



Carnegie Shul Chatter

January 28, 2021



Zoom in for Services

We invite you to join in our abbreviated Shabbos service, beginning at 10 am and lasting for approximately an hour, by clicking this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81248746320?pwd=NFJ5TlF3UXFlcU5zL3lQSTZldnUxUT09>

Find the Birnbaum siddur at: <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/hasiddur-hashalem-by-paltiel-birnbaum-1949/>

Leadership

Moses and Joshua - two great Jewish leaders who led the Children of Israel to the Promised Land.

But neither of these two great leaders was what you might expect a leader to be. After all, Moses had a speech impediment, and certainly was not looking to be a leader when he saw the burning bush and was instructed by God to confront Pharaoh, and Moses was extremely reluctant to accept the tremendous responsibility that God bestowed upon him.

Likewise, as the article from jewishhistory.org tells us, Moses and others had to keep telling Joshua to, "Be strong."

Some leaders seem to be natural leaders. Some leaders seem to be reluctant leaders. Some become leaders because, in time of crisis, leadership is thrust upon them.

Most of the time, regardless of how well a person seems to be prepared for leadership, situations occur when the leader finds that he just can't go it alone; that he needs help. And when that situation occurs, one should never be afraid to ask God for help. Moses and Joshua did, and with God's help and blessing, they were able to get the job done.

Beshalach in a Nutshell

Exodus 13:17-17:16

Below is this week's Parshah in a Nutshell from chabad.org.

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the Children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.



In the desert, the people suffer thirst and hunger and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff; He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The Children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

Who is this Joshua?

Near the end of this week's parshah we learn that Joshua leads an army that defeats the Amalekites at Rephidim. As the Parsha in a Nutshell says, "In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua."

Joshua is, of course, best known for succeeding Moses as the leader of the Children of Israel, taking them into the Promised Land upon the death of Moses. He is also known to many as the leader who won the battle of Jericho (Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down.)

There is even a Book of Joshua in the Bible. So I thought that a bit more background about Joshua might be interesting, and I found it at www.jewishhistory.org. And following that article, there is an October, 2017 article from the Times of Israel about how Joshua stopped the sun. If you are not familiar with that story, it is truly fascinating.

Joshua

One of the great tragedies of Moses' life was that his children did not fill his shoes. Rarely does one find in biblical or even general history that great people produced offspring who succeed them in a meaningful fashion. Moses' successor will not be among his descendants. In fact, one of his great-grandchildren will become a pagan priest.



No one has any contracts or guarantees. Greatness is not a matter of inheritance. It has to be earned by each individual and each generation. Even if a person is born into a great family he has to carve out his own greatness through his own efforts.

Joshua – Be Strong!

Moses' disciple was Joshua. He was a person of great talents and enormous ability in his own right. He was a warrior, political leader, skilled negotiator, prophet and the greatest scholar of his time. Nevertheless, he so completely subjugated himself to Moses that it was as if he had no confidence in himself when his master passed on.

Before he died, Moses blessed Joshua as follows: "If nothing else, be strong" (Deuteronomy 31:23). That blessing is only said to someone who is not strong, who is beset with great inner doubts and insecurity. "Be strong!" — Moses told him. "Be strong!" — God told him (Joshua 1:6, 9). "Be strong!" — the Jewish people told him (Joshua 1: 18). That phrase is repeated time and again in the Book of Joshua.



Joshua was the warrior who led the battle against Amalek (Exodus 17:9). He was the spy who went to the Land of Israel and came back to give the correct report in the face of enormous peer pressure (Numbers 14). He was the leader of the army who fought the 31 kings of Canaan and defeated them. The sun was stopped for his sake.

Yet everyone kept telling him, "Be strong!"

To his dying day, Joshua lived in a vacuum caused by Moses' death. He was the disciple without his master, the student without his teacher. He did not see himself able to fill Moses' shoes.

We're Back

A month after Moses died, the Jewish people crossed the Jordan, which miraculously split for them in a fashion similar to the Sea of Reeds (Joshua 3:16-17).

Jews had returned to their homeland after a 250 year absence. They would remain in the land for over 800 years, be exiled after the destruction of the First Temple and come back after

70 years. They would remain there for over 400 years, be exiled after the destruction of the Second Temple and remain in exile for almost 2,000 years.

Every time they came back it was with blood. Even under the protection of God, the Jewish people were never free of war. Amalek attacked them almost immediately after the exodus. Then in succession they had to fight Midian, Moab and Sichon. When the Jewish people returned in Joshua's time it, too, would be a time of one war following another.

Joshua Fought the Battle at Jericho



Joshua fought for seven years to conquer the land. It was costly, bloody and tiresome. We can well imagine that there were people who lost hope along way.

31 different kings united against them. The first battle took place just after they crossed the Jordan River near Jericho, which was a great fortress city. In one of the most renowned biblical miracles, the Jewish army marched around the city seven times blowing trumpets until the walls came tumbling down (Joshua 6).

There was not one Jewish casualty. It was completely miraculous. They did not even have to draw their swords from their sheaths.

The Battle of Ai

Given the miraculous way the Battle of Jericho went, people expected all the battles to go that way. They expected all the Canaanite cities to lay down their arms and make peace. However, it was not to be. The very next city they tried to conquer, Ai, put up a bloody fight.

The story is recounted in Chapter 7. The Jewish army was routed and 36 soldiers were killed in battle. Beyond the casualties themselves, the defeat broke their spirit. "The hearts of the people melted away" (Joshua 7:5). Their morale was shattered.

Joshua fell to the ground and said to God, "Did You take this people across the Jordan, to deliver us to the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, God, we would have been content to dwell on the other side of the Jordan."

This is remarkable. Joshua's words are reminiscent of the rebels who complained to Moses every time there was trouble, "Why did you take us out of Egypt?" We hear again the echo of their complaints – but the shocking thing now was that the words were coming out of the mouth of Joshua, the leader!



The Talmud derives a very important lesson from this: If you hear negativism long enough it will seep into you. Joshua was one of two people to stand up to the negativity of the spies – yet now he mouthed it himself!

God's response was: "Why are you laying prostrate?" Get up. There was still a war to fight. The reason you lost was because one of the soldiers sinned. Find out who it was and continue the battle.

A man by the name of Achan confessed that he had secretly taken booty and buried it (Joshua 7:20). After he was put to death, the Jewish army went on to capture the city of Ai.

The Day the Sun Stood Still

The Book of Joshua also contains the famous incident when God stopped the sun, lengthening the day in Joshua's merit, in order to pursue a critical battle to its end (Joshua 10:12). It was literally a moment frozen in time, which gave the Jewish army victory.

There are many interpretations of the sun standing still, including of course the literal one. However, the deeper point is that over and over again the Jewish people would never have been able to conquer the Land of Israel by natural means.

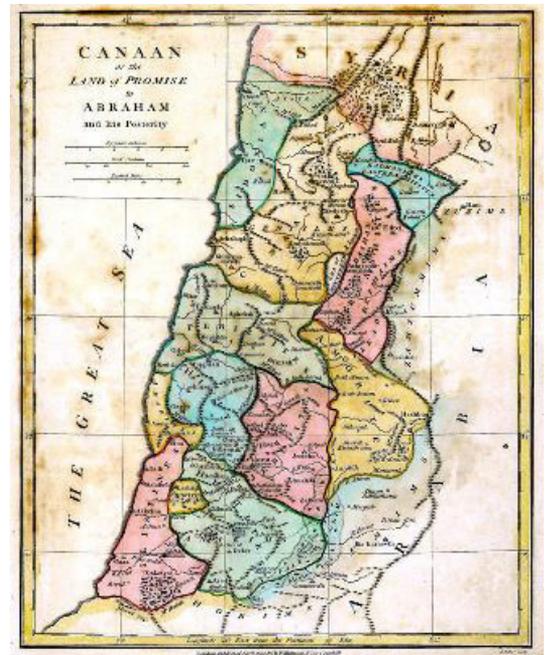
It would not entail wars purely of strategy and arms. Not every battle would be openly miraculous, but in general the conquering of the Land of Israel was not going to be natural.

The Luck of the Draw

The division of the Land of Israel between the tribes was done by choosing lots (chapters 14-21). The great moral lesson implied is that we all receive gifts from heaven not dependent upon anything logical. Why is one person born with certain gifts and not another? Why is one person born under apparently favorable circumstances and not another? Ultimately it is a mystery. It comes from God.

The division of the Land of Israel is not subject to negotiations. Everyone thinks he knows what is best for him. However, a person never really knows what is best for him. He never knows what is blessing and what is not. Many times in life things occur that we think are terribly negative, but turn out to be completely positive. And vice versa. There are people who pursue a deal again and again and again... until they finally get it – and it turns out to be a deal that undoes everything they accomplished previously.

One never knows in life. When God said the land would be divided by lots He was in effect saying, "Let me choose your lot in life for you. I know what you really need better than you do. Do not look at the other person's property. It has nothing to do with you. Look at your own property. Look into what you are going to do with what you have."



This great life lesson is hammered home by very method through which the Land of Israel was divided between the tribes.

Seven Years Later

Finally, after seven years the land was more or less subdued. That was followed by seven years of colonization. The twelve tribes divided the country.

Before his death, Joshua disbanded the great Jewish army that won the war. He also disbanded the central council of the tribes and thus in effect created a confederacy of twelve distinct tribes rather than a single country united with a strong central government. They were united by a common past, a common Torah and a common God, but they were not a truly centralized political entity. As we will see in the time of Samuel, there was an advantage to that.

Joshua accomplished all the goals he set out from the beginning. Together with Moses, they were like a single, great individual who ruled and formed the people for a combined 80 years.

After them, it would be a different world. The transition from Joshua to the era of the Judges would not be so smooth. Indeed, after Joshua the Jewish people would go into a steady decline, which would only be arrested at the time of Samuel, Saul and King David.

When the sun stood still upon Gibeon 'Joshua stopped the sun' 3,224 years ago today, scientists say

Researchers claim epic Biblical story is earliest account of annular eclipse that occurred on October 30, 1207 BCE; also helps pinpoint reigns of Pharaohs Ramesses and Merneptah

By David Sedley 30 October 2017, 10:11 pm 31

Cambridge researchers announced Monday that they have pinpointed the date of the biblical account of Joshua stopping the sun — which they claim is the day of the oldest eclipse ever recorded — to October 30, 1207 BCE, exactly 3,224 years ago.

In a paper published in the “Royal Astronomical Society journal Astronomy & Geophysics,” researchers explained that they were consequently also able to refine the dates of the reigns of two Egyptian pharaohs of that era, Ramesses the Great and his son Merneptah.



Joshuah Ordering the Sun to Stand Still (1743-1744), Joseph Marie Vien in Musée Fabre, Montpellier. (Public domain, Wikimedia Commons)

The paper reinforces research published earlier this year by Israeli scientists, which also interpreted the biblical story as referring to an eclipse on the same date.

The researchers rejected earlier Chinese and Ugaritic records of eclipses as unreliable, concluding that the Bible contains the only record of a solar eclipse prior to 1000 BCE.

Chapter 10 of the Book of Joshua relates that soon after Joshua and the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they waged battle against five armies which laid siege to the Gibeonites. Joshua had promised to protect the Gibeonites, so he led an army and defeated the five kings. Joshua prayed that God help the Israelites in their battle by stopping the sun:



Solar annular eclipse in Jinan, Republic of China, January 15, 2010. (CC BY-SA A013231, Wikimedia Commons)

“Then Joshua spoke to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered the Amorites before the children of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel: ‘Sun, stand still [dom] upon Gibeon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Ayalon.’” (Joshua 10:12).

“If these words are describing a real observation, then a major astronomical event was taking place — the question for us to figure out is what the text actually means,” said paper co-author Colin Humphreys from the University of Cambridge’s Department of Materials Science & Metallurgy.

“Modern English translations, which follow the King James translation of 1611, usually interpret this text to mean that the sun and moon stopped moving,” Humphreys explained. “But going back to the original Hebrew text, we determined that an alternative meaning could be that the sun and moon just stopped doing what they normally do: they stopped shining.”

Humphreys said that if the biblical account means that the light from the sun appeared to stop shining, it may refer to an eclipse.

“This interpretation is supported by the fact that the Hebrew word translated ‘stand still’ has the same root as a Babylonian word used in ancient astronomical texts to describe eclipses,” he said.

The researchers note that they were not the first to interpret the words as referring to an astronomical event — Robert Wilson suggested it in 1918. However, until recently, it was impossible to confirm the exact date of the eclipse, due to the “laborious nature of the calculations required.”

More recently, researchers were unable to find any eclipse occurring during the time that the Israelites were in Canaan. However, they only considered total eclipses, where the moon passes between the sun and the earth, blocking the sunlight completely.

Their new research found, however, that an annular eclipse, “in which the moon passes directly in front of the sun, but is too far away to cover the disc completely, leading to the characteristic ‘ring of fire’ appearance,” occurred on October 30, 1207 BCE.

The researchers note that the ancient world did not distinguish linguistically between total and annular eclipses.

“The researchers developed a new eclipse code, which takes into account variations in the Earth’s rotation over time,” Cambridge University said in its statement. “From their calculations, they determined that the only annular eclipse visible from Canaan between 1500 and 1050 BC was on 30 October 1207 BC, in the afternoon.”

“Independent evidence that the Israelites were in Canaan between 1500 and 1050 BC can be found in the Merneptah Stele,” the Cambridge University statement said.

The paper then goes on to apply this event to precisely date the reigns of two ancient Egyptian pharaohs.

“Solar eclipses are often used as a fixed point to date events in the ancient world,” said Humphreys.

The Merneptah Stele, a “large inscribed granite block now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo,” was carved in the fifth year of the reign of Merneptah and describes his defeat of the Israelites in Canaan two or three years earlier.

Using the precise dating of the eclipse and the stele, the researchers were able to pinpoint the reigns of Merneptah and his father Ramesses the Great.

“Using these new calculations, the reign of Merneptah began in 1210 or 1209 BCE. As it is known from Egyptian texts how long he and his father reigned for, it would mean that Ramesses the Great reigned from 1276-1210 BCE, with a precision of plus or minus one year, the most accurate dates available.”



Merneptah Stele, circa 1208 BCE, known as the Israel stela, was discovered in 1896 and is now found in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. (CC-BY-SA, via Wikipedia)