

Bogged in Confusion: Yam Suph

"And they removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red Sea (rendered as "Reed Sea" in modern Bible translations)," Numbers 33: 10 (KJV).

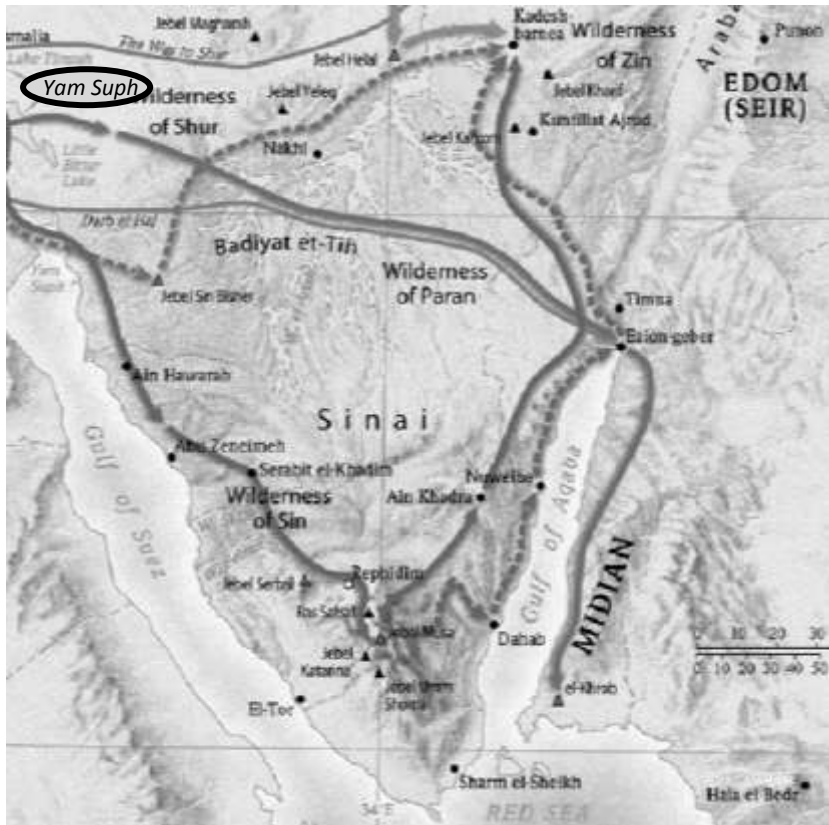
Leaving *Elim*, the scenery changed. Instead of sandy plains, the nomad nation would have entered the mountains with its lush carpets of early spring grasses, in striking contrast to the red sandstone of the rocks dotting the land.⁷⁰ They followed the coastline that next day, and camped by a marshy area. The Bible leaves out this sixth camping location from the Exodus 15-16 account, but lists it in the summary of campsites found in Numbers 33. Therefore, it is included here, for there is something to learn from the marshes.

But, we must not get ahead of our story. To begin, we must first identify the location of this encampment. Is it possible to pinpoint it on a map? Actually this sixth campsite has been the object of considerable controversy. Was it along the Red Sea, as the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible states? Or, as modern Bible versions record, was it on the edge of the Reed Sea, located in the Suez Valley north of the Gulf of the Suez?

Those who locate the Red Sea Crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba and pinpoint Mount Sinai as *Jebel el Lawz* in the land of Midian, also identify *Yam Suph* (translated as "Red Sea" in the KJV) as a marshy region fraught with reeds near the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez.

As the following map indicates (see the map on the next page), the Reed Sea region, which many identify as *Yam Suph* (circled on the map) is quite a great distance from the eastern shores of the Gulf of *Aqaba*, where this campsite should be if our prior camp locations are

accurate. The map below shows the commonly believed route of the Exodus. (For a correct map of the Exodus, see pages 29 and 75.)



The above map shows several different (all inaccurate) Exodus routes. Notice that Mount Sinai is in the Sinai Peninsula on this map, rather being correctly placed in Midian.

Miles apart, one may wonder how there could be such uncertainty between identifying the correct body of water. The source of the confusion in locating this camping spot is a translation problem from the Septuagint. "Red Sea" and "Reed Sea" are both translated from the same Hebrew term: *Yam Suph*.

REED SEA OR RED SEA? DOES IT MATTER?

Was Israel's sixth campsite located near the shores of the great Red Sea? Or was it by the shoreline of the shallow Reed Sea? Naturally, the location of this campsite effects the Crossing Point of Israel's deliverance. For this *Yam Suph*, is the same body of water in which the Egyptians drowned.

Many Christians consider this controversy a moot point. After all, whether the Egyptian army drowned in a few inches of water, or God parted a deep sea for His people to pass through, the deliverance of Israel was miraculous. To illustrate this way of thinking, one unknown Christian started a story which has circulated about in various forms over the Internet. This story is not meant to be true, only to demonstrate how Christians have come to think regarding this controversy.



A boy was reading about Israel's deliverance from Egypt while resting on a park bench in the warmth of the autumn afternoon. "Wow! God is great!" he exclaimed without worry over who might hear him.

A man passing by overheard the boy's remark. Feeling himself very enlightened in the ways of scientific fact and above the "childish" belief in the supernatural, he asked the boy about the

reason for his praise.

"I just read that God opened up the waves of the Red Sea and led the whole nation of Israel right through the middle on dry land!"

Laughing lightly, the man sat down next to the boy and began to try to open his eyes to the "realities" of the biblical miracles. "That can all be very easily explained," the man began. "Science has shown that the area your Bible story calls the 'Red Sea' was really the 'Reed Sea.' The place where the Israelites passed through was only ten inches deep at that time. The Israelites just had to wade across."

Frowning, the boy's eyes searched the page of his Bible story book. He was obviously in deep thought as he turned to the next page. Content that he had dispelled the darkness of myth and revealed the finer points of scientific insight, the man patted the boy's shoulder and rose to leave.

Scarcely had he taken two steps before the child exclaimed again. Surprised, the man turned back only to find the boy's face again wreathed in smiles. "Now what?" he asked.

"God DID do a miracle for the Children of Israel. He drowned the whole Egyptian army in just ten inches of water!"

"... Doubt regarding the accuracy of (the Bible's) historical 'trivia' undermines God's Book on every other front as well."

Cute as this tale may be, it is based on a faulty premise. Does the Bible mean what it says? Believing that it doesn't matter whether the biblical account is accurate or not reveals a deep-seated doubt in the Bible's credibility. And doubt regarding the accuracy of its historical "trivia" undermines God's Book on every other front as well.

EVIDENCE FOR THE RED SEA

There should be no doubt regarding the Scriptures. Yahweh's Word means just what it says. Even the proverbial rocks "cry out" in support of the biblical record, for there is ample archaeological evidence to validate the account.

Today, the chariot wheels on the floor of the Gulf of Aquaba testify to the accuracy of the Bible record. And the body of water containing those traces of the Egyptian army is indeed the Red Sea, as it states plainly in the King James Version of the Bible.

According to this evidence, the *Yam Suph* of the sixth campsite had to be on the Red Sea. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* further confirms this conclusion.

"**sea-weed**, sedge, Jonah 2:6. Hence *yam sup* (alternate spelling for *yam suph*), the sea of sedge, i.e. the Arabian Gulf or Red Sea, which abounds in seaweed..."⁷¹

This lexicon has been around for a long time (first edition: 1949) and many other lexicons have borrowed from it. So the sea the Israelites crossed, according to this lexicon, was the Red Sea, which was full of sea-weed.

Finally, we find a third verification that *Yam Suph* is indeed the Red Sea. Two other Scriptural references using this term translate *Yam Suph* as Red Sea:

"... These forty-two campsites are carefully recorded... to teach us..."

*And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea (*Yam Suph*), to compass the land of Edom; and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way, Numbers 21:4.*

*The earth is moved at the noise of their fall, at the cry the noise thereof was heard in the Red Sea (*Yam Suph*), Jeremiah 49:21*

Thus, having verified the biblical account scripturally, with the lexicon and through archaeology, we can state with reasonable certainty that the sixth campsite was located by a marshy region near the lengthy shoreline of the Red Sea. No other body of water in the region would have been large enough for the Israelites to have traveled so long and still be close to its coast.⁷²

A CLUELESS CAMPSITE?

Clearly there were more than the recorded forty-two campsites between the borders of Egypt and the Promised Land. One evidence for this is the length of time it took the Children of Israel to travel from one campsite to another. For example, the Bible tells us that it took three days for the multitude to reach *Marah* after having left the

Red Sea. Yet, the Word is silent about where the people stopped to sleep on those intervening nights.

As has been mentioned in a previous chapter, these forty-two campsites are carefully recorded, not as meaningless factoids of historical data, but rather to teach the lessons of the process Yahweh uses to experientially seal us in His own forty-two-letter Name!

*"Suph" was a
Hebrew metaphor
for despondency,
discouragement and
despair.*

In light of this, we are brought up against a real problem. There are not many scriptural details given about this campsite. Numbers 33 summarizes the stops the Israelites made in the wilderness. After crossing "the sea," they camped in Marah, then Elim. Then "they moved from Elim and camped near the 'Red Sea' [*Yam Suph*]," (Numbers 33:10).

But, why is a campsite, without any recorded events, listed among the forty-two? If this sixth recorded campsite truly had no spiritual lessons to reveal, it would have been left out of the biblical record as surely as were the numerous other unmentioned sites. It's very presence in the Numbers Thirty-three list invites closer investigation.

The first clue about this campsite is the biblical meaning found in the Hebrew name for this site: *Yam Suph*. Insight into the term *suf* (an alternate spelling for *suph*) is found in Jonah 2:5:

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

In this verse, *suf* is translated "weeds" meaning "sea-weed" or "kelp." By this usage of *suph*, we find that it was a literal reference to seaweed and a metaphor expressing "despondency, discouragement, and despair."

Could it be that after Elim, the throng of desert travelers, encountered some spiritual discouragement in their stay at *Yam Suph*?

It is interesting that skepticism and doubt have arisen among scholars in locating *Yam Suph*. Remarkable also is the fact that *suph* is used as a symbol for “despondency;” for as the spiritual message of the number six reveals, this is one of the issues found in the Hebrew



Gematria of this number. Perhaps a warning to walk carefully according to the Word, rather than falling into doubt, is precisely what we are to “see” at this sixth campsite to Canaan.

THE GEMATRIA OF SIX

In Hebrew, the letters of the alephbet have numerical value as well as spiritual meaning. Thus, the number six yields more clues to this campsite’s significance. The number six is the Hebrew letter *vav* (ך)

Since *vav* represents the number six, it has long been identified as the number of man:

- Man was created on the **sixth** day
- Man works for **six** days
- There are **six** millennia before the coming of the *Mashiach*
- The “beast” is identified as the ultimate “number of a man” - 666 (Rev. 13:18)

Vav has a good spiritual meaning in that it connects man to his Creator, as is represented in its association with the sixth day of Creation. *Vav* is also used to represent the silver hooks anchoring to the ground, the white linen wall of the Wilderness. It also points to the Saviour’s offering upon the Cross by alluding to the nails which pierced *Yahshua*’s hands and feet, thereby offering a shadow picture of salvation to lost mankind.

But, when taken out to its negative enth, as it is in the number 666, the *vav* yields a sinister message. It points to that which is the epitome of evil. As the Bible states in Revelation, Chapter Seventeen; the beast,

whose number is 666, is associated with the whore of Babylon (meaning confusion). Both of these powers are enemies of the Most High God. Both are ultimately destroyed.



While the negative meaning of the *vav* is more starkly revealed when taken out to its farthest reaches, the message of the sixth campsite of Israel is a less negative form. Here, rather than the “ultimate evil” and “confusion of final Babylon,” the *vav* emblemizes a lesser level of human failing, doubt, and confusion.

DOWN IN THE PITS

As has already been mentioned, this sixth campsite was located along the coast of the Red Sea near a region known for its miry bogs and salt-marsh reeds. This proximity would likely have required passage through the marshy region in multitude’s travels. What would it have been like crossing a bog, or marshland, with a few million people, wagons, carts, and much livestock? In our language today, we would call it “the pits!”

*“... The vav
(Hebrew number
6) emblemizes...
human failing,
doubt and
confusion.”*

Likely the travelers would have faced some difficulty in passing masses of people, animals and wagons over this terrain. It is possible that many found passage laborious in places of sucking slime. Such an experience is certainly supported by the use of “*Suph*,” Jonah’s metaphor for despair. It also ties in to the spiritual message of the number six.

Does such an account have any place in the experiential “rites of passage” for Yahweh’s end-time people? One famous writer believed it did. In John Bunyan’s 17th century allegory, called *Pilgrim’s Progress*, we read about a pilgrim’s experience in a “bog of

despondency.” In this literary work, perhaps we may find another hint or insight into the message of Israel’s sixth camp.

Early in the pilgrim’s journey to the Celestial City (which represents the New Jerusalem), he was joined by Pliable, an acquaintance from the old neighborhood. Pliable didn’t love the King (Yahweh). He wasn’t interested in having his burden of sin lifted. Pliable wasn’t even motivated to accompany the true pilgrim (then called Graceless) by a belief in the forewarnings of destruction coming to his homeland. He simply joined the Christian traveler out of an interest in the “goodies” offered at the end of the journey.

“While they were thus busily talking about the beauties and glories of heaven, and not looking too well to their feet, they did not notice that right in front of them was a great pond filled with mud, the name of which was the Bog, or Slough, of Despond. Into this mire they fell headlong and were soon covered with the filthy mud, and Graceless, because of his burden (which represented his sin) began to sink.

Then cried Pliable, "Ah, neighbor Graceless, where are you now?"

Graceless replied, "I do not know."

Pliable now began to be offended and cried angrily, "Is this the happiness you have been telling me about? If at the beginning of the journey we are thus treated, what will it be like before we reach the journey's end?"⁷³

At this unforeseen difficulty, Pliable quickly abandoned the journey. Thrashing about, he managed to free himself from the muck and rushed back to his soon-to-be-destroyed city, preferring the old life to the discouragements of the pilgrimage.

Graceless, later called Pilgrim, sank deeper into despondency. Until at last he cried out to the King of the City for help. Instantly a hand reached out and lifted him from the bog. It was then that the pilgrim’s benefactor pointed out how needless it had been for him to sink into the slough. The King had provided stones of faith. Had Graceless but stepped upon them, he would not have fallen into Despond in the first place.

Like the doubt of Graceless and Pliable in the allegory, the pitfalls in the path to Glory bring discouragement to the unwary. But, if we will remain prayerful, alert, and faithful we need not ever sink into doubt or despair.



When facing trial, discouragement and difficulty, let us look for the “stones of faith,” to raise us above the “bog.” It is helpful for us to recite instances of answered prayer and divine providence. We must not forget how He has lead us in the past. Our God is patiently countering our confusion with evidence of His care and provision for us as He tenderly guides...

Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood.⁷⁴

NOT THE END – THE BEGINNING

A further depth of meaning into *Yam Suph* is brought out by close study of 1 Corinthians 10:1, where we read that "all passed through the sea." While the obvious reference here is to the crossing of the Red Sea, a word study reveals another application to this *Yam Suph*. Figuratively, *Yam Suph* may refer to "The Sea of the End," or the "end of life" contrasted with a new beginning. How can it be both the beginning and the end of life?

When the Children of Israel encountered the great *Yam Suph* in their deliverance at *Pa Hahiroth*, they found it marked the beginning of their journey to life; as the Slough of Despond marked the Gateway to the Celestial City. But, for the rebellious Egyptians, *Yam Suph* offered death. Like Pliable, who turned back to Destruction at the Slough, the heedless Egyptian army found the “end of life” at *Yam Suph*, while the delivered people of Yahweh found the “beginning of life.”

This is the deeper message in this significant Hebrew term. What is the “end of life” to those who are rebellious, proves a new beginning for the faithful. Yahweh's people are to walk in new life, having left the darkness of death behind.

In support of this dual meaning of *Yam Suph*, author Yoseph Viel, explained that *yam suf* is a word play on *Suf Chayyim*, which indicates the "end of life." *Yam suf*, on the other hand, is the reverse of this process of life coming to an end. In Revelation, it is the result of having your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, *sefer chayyim*, while those who kill with a sword will have their lives so ended. See Revelation 13:8-10.⁷⁵

This perspective bears up with our prior example from *Pilgrim's Progress*. Notably, the experience of the Slough of Despond, which ended Pliable's pilgrimage, marked the beginning for the faithful pilgrim. Just beyond the bog was the very Gateway to the path of life!

The confusion and doubt of the marshland, the bog, the pits, the Slough of Despond! Are you there yet? One thing is sure: before you reach the realm of Canaan, it will find you. Yes, the shadows of marsh and bog will be somewhere in your spiritual pathway, but so will your Almighty God. Facts may be challenged by critics, remapped by agnostics, or renamed by cavers, but God will remain constant, merciful, and true. He doesn't expect you to always understand how He is leading you, but He does expect you to always trust Him! Circumstances and friends may change, but our God is changeless.

When you encounter the Bog of Despond, remember, you needn't sink into the slime of confusion, discouragement and despair. Keep your spiritual eyes upon Him and follow faithfully. In so doing, you'll find His strength to bear you up on “stones” of deliverance. He knows the way through the wilderness. Then, in the experience that would have brought destruction, you'll find renewed commitment and a new life in Yahweh.

"He leadeth me, He leadeth me;
By His own hand He leadeth me:
His faithful follower I would be,
For by His hand He leadeth me."⁷⁶



SUMMARY OF CHAPTER SIX

- *Yam Suph* was Israel's sixth campsite. Located in a marshy region, travel would have been difficult. This experience represents the difficulties we face when our spiritual walk takes us through times of discouragement.
- When we are tempted to fall into confusion or despair, we must look beyond the struggle with the eyes of faith, grasping onto the Truth of the Word with firm "hands."
- *Yam Suph* is the sixth campsite. At its negative end, the number six references the confusion which the Whore and Beast of Revelation will ultimately try to incite among the followers of Yahweh. Should we fall into this confusion, the result will be much like falling into a pit of oozing slime.
- How we handle the testing of our spiritual *Yam Suph* (a play on words referencing both the end and beginning of life) will either bring our spiritual end, or the beginning of our renewed life in Christ.