

## **Bible Study # 22 Exodus 13:17–22 03/04/2021**

This reading introduces the actual exodus. Pharaoh's action in this was to 'let the people go'. God's action was to 'lead' the people 'around by the desert road towards the Red Sea'. The explanation is given that the choice of route was God's, and it was to avoid having the Israelites clash with the Philistines if they took the shorter route along the Mediterranean Sea. Thus they journeyed on the desert road towards the Red Sea (yam-sûf).

This Hebrew name denotes a body of water the Israelites had to cross, possibly the Bitter Lakes, or Lake Timsah. However, even in the Bible, this term is used for a variety of locations. The same term is used of the Gulf of Suez (Num. 33:10-11) and the modern Gulf of Aqaba (1 Kings 9:26).

God says the reason for this choice was lest the Israelites turn back to Egypt if the Philistines confronted them. However, they were prepared for hostilities, as they went out 'armed for battle'. This fact ties in with the expression that has been used twice already, that the Israelites were to march out in their divisions (a military term, 12:17), even though they had no army.

100's of years before the Exodus, Joseph made his people swear that when God came to their aid and visited them, then they would carry up his bones from Egypt to Canaan (Gen. 50:25). Joseph believed the promise of God that they would receive the land of Canaan. The narrative here in Exodus echoes that passage in Genesis as it relates the fulfilment of that solemn promise.

This fact is important in both Old Testament and New Testaments as it is referred to several times (see, in addition to Exod. 13:19, Josh. 24:32; Acts 7:16; Heb. 11:22). There was faith among the patriarchs about the promise of God made to Abram in Genesis 12:5–7. Somehow at sometime, God would provide this land to his people.

Joseph fulfilled the request of his father Jacob (Gen. 49:29-30) and took his body back to the burial cave of Machpelah in the land of Canaan. Then before Joseph died, he made his descendants promise to take his bones for burial back to this covenant promised land.

How easy it is for succeeding generations to forget such promises. Even though human memories cannot always be trusted, God's memory never fails and he will bring to mind what needs to be done to fulfill his divine promises. What comfort this is for us as we wait for God to fulfill promise for us!

The narrative (vs. 20–22) now picks up again the account of the exit from Egypt, and specifically what happened when they left Succoth (see 12:37). The location of Etham is unknown, except that it is characterized here as being on the edge of the desert, i.e., it was on the very edge of the cultivated and irrigated Egyptian land.

God's presence went with them, as symbolized in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. These signs were to encourage the Israelites as they were led and protected on their journey to Canaan, but they also served as a threat to their enemies (Num. 14:13-14). Israel never forgot this experience, for even after the exile they could still recount how by day God 'led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take' (Neh. 9:12).

Tomorrow we will examine Exodus 14:1–14.