

One of the readers of PaleoBabble recently asked me to take a look at some of the claims of Jordan Maxwell. I'd heard of Maxwell before, but had never really taken much of an interest in his work (presented on his website), mostly because it was hard to navigate. I've given it more of a look now and it seems I've been directed to yet another treasure trove of PaleoBabble.

One of Maxwell's claims is that the name "Israel" derives from three deity names: Isis-Ra-El. This is utter nonsense for two basic reasons: (1) The Bible itself points to a derivation (there is more than one possibility, none of which are anything near to what Maxwell says), and (2) Hebrew and Egyptian come from different language families (one Semitic, the other Afro-Asiatic), and so the syllables in the Hebrew word "Israel" do not line up phonetically to the Egyptian words "Isis" and "Ra", thus marring Maxwell's analysis (hate to call it an analysis really).

1. The Old Testament vs. Maxwell

Let's start with the first reason - the one that Maxwell utterly ignores. What a surprise. Those readers familiar with the Old Testament patriarch stories will likely recall that the name "Israel" was given to the patriarch Jacob after he wrestled with a divine being. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and hence Jacob's twelve sons became known as the twelve tribes of ISRAEL. Anyone who has actually read that Old Testament story (Genesis 32) knows that when the name of Jacob is changed, an explanation is given. Here's the passage:

²² The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the *יַבְבֹּק*. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And *יָצָא* a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, *יִשְׂרָאֵל* "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then he said, *יִשְׂרָאֵל* **Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for *יָצָא*; you have striven with God and *יָצָא*; with men, and have prevailed.** ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, *יִשְׂרָאֵל* "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For *יָצָא*; I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed *יְבֻל* Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

According to Genesis 32:28, the name "Israel" (*יִשְׂרָאֵל*) is connected somehow to the idea of "struggling." As a result, many Hebrew scholars relates "Israel" to the verb *סָרַח* (*sarah*; "to struggle, fight"; note the similar consonants - the last of which would drop off if another element is added). This would mean that "Israel" (if it comes from this verb root) literally means either "El (God) fights" (presumably for his people), or "he fights (with) El (God)." The point could also be wordplay - "God fights"

in a passage where Jacob is fighting with God. The former option follows predominant Hebrew word order for predicate + subject, but the narrative in Gen 32 favors the latter. There is another option, though. Other scholars think "Israel" comes not from verb $\times\textcircled{\times},\times\text{'}\times\text{'}$ (*sarah*; "to struggle, fight") but from the verb $\times\textcircled{\times},\times\text{'}\times\text{'}$ (*sarar*; "to rule, be strong"). In this case the name would mean "El (God) is strong" and would likely point to Jacob being subdued by the embodied God in the Genesis 32 story. A third option is that the proper root is $\times^{\text{TM}}\times\textcircled{\times}\times\text{'}$ (*yasar*; "just, right"), and so the meaning would be something like "El (God) is just." In favor of this third option is the alternate word for Israel found in the Old Testament, Jeshurun (y-s-r-n) in Deut 32:15; 33:5, 26.

At any rate, Jacob's old name recalled his past underhand dealings ("Jacob" means "supplanting" - and it was Jacob who stole his brother Esau's birthright; it can also mean "deception" and the narratives of Jacob's life give abundant testimony to this character flaw of his). His new name, Israel, recalled this incident in which he wrestled with God and prevailed with a blessing.

The point here is that the Old Testament telegraphs what Jacob's name means according to three semantically similar Hebrew options / roots. Think of that - interpreting a Hebrew name with Hebrew! That's just too boring for Jordan Maxwell. Why read the biblical story associated with the name "Israel" when we can just make up something cooler? That brings us to Maxwell's second problem.

2. Egyptian and Semitic Language / Linguistics vs. Maxwell

Just as I'd bet that Maxwell counts on his followers not knowing the Genesis 32 story and its own explanation of the name "Israel," I'm betting Maxwell knows nothing of Egyptian or Hebrew or Semitic languages. I'd also bet he doesn't care, since his real agenda is creating some sort of link between Israelite religion and Egyptian mystery religion. When that's your goal, who cares about boring facts about language.

One sidebar note before we get to the material. Maxwell is apparently from the William Henry school of determining word meanings by dicing, slicing, and splicing syllables of words. If a sound of one word sounds like a word in another language, there **MUST** be a connection! This is crap. The human mouth is only capable of making a finite number of sounds (this is what phonology is concerned with, a sub-discipline of linguistics). Since there are only a finite number of sounds a human can make with tongue, lips, teeth, throat, cleft palate, and nasal passages, it is no surprise that humans all over the world make the same sounds. What else would they make? But human people groups assembled and inflect those sounds in specific and divergent ways. People who are in close proximity geographically will often share how sounds are put together - hence we get "language families" like "Semitic." The languages in that family share certain features. But people groups who have no proximity put the sounds together quite differently. The result is that the three sounds (two consonants and a vowel) in "bat" in English (an Indo-European language) mean "flying rodent" or "stick you hit a baseball with" while in Hebrew "bat" means something quite different ("daughter"). Unless you're William Henry, that is. Or Jordan Maxwell.



First, it should be apparent from the discussion in #1 above that Maxwell does get one syllable right - the last one ("el"). Hard to mess that up. But the more important ones are the first two, since they are the Egyptian elements to his agenda.

In the world of Maxwell the first syllable in "Israel" ("is" or "yis") must come from "Isis". Why? Because they sound the same. Yeah, they sound the same **IN ENGLISH!** Unfortunately for Maxwell, the Egyptians didn't write or speak English. "Isis" was not the way the Egyptians pronounced the name of this goddess. That pronunciation comes from Greek and Coptic, languages that came into the biblical world centuries after Hebrew. The Egyptian pronunciation of the name of this goddess was something like "Waset" or "Awset." No resemblance to "is" or "yis". Here's how "Isis" is spelled in hieroglyphs:



Starting at the lefthand side, the first glyph (a throne; Gardner sign Q1) is pronounced "ws" or "as" or "aws" depending on which Egyptologist or grammar you'll pick up. If you want a detailed linguistic description of the pronunciation issues and development, see A. Loprieno's linguistic introduction to Egyptian. The next glyph at the top is the "t" sound. The other two are determinatives and are unpronounced. The final determinative (female) denotes this is a goddess.

The point: the first syllable of Israel does not correspond to "Awset." One down, one to go.

The second syllable in "Israel" (אִשְׂרָאֵל; ra³) also requires a bit of unpacking. In Hebrew, we have the first syllable *yis*, and the next syllable is אִשְׂרָאֵל (ra³ in transliteration). The aleph letter (א) is also shared by the last syllable – אֵל (el). The second syllable (אִשְׂרָאֵל) is composed of the Hebrew "r" plus the Hebrew aleph (א). What is the apostrophe? That is the English character that denotes A SILENT LETTER. That's right, aleph is silent in Hebrew (it's a back-of-the-throat stop). What this means is that these two consonants by themselves are not actually pronounced "ra" (though they can be – it depends on the vowel associated with the consonants). But that's a minor issue. **More important is that in Egyptian, the deity name "Ra" is NOT spelled with the Egyptian aleph** (the falcon ). It's spelled with the sun disk sign ☉ and the arm sign  (when spelled phonetically). The arm sign is pronounced "ghah" (it is the equivalent of Hebrew 'ayin [א], not aleph א). Therefore, this "equivalence" is also marred. **But even more damning to Maxwell's idea is the fact that the name "Ra" is actually present in the**

Hebrew Bible, so we know how the Hebrews would have spelled it! Is "Ra" in Hebrew letters אר? Nope. So it cannot be part of the name "Israel". Where in the Hebrew Bible do we find the name "Ra"? Just where you'd expect it - it's part of an Egyptian Pharaoh's name in Jeremiah 44:30 -

Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will give Pharaoh **Hophra** [הֲפֹרַע] king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies . . .

The name **Hophra** is the combination of the familiar "hepher" ("khepher" - the verb formed by the sign of the dung beetle which means "to become") + "Ra" - and so the name Hophra means "he becomes Ra" (no surprise there with respect to Egyptian religion). And so how is Hophra spelled in Jeremiah 44:30 in Hebrew? With the Hebrew 'ayin [ע], not aleph א. Maxwell is 0-for-2. His contention is bogus, and so any claims he makes on its basis are equally bogus.