," but rather, "it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth." (8:17-18 but best to read chapter 8 in its entirety!) On this basis man will understand that the only assurance of national success is to be guided by the word of God.

Source 13: A Post-Script: Times of Israel, April 5, 2015: Professor Joshua Berman

At Passover, we talk like an Egyptian

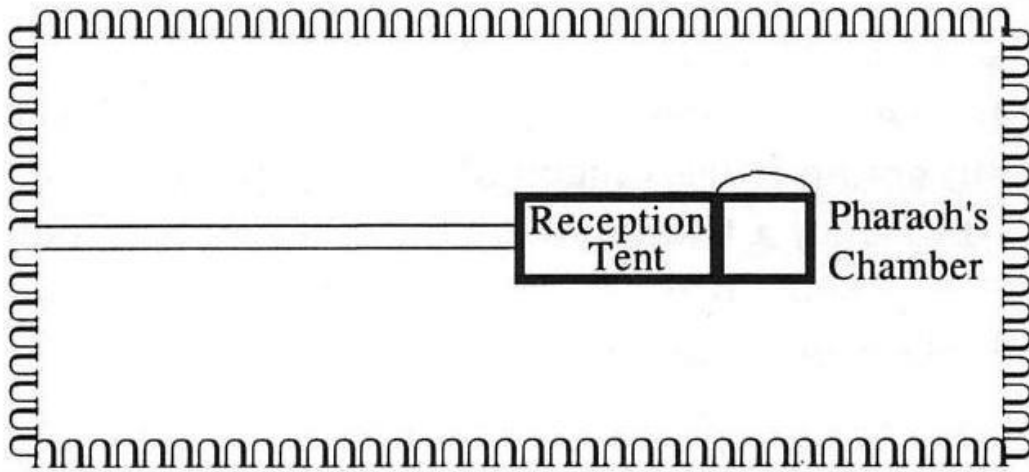
The Bible's account of the splitting of the sea echoes a tribute to Ramesses

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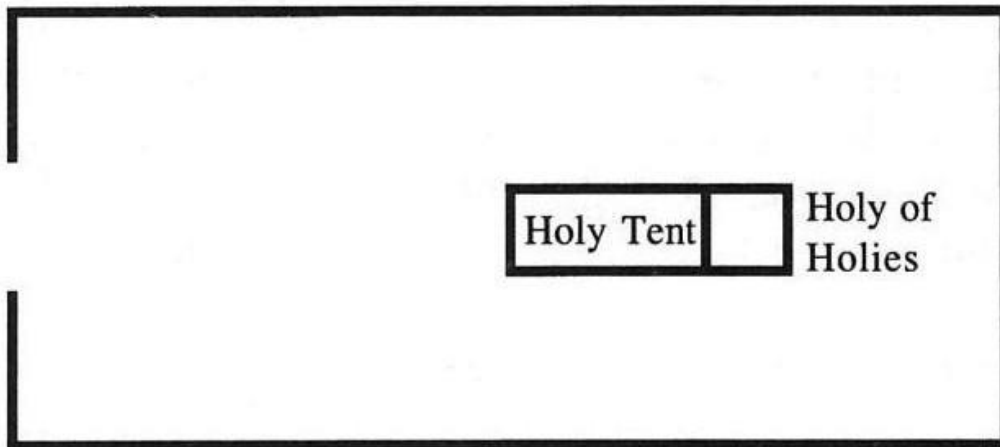
The paramount achievement of Ramesses II (reigned 1279-1213 BCE) — known also as Ramesses the Great — occurred early in his reign, in his victory over Egypt's arch-rival, the Hittite empire, at the battle of Kadesh: a town located on the Orontes River on the modern-day border between Lebanon and Syria. It is believed to have been the largest chariot battle in history. Upon his return to Egypt, Ramesses inscribed accounts of this battle on monuments all across the empire. Ten copies of the work, known as the Kadesh Poem, exist to this day. These multiple copies make the battle of Kadesh the most publicized event in the ancient world. Many Egyptologists believe that the Kadesh Poem was a widely disseminated "little red book," aimed at stirring public adoration of the valor of Ramesses the Great.

Some 80 years ago, scholars noted an unexpected affinity between the biblical descriptions of the Tabernacle and the illustrations of Ramesses' camp at Kadesh in several bas reliefs that accompany the Kadesh Poem. The proportions of Ramesses' throne tent, surrounded by his army on four sides, exactly match those of God's Tabernacle sanctuary as depicted in the Book of Exodus:

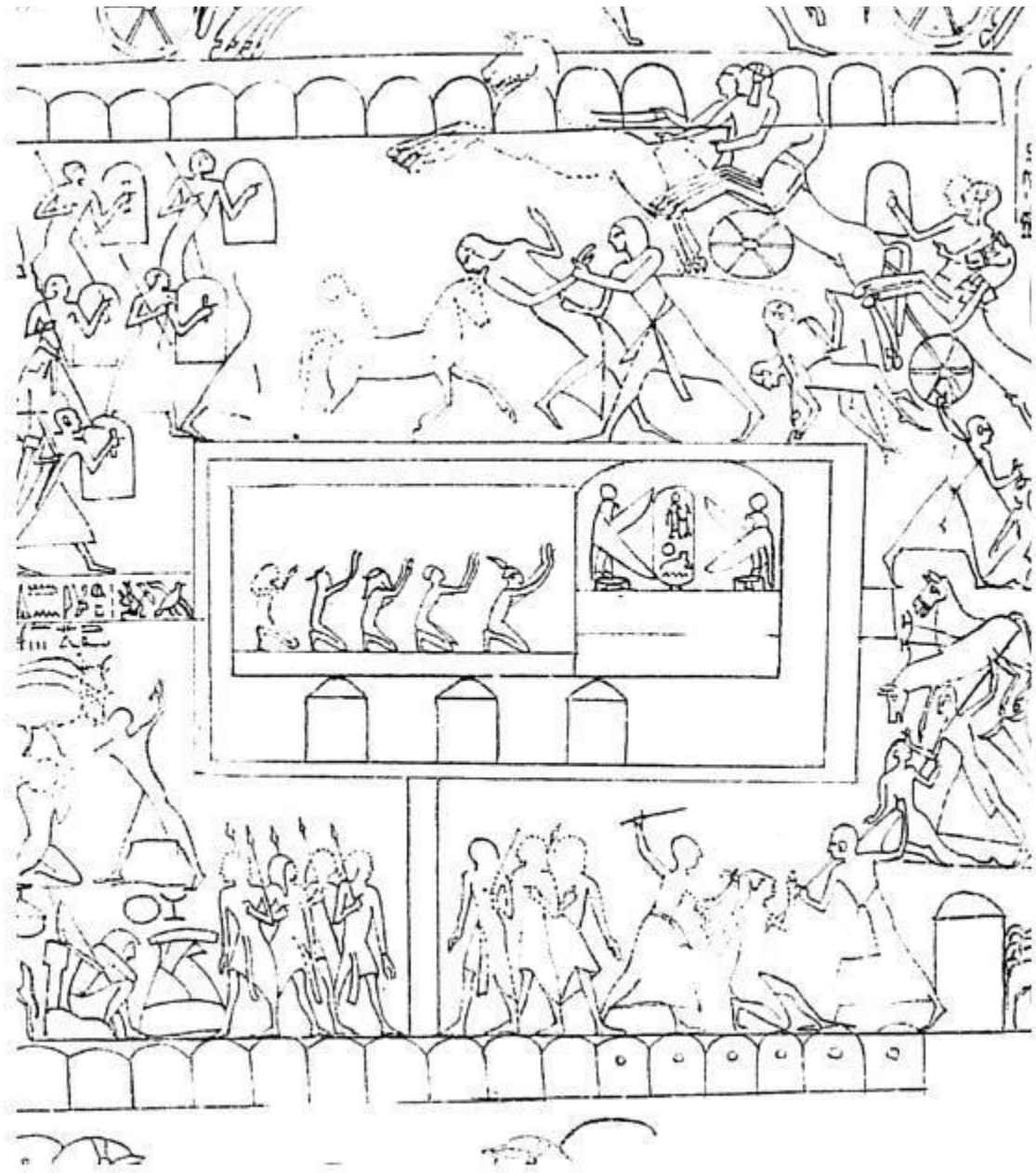
Battle Compound of Ramesses II



Tabernacle Compound



Two falcons spread their wings protectively over the symbol of the Pharaoh, just as cherubim spread their wings protectively over the ark in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:21):



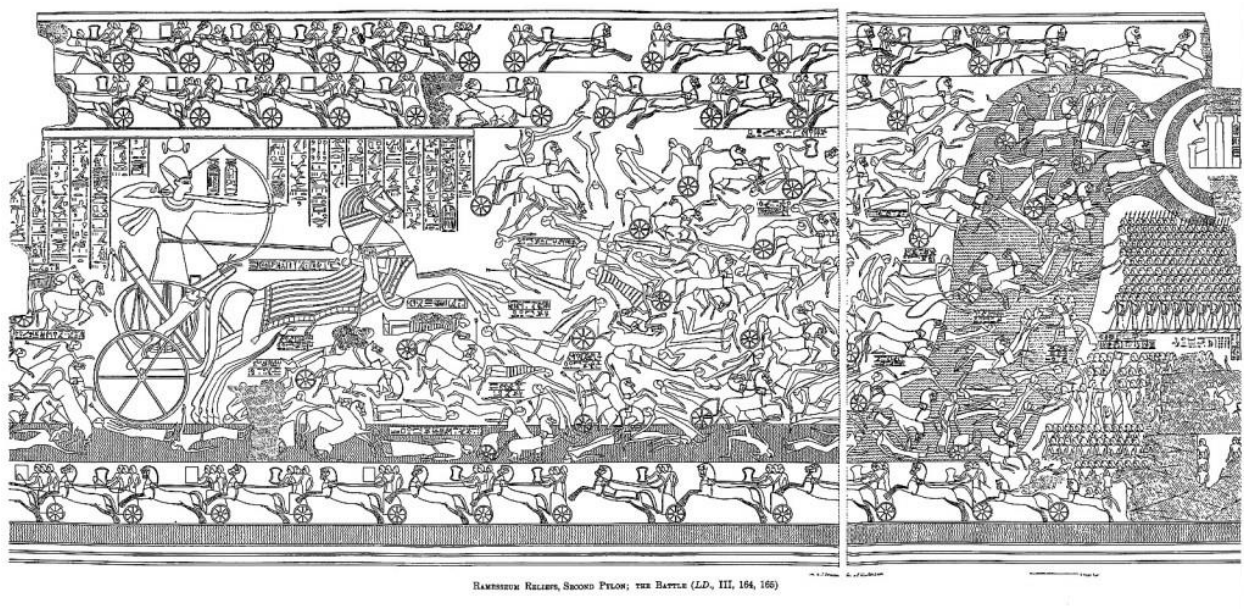
The throne tent of Ramesses II with winged falcons flanking his cartouche at Abu Simbel. (image from W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte* vol ii, 1935 pl. 169)

Some scholars suggest that the Bible reworked the throne tent ideologically, with God displacing Ramesses the Great as the most powerful force of the time.

It turns out, moreover, that the account of the battle in the text of the Kadesh Poem is remarkably similar to the account of the battle against the Egyptians

at the Red Sea in Exodus chapters 14-15, which rabbinic tradition dates to the upcoming holiday of the seventh day of Passover.

The two accounts follow a similar sequence of motifs and images seen nowhere else in the battle accounts of the ancient Near East. Here are the main parallel elements: Ramesses' troops break ranks at the sight of the Hittite chariot force, just as Israel cowers at the sight of the oncoming Egyptian chariots. Ramesses pleads for divine help, just as Moses does and is encouraged to move forward with victory assured, just as Moses is assured by God. Bas reliefs depict the Hittite corpses floating in the Orontes River:



Corpses of Hittite troops in the Orontes River on the second pylon at the Ramesseum (image from James Henry Breasted, *The Battle of Kadesh: A Study in the Earliest Known Military Strategy* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1903] pl. III)

Most strikingly, Ramesses' troops return to survey the enemy corpses. Amazed at the king's accomplishment, the troops offer a victory hymn that includes praise of his name, references to his strong arm, and tribute to him as the source of their strength and their salvation. Likewise, The Israelites survey the Egyptian corpses and offer a hymn of praise to God — the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 — that contains many of the same motifs found in the hymn of praise by Ramesses' troops. Ramesses consumes his enemy "like chaff" (cf. Exodus 15:7). Both the Kadesh Poem and the Exodus Sea account conclude with the "king" (Ramesses and God respectively) leading his troops peacefully home, intimidating foreign lands along the way, arriving at the palace, and being granted eternal rule. (For more details see my essay, [Was There an Exodus?](#))

The latest copies of the Kadesh Poem in our possession are from the reign of Ramesses himself, and there are no references to it, or clear attempts to imitate it, in later Egyptian literature. There is no evidence that any historical inscriptions from ancient Egypt ever reached Israel. This suggests that it is unlikely that an Israelite scribe living centuries later would have known about the Kadesh Poem, let alone borrow from it to inspire his own people.

To date, no trace of the Exodus has been found in Egyptian sources or any mention of a people Israel. The biblical adaptation of the Kadesh Poem suggests that Israelites were a minority presence in Egypt under the subjugation of Ramesses II.

The fact that the Kadesh poem retained such currency throughout biblical Israel suggests that the book of Exodus preserves the memory of a moment when these Israelites were relieved from Ramesses II's subjugation. Reaching for language with which to exalt God's mighty virtues, they found material in the tropes of one of the best-known accounts of perhaps the greatest Egyptian monarch — and proceeded to “out-Pharaoh” the Pharaoh himself.