

Puzzling Hebrew Scripture Revealed For The Modern Mind

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“CAST YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS, FOR AFTER MANY DAYS YOU WILL FIND IT AGAIN. GIVE PORTIONS TO SEVEN, YES TO EIGHT, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT DISASTER MAY COME UPON THE LAND.” ECCLESIASTES 11:1-2 NIV

Many people have wondered what is meant by “Cast your bread upon the water, and you will find it after many days...” Actually, it is an old Hebrew idiom referring to primitive boat races. More accurately, miniature raft competitions.

Hebrew scholar Hiam Shlomovitz, of Tel Aviv University, in his 1935 dissertation on this curious and oft mis-understood passage, gave this interpretation found in the New World Middle Eastern Encyclopedia Vol. 12, page 309, 1959 Edition. “The ancient Jews were never much for being mariners, but they did enjoy a good bet. Gambling in the Middle-East was a prominent ancient pastime and remains so today. The Western and European teachers of Holy Scripture failed to apply obvious laws of gravity and simple physics to this Bible passage. Even a child knows that a loaf of bread, let alone a slice of bread, will readily absorb liquid. Placing any baked grain onto the surface of water will merely cause it to sink.

“While in captivity in Egypt, the Jews invented a means to torment their “harsh taskmasters.” They craftily came up with a concoction (now lost to time itself) that was a lightweight and transparent water sealant. Most likely egg whites were part of the mix. When applied with papyrus brushes, no shine or discoloration showed. What a trick! After lengthy testing, surviving records show that a simple loaf of bread could stay afloat for ‘many days.’ This was only true of fresh water, because salt water tended to disintegrate the secret solution rapidly.

“Utilizing the Nile River and its massive delta, the Hebrews would bet their slave-driving hosts as to whether Egyptian bakers’ bread was superior in the untried arena of floatation. The prideful and arrogant pagans fashioned design after design in order to beat the unsinkable loaves of the Hebrew bakers. No record survives of any success. What did the Jews get out of their winnings...nothing more ‘straw for bricks’ and snickering satisfaction.

“Once the conniving Hebrews relocated to the Promised Land, in honor of the Passover, they switched to using only unleavened flatbread, called matzah. Hence, the beginning of raft races.

“Without any evil taskmasters to schnooker, the Hebrews simply enjoyed fair and square competitions among themselves. To catch the wind, miniature sails on delicate masts developed. Securing these accoutrements to the cracker bread required drilling tiny holes plus an advanced understanding of glue. This mastery was learned by years of ‘toil by the sweat of their brows’ making bricks and building Egyptian cities.

“As previously stated, the sealants’ chemical ingredients were lost in antiquity. Petrified matzah unearthed in the holy land reveal markings for riggings, sails, and a centrally located hole for the mast. Lab work failed to identify the chemicals used for the all important coating, due to decomposition.

“Finally, the scripture passage “YOU WILL FIND IT AGAIN...” has never been a mystery to even the modern-day Jew or resident of the holy land. Attaching string or entwined animal hair to the matzah ships as a bow-line, prevented it from drifting away. But, many children and adults who were not good

swimmers and did not use or secure a bow line simply had to let their ship drift away. An unknown number of landlubbers drowned in efforts to catch a ship.

“Back to the text. Whether due to tides at the Sea of Galilee or the odd currents of the slow-moving Jordan River, on even the very next day, if owners were patient, they just might find their boat right close to where they had last seen it. Such lucky occurrences are noted in historical documents.

“To clarify, ‘cast,’ is from the original Egyptian language. It simply meant, “shove-off.” Confusion has arisen when biblical scholars (who you might say are one exposition short of a full degree) and church laymen, apply Hebrew or Aramaic instead.

“GIVE PORTIONS TO SEVEN, YES TO EIGHT, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT DISASTER MAY COME...This section of the passage emphasizes the very real possibility of losing one’s craft and the need to create extras, or more correctly, keep a personal fleet at the ready. High-winds and rainstorms could arrive without warning and not allow enough time to save vessels. Ship stealing was not uncommon either.

“It is recorded that when a boy, King Solomon, with other palace siblings, used the handy Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem to play pirate, fisherman, or seafaring merchant with his matzah flotilla.”

Of course today, in modern Israel, anyone can buy a can of water sealant and apply by spray or brush to a fleet of matzah rafts. Bagel races have become quite popular too. Sliced bagels provide opportunity for twin crafts with circular flat decks. Would-be captains use tiny motors, rudders, sails and flags. They even attach toy action figures for a miniature captain and crew. These vessels are operated with remote control (RC) hand-held devices.

Now when the ancient holiday Passover occurs , hobbyists jovially dress in ancient clothing and have pretend battles of hapless Egyptians against clever and hearty Jewish slaves. Prizes are also awarded for craft handiwork.

Another story from REAL LIFE (that I made up!) This parody news story is for amusement. Any similarity to real people, places or things is fictitious and not to be taken as fact.