

THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY
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I. THE JOURNEY OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPT TO THE RED SEA
(Ex. 12:37; Num. 33:5-10)

A. THE ISRAELITES DEPARTED FROM RAMESES AND ENCAMPED AT SUCCOTH
(Ex. 12:37; Num. 33:5).

1. Some things about these particular places.

Rameses, meaning son of the sun, was an Egyptian city located in the land of Goshen. Rameses and Pithom were two cities built by the enslaved Israelites for the Pharaoh (Ex. 1:11). Rameses probably refers to the older city of Zoan-Avaris which was given a new name to honor Rameses II (Unger's dictionary, 911).

Succoth, the first encampment of the Israelites, was not a city and is not to be confused with the town in Palestine mentioned in Gen. 33:17. Succoth was a district or region located some distance southeast from Rameses. Its name is very fitting since it means "tents" or "booths."

2. Some applications we can make from the direction they traveled.

a. Notice there were two ways to the land of promise. One way led from Zoan (Rameses) along the Mediterranean coast. It was the caravan route that Jacob had no doubt taken when he had joined Joseph in Egypt and it was probably the same route his sons traveled to take his body back for burial (Gen. 45:25; 50:13,14). This way to Canaan usually took eight to ten days. It led through populated areas, was well-traveled, direct and the safe route to take.

The other way to Canaan was through the wilderness and by the way of the Red Sea. It was just the opposite of the coastal caravan route. It was desolate, unsafe, and much longer and therefore a route that most would never consider. There's a parallel here for us to see. The Christian life is not an easy road to travel. It is often filled with great trials and difficulties but it leads to life everlasting.

b. According to Ex. 13:17,18 we find that God led the Israelites that way through the wilderness for one initial purpose. He didn't want them to be confronted by the Philistines and this cause them to return to Egypt. When we consider that Egypt is a type of the world we can discover that God doesn't want His people back into the world once they have been blood-bought and redeemed.

c. We notice moreover that the way through the wilderness was needful for the Israelites. They needed, first and foremost, to know God. They needed to learn to trust Him and they needed to know how to worship Him and walk with Him. And in order for them to learn these things they needed to have wilderness training and suffer various trails that would cause them to call upon God and find their sufficiency in Him. Form this we can learn that God uses trials in our own lives to bring us closer to Him and he is glorified in meeting our needs as He enriches our lives spiritually.

- d. The Israelites needed to be trained also in warfare and learn that their strength and resource was in God and not in themselves (I Sam. 17:47). It would take the way through the wilderness to teach the Israelites these things, so God led them through the way of the wilderness (Ex. 13:18). So it is with us. God must lead us through hardships and trials if we are to know Him, seek Him, trust Him and be victorious in serving Him. So the Israelites were led to the southeast into the wilderness and toward the Red Sea.

B. NEXT, THE ISRAELITES REMOVED FROM SUCCOTH AND ENCAMPED IN ETHAN (Ex. 13:20; Num. 33:6)

1. Some things about this particular place.

Ethan was located on the border of the wilderness. It was east of where the Suez Canal is now (Unger's Dictionary, 326).

2. Some applications we can make from this second encampment.

Ex. 13:20 says, "They took their journey." This seems to indicate their own initiative and self-reliance. Notice the Israelites were still in Egypt, they were still on roads well-traveled, and they, to this point, saw no need for a supernatural guide. But now at Ethan, it was the end of the road and the wilderness was before them and so were the experiences which would require them to seek God and His help.

From this move to Ethan we can learn that those in the world are, most often, self-reliant and seldom see the need to rely upon God. Traveling the short way of the world presents no need for God to guide and for God to provide. It is the long road through the wilderness with its trials which is needful for us to develop a relationship with God and a day by day reliance upon Him.

C. THE ISRAELITES WERE THEN LED FROM ETHAN TO ENCAMP BEFORE PIHAHIROTH WHICH WAS BETWEEN MIGDOL AND THE RED SEA (Ex. 14:2; Num. 33:7).

1. Some things about this particular place.

Notice this place of encampment was also near Baalzephon. This place means "the Lord of the North." Pihahiroth means, "the place of reeds" and Migdol means "tower or hills." The exact location is a matter of dispute. One archaeologist places it in the swamps of Jeneffeh at the end of the pass between the mountain and a lake called Bitter Lake (Unger's Dictionary, 865).

2. The events which took place at this encampment.

- a. First, it was here between Migdol and the Red Sea that the Egyptians overtook the Israelites (Ex. 14:5-9).

- b. Secondly, when the Israelites saw the Egyptians marching after them they cried out

to the Lord and complained to Moses (Ex. 14:10-12).

- c. Then, Moses called upon the people to trust the Lord to fight for them and to deliver them (Ex. 14:13).
- d. The Lord then directed Moses to lift up his rod over the sea and God divided the water and sent an east wind to dry the land in the sea all night (Ex. 14:15,16).
- e. Notice the pillar of the cloud which had gone before them (Ex. 13:21), removed and went between the Egyptians and the Israelites. This pillar was a cloud of darkness all night to the Egyptians but a light for the Israelites (Ex. 14:19,20).
- f. Then we notice the children of Israel went through the Red Sea upon dry land with a wall of water on both sides of them. When the Egyptians pursued after them God directed Moses to stretch out his hand and the water came together and destroyed the Egyptians (Ex. 14:21-31).

3. Some applications we can make from these events.

- a. First of all, we notice that the Lord went before the Israelites in the pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21). Dr. Charles Stevens said, "There is romance in the wilderness walk because God is there, present in the cloud." (Stevens,85)
- b. Notice Israel's journey to their third encampment involved a "turn" (Ex. 14:2). It was the end of the road with others and the beginning of a journey with God. From this we can gather that, while our journey with God might involve all kinds of trials and testings, we can rest assured that God will be with us and that God will protect us and give us peace.
- c. Notice in the response of the Israelites to their first great test to trust God we find a certain parallel. The new Christian, when facing his first test, will often complain and compare how things used to be. And for many who are really not saved, when tested, they will wither away as seed, without root, in the sun's heat (Matt. 13:6,20,21).
- d. We can gather also as the pillar of cloud stood between the Egyptians and the Israelites, God will put Himself between His people and the enemy of our souls. It might not involve a miracle like parting the waters of the Red Sea, but God will manifest His presence and power when His people are being led by Him and they are following in the path of obedience.

