

NOVEMBER 28, 2016

Parashat Toldot

Historical Sophistry

And he called the name of the well Esek (Genesis 26:20)

ויקרא שם הבאר עשק (בראשית כו:כ)

Most of us have, during a visit to Israel, made the pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Book, the beautiful underground domed structure at the Israel Museum in the heart of Jerusalem. This shrine houses a number of critical archeological finds, including the world famous [Dead Sea Scrolls](#). These scrolls, the world's oldest biblical manuscripts, established a Jewish connection to the Dead Sea region dating back thousands of years. Moreover, they represent such significant archeological finds that earlier this month the Israel Antiquities Authority [launched a three-year initiative to survey hundreds of caves in the Judean Desert](#) near the Dead Sea in the hopes of locating additional scrolls. Unfortunately, just as the Palestinian Authority (PA) denied that there is Jewish connection to the Temple Mount at the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) last month, the PA seems to have turned its sights on the Dead Sea Scrolls as well. [According to the Jerusalem Post](#), the Palestinian Authority recently hinted that it, "is preparing to lay a claim to the Dead Sea Scrolls at UNESCO." The PA considers Qumran, the location where the scrolls were discovered, to be a part of its future State (Qumran is currently designated as "Area C" under full Israeli control), and the Palestinians want to register the location under the "state of Palestine" on the World Heritage List. The PA plans to bring the matter of the Dead Sea Scrolls up before the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation, a committee that operates in an advisory capacity to UNESCO. This effort is not the first attempt in history by a neighboring population to erase a Jewish connection to Israel. In fact, it has been happening throughout history all the way back to our forefather Isaac.

Chapter 26 describes a number of attempts on the part of Isaac to establish a firm footing for his family. In order to lay down roots, Isaac must first dig a well in order to support his cattle and household. Yet, every time his servants completed a well, the herdsman of Gerar, the local Philistine city, claimed the well and drove Isaac's shepherds away. During the second episode, of Isaac's men digging a well and then being driven away, we read that, "the herdsmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdsmen, saying: 'The water is ours.' And [Isaac] called the name of the well Esek; because they contended (in Hebrew *hitasku*) with him." Commenting on the meaning of the name Esek, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes (on verse 20) that the word means, "to grasp something forcibly with your mind, to try and obtain something by sophistry." Hirsch notes that this dispute was in the exact style, which down the centuries has been used against the Jews in exile—"yes, you dug the well, the hole belongs to you, but the water is ours." Isaac specifically named the well Esek to memorialize the Philistine campaign of lies employed to gain control of a well that did not in fact belong to them and thus to drive Isaac and his family away.

Kli Yakar (on verse 19) quotes the position of Ramban that the struggles surrounding the wells specifically allude to future events that would later take place in Jewish history. In the words of Ramban, *ma'aseh avot siman l'banim*—"the actions of the forefathers represent a sign for their descendants." Today we witness the identical tactic employed so many centuries ago in an effort to deny the Jewish connection to the Holy Land and the rich Jewish history embedded in the soil across Israel. Commenting on this new Palestinian effort to lay claim to the Dead Sea Scrolls, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, Israel's envoy to UNESCO, [said](#), "This is another instance of provocation and the *chutzpah* of the Palestinians trying to rewrite history and erase our connection to our land... The fragments of the scrolls are proof and a weighty archaeological evidence of the historical connection of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel."

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Combatting BDS on All Fronts

Go from us... (Genesis 26:16)

לך מעמנו (בראשית כו:טז)

Earlier this month, “[the] Central Student Government voted 34 to 13 to reject a resolution that would have called on the University of Michigan to divest its investments in several companies that allegedly commit human rights violations against Palestinians,” the [Michigan Daily reported](#). The defeated resolution represented the 10th attempt since 2002 to pass a divestment resolution at the University of Michigan, following in the path of similar resolutions at many other schools around the country. “This resolution challenges the core of what I stand for...this resolution calls for the delegitimization of Israel and that is not what the majority of this campus stands for,” junior Joe Goldberg said. Speaking at the Jerusalem Post Diplomatic Conference last week, Israeli Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan echoed and amplified Goldberg’s sentiment [when he said that](#), “Just as the goal of terrorism is to spread fear and instability, BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) aims to delegitimize and isolate Israel and in the end to destroy it. The ideological roots of both Palestinian terror and the BDS campaign are exactly the same. BDS is not about human rights, both are about the rejection of Israel’s right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people.”

Isaac faced the very same attitude in his struggle against the Philistines. As Isaac is blessed with successful crops, growing flocks, personal wealth and prominence, we learn that, “And the man (Isaac) became great, and grew more and more until he became very great...” (26:13) As the local Philistine population witnessed Isaac’s growth, they “envied him and stopped up his wells,” (verse 14-15) and then finally, Philistine King Abimelech said to Isaac: “Go from us; for you are much mightier than we.” (26:16) Commenting on the Philistine king’s banishment of Isaac for the sin of amassing too much wealth, Rabbi Israel Meir of Radin (also known as the Chafetz Chaim) noted that this act represents an early example of anti-Semitism. Consumed by jealousy for his neighbor Isaac’s success, Abimelech is filled with hatred and takes steps to drive Isaac and his household from his land. Netziv, in his *Ha’amek Davar* commentary sees the actions of Abimelech as a harbinger of the future: “The text implies that a similar fate will befall the Jews in the Diaspora when they will be restricted in their right of domicile based upon the claim that we enrich ourselves from the coffers of the State...” The anti-Semitism, jealousy and hatred Isaac encountered would eventually affect his descendants, both in the Diaspora, and today in the Jewish state.

Today, that same hatred is couched in the language of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which claims to advocate on behalf of Palestinians, but in fact seeks to delegitimize, stigmatize and isolate Israel. Thankfully, friends of Israel from across the political spectrum are rising to challenge, weaken and ultimately defeat the BDS movement. We have seen the fruits of these efforts on campuses across America like the University of Michigan, where AIPAC-trained student activists used a proactive approach to lobby members of Student Government, with whom they had longstanding relationships, to oppose the resolution, as well as in the halls of the United States Congress. Earlier this month, Reps. Peter Roskam (R-IL) and Juan Vargas (D-CA) [introduced the bipartisan “Protecting Israel Against Economic Discrimination Act”](#) as part of the continuing effort combat the BDS movement against Israel. The bill would amend existing U.S. anti-boycott laws to include efforts by international organizations to economically isolate the Jewish state, and it would require the Export-Import Bank to negatively consider BDS activity when evaluating potential applicants. “The Protecting Israel Against Economic Discrimination Act puts Congress on the record opposing the UNHRC resolution and other attempts to economically harm and delegitimize Israel,” said Reps. Roskam and Vargas. “U.S. taxpayer-backed financing should not be available to those who choose to conduct economic warfare against Israel.” When asked why he thinks there is “overwhelming” bipartisan support in Congress for the fight against BDS, Congressman Roskam [said simply](#), “I mean, good grief, you got one nation that is held to a standard by which nobody else is held to.”

According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan petitioned the international community to “reject BDS in all forms,” and pressure Palestinian leadership to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. “If each of your countries make this a core demand from the Palestinians [recognizing Israel as a Jewish state] and repeat it over and over...we may see the day when we have true partner for peace.” ■

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