



Steven Stark-Riemer

An attorney by profession, Steven Stark-Riemer graduated *magna cum laude* from the City College of New York, studying Anthropology, and specializing in Archaeology. In 1970, he conducted fieldwork in Israel at the Tell Gezer excavations under the direction of William G. Dever, then Director of the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archaeological School. Mr. Stark-Riemer graduated in 1972 and was elected Phi Beta Kappa and accepted into the Ph.D. program in Anthropology at UCLA on the strength of his senior thesis on the origins of agriculture in the Nile, Indus, and Mekong River Valleys.

Mr. Stark-Riemer has acquired a devoted following in his community education endeavors in the Capital District. He has taught courses on the archaeology, history and religion of Ancient Israel at Temple Israel, Congregation Ohav Shalom, Brnai Sholom Reform Congregation, and the Bethlehem Humanities Institute for Lifelong Learning (HILL).

Temple Israel Adult Education

Fall 2017

The Archaeology of The Religion of Ancient Israel

Sept 5, Sept 13, Sept 19, Sept 26,
Oct 3, Oct 17, Oct 24

7:00 PM

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The Archaeology of The Religion of Ancient Israel



In this course, we will look mostly at the *practice* of religion in Ancient Israel, no belief, much less theology. We will be concerned with what Israelite religion actually did. While beliefs matter archaeology is more at home with the *thing*, that past peoples made, used, and discarded or reused, and what these artifacts reveal about their behavior. It is less comfortable speculating about what these people *thought* they were doing because as has been said, “archaeologists: are poorly equipped to be paleo psychologists.”

If religion is what the majority of people *actually* believe and do in the name of the religion – not simply what theologians priests and rabbis say they *ought* to believe and do – then archaeology offers its own practical working definition of religion which provides the possibility of a fuller appreciation of the religion of Ancient Israel

Tuesday, September 5.....7:00 PM

I. The History of the Search For Ancient Israel’s Religion



What is the difference between “biblical theology” and “Israelite religion?” Can we use biblical texts and Israelite artifacts to try to “think and feel ourselves” empathetically into the past? How may Ancient Israelites and their immediate descendants have thought about the meaning of their religious experience?

Wednesday, September 13.....7:00 PM

II. Canaanite Religion Before the Emergence of Ancient Israel



Is it possible to view Ancient Israelite religion within the context of the religious environment in which it developed? How have scholars developed their understanding of Canaanite religion?

Tuesday, September 19.....7:00 PM

III. The Distinction Between “Book Religion” and “Folk Religion”: Does the Bible Present Ritual Reality or Theological Ideal?



Has the search for Ancient Israel’s religion paid sufficient attention to the archaeological data, which is substantial? What is the distinction between “book religion” and “folk religion?” Is the Hebrew Bible a “minority report” presenting a picture of its writers thought Israelite worship and practice should have been, but was not?

Tuesday, September 26.....7:00 PM

IV. Sacred Space in Ancient Israel, Part 1



What types of sacred space functioned as the focus of folk religion in Ancient Israel? What can the artifacts found in sacred spaces tell us about Israelite ritual practice? Are there any biblical parallels to archaeological discoveries of household shrines?

Tuesday, October 3.....7:00 PM

V. Sacred Space in Ancient Israel, Part 2



Is there archaeological evidence for the “high places” or “bamot” reviled by biblical writers and editors? What about a temple other than Solomon’s in Jerusalem? Is there evidence to support

the idea that the God of Israel was the focus of worship, not “foreign gods”?

Tuesday, October 17.....7:00 PM

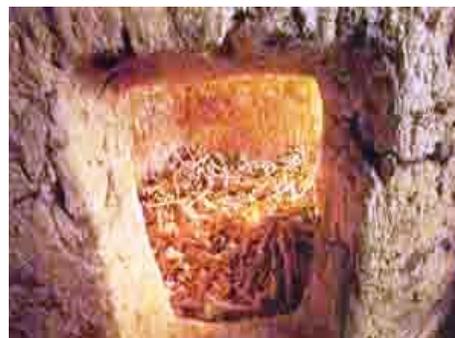
VI. The Cult of Asherah



Did God have a wife? Who or what was Asherah? What is the relationship between the Canaanite Asherah and the Israelite? Did Israelites revere her in opposition to God, alongside God, or in some other fashion?

Tuesday, October 24.....7:00 PM

VII. Death in the Life of Ancient Israel; From Polytheism to Monotheism



What was the ritual response to death in Israelite folk religion? Is there textual or archaeological evidence for a cult of the dead, i.e. worship? How

may we interpret the Biblical and artifactual evidence that Ancient Israelites worshiped many gods and physically represented them? How may the idea of *hypostasis* – an abstract aspect of a god given concrete substance and revered as a divine presence of that god – inform our understanding of Israelite ritual belief and practice?