

# The Pillar of Cloud and Fire

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Date: 12 June 2022

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Exodus in the 13th chapter, Exodus chapter 13.

We're continuing our study in the book of Exodus and we're looking today at verses 17 through 22, the end of the chapter of chapter 13. So if you look there with me, it's this 13 beginning in verse 17.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near for God said, lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. But God led the people around by way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea and the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones with you from here. And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from them from before that the people let's pray. Dear heavenly father, we again, thank you for your word and ask your blessing upon it. Be with your messenger now and be with your people as that word is received. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. We have looked already and seen how God had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. So we've just seen that deliverance really the etzes for which the book is named. And now we see the Lord with his people leading them. Remember, that was the desire that God would be with his people or that the people would be with God. And now we see God there with them, leading them. And that says 18, eight, it says, then Moses told his father-in-law all that

Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way and how the Lord had delivered them. And so we have seen how God has delivered them.

But you see as well there that it says all the hardship that had come upon them in the way. And so we're beginning that travel, some of the hardships and seeing how God faithfully led his people.

[ 2 : 5 4 ] If you're interested, you may have seen here, it talks about them going from Succoth to Etham on the edge of the wilderness. If you were interested in seeing the stage by stage trip, the journal of where they traveled and how that travel went, that's recorded for you in Numbers 33 verses 1 through 49. So we won't go and read that larger passage, but it's all there.

We're basically in stage two. Remember last time we saw they had traveled to Succoth, now they're going from Succoth to Etham, perhaps even day two of the travel. And as we look at the sermon, I want us to consider three things. First, God's leading. Then secondly, God's faithfulness. And third, God's presence.

Again, God's leading, God's faithfulness, and God's presence. So first looking at God's leading. Let's look again at our text. We'll look at verses 17 and 18 and then verse 20. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. But God led the people around by way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. And then looking further down verse 20, and they moved on from Succoth and encamped to eat them on the edge of the wilderness.

So from the very beginning, we see that God's people are divinely led. God's leading them in the direction that they should go. This will continue all throughout the wilderness wanderings as they make their way eventually to the promised land of Canaan. In Psalm 5a, we read, Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies. Make your way straight before me.

In Psalm 31 3, for you are my rock and my fortress, and for your namesake, you lead me and guide me. And so we can, like the psalmist, sing praise or pray to God in that kind of way that God would lead us. And we can praise God for the way he leads. But we see here God's leadership for his people.

[ 5 : 00 ] And we also see as they're developing into a nation of their own, we see God as their king and leader. He's the one leading them. He's the leader of the people. And we read in verse 18 that God led them through the wilderness, or at this point, they're headed to the wilderness. Now, there was a trade route along the Mediterranean Sea, and I don't have a map to show you up there, but maybe some of you in the back of your Bible will see. But as you go from Egypt, you could follow right along the Mediterranean Sea. I think I read something like it was eight kilometers wide, but you could travel.

That's probably around five miles for those of you who are kilometers. Around five miles wide, there's a trade route that goes along the Mediterranean Sea into Palestine, and that would have been the direct route. And in fact, had they gone that way, it would be about two weeks travel time to get from where they were in Egypt into the borders of the promised land of Canaan.

But we're told they didn't go that way. And we're given a reason for why God has led them that way. And you know, often in God's leading, we're not given reason. We can trust God that he has reason for these things. But here we give it, we're given a reason. And the reason is because the people were not ready for war. They were not yet ready to fight the Philistines. This will be proven later on.

Really, in our next chapter, we'll see in verses 10 through 12 of chapter 14, we read there, when Pharaoh drew near the people of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord.

They said to Moses, is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt? Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians, for it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. We'll have time to look at that in the weeks ahead.

[ 7 : 06 ] So I won't go all through that. But even today, what is Egypt famous for? It's their pyramids, right? And what are the pyramids but large tombs? And so there's humor in what they're saying.

Were there not enough graves in Egypt? You've got to bring us out here that we would die and be buried? And you see as well their desire that you would have left us alone, that we could serve the Egyptians.

And so a few days removed, they see the Egyptian army and they're already ready to go back and live with the Egyptians lest they die in the wilderness. So yeah, they're not ready to face the Philistines. In fact, a year later, we'll read in Numbers 14 that a year after all this takes place, when they finally reach Canaan and they see the strength of the enemies there in Canaan, they say, let us choose a new leader and go back to Egypt. It's Numbers 14, 14, 14, 4, sorry. Let us choose a new leader and go back. So again, this is in many ways rejecting God, but let us reject the leader that God's given us. We'll pick our own leader. Who's going to take us back to Egypt that we may live there. So no, they're not yet ready to face the Philistines. They're nowhere close to being ready for that. But the indication here in the passage is that is the way they would have gone if they had their own way, right? They would have taken the short route, the quickest route, even if it meant going near the Philistines and what they couldn't comprehend even yet was facing them in war.

And we're reminded of Psalm 103, 13 through 14, where we read, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. God knows us better than we know ourselves. I think we see this here with the Israelites. They would have gone the quickest route because most of us don't want to hike further than we have to. I have a friend right now who's on the Appalachian Trail. I think he's on day 61.

I'm so impressed by that. And at the same time, I think every time I go for a hike, I think, why did I sign up for it? Or why couldn't we have picked the shorter route? And they're ready to take the short route, the quickest route. Maybe if it's not a hike, maybe hiking is more real for us, but they're marching, walking through. But just imagine when you're driving somewhere. When we drive down to Georgia, it's a long trip, and I'm eager to get there as quickly as possible. And so we don't allow for many restroom breaks or food, you know, we don't need to eat. We don't need to use the bathroom or drinks. Let's get there. And so too, they're eager to get there. And instead, the route that God takes them, it takes them a year to get there. And ultimately, because of the rejection, it's going to be 40 years before they enter into Canaan. But we see here a glimpse of God's purpose in this. He knows better than they knew. If they would have gone, they would have gone to war with the Philistines.

[ 10 : 24 ] Probably many of them would have died, and they would have turned around and gone back. We see as well the fact that as they see the Egyptian army, as I mentioned in Numbers 14, they've forgotten what God has already done against the Egyptians and who is with them.

There's no need to turn back because God is on their side, but they've forgotten this. And so I think, again, Psalm 103 says it so well. God knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. We tend to think a lot of ourselves, most of the time, we are proud people. And maybe we would assume that we can face the Philistines on our own and do fine.

But God knows our frame. He knows that we're dust. And I think for us, it's probably not the Philistines, but they're not ways in which we're tempted. Maybe that we think, oh, I'm strong enough. That's not going to bother me.

God knows our frame. He's compassionate to his children. It mentioned in verse 18 that they were headed toward the Red Sea, the wilderness toward the Red Sea.

This, I believe, is likely the Red Sea that we know today. There's a lot of discussion of even the crossing of the Red Sea, and was it really the Red Sea or where was it? The same language is used elsewhere in God's Word, referring to the same body of water.

[ 11 : 47 ] 1 Kings 9, 26, King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezeon Geber, which is near Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea in the land of Edom. So all of those physical locations we know, and it really is on the north shore of the Red Sea that we know today.

And so, again, God's Word would tend to lead us to the fact that they're headed toward the Red Sea as we know it. In verse 20, it mentioned that they traveled from Succoth to Ezeon, so they're moving east by southeast, down and south.

And they're somewhere at this point, in Ezeon, it's somewhere near modern-day Suez Canal. I don't know how you are with your geography, but the Suez Canal, you could travel from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean Sea.

The Suez Canal did not exist then, although there were some canal attempts to irrigate the land in Egypt. And they were going to connect the Red Sea to the Nile River until they realized it flowed the wrong way and that it would have resulted in salt water going into the Nile River, destroying it.

So they ended up not doing that, but there would have been maybe some canals, but nothing like the Suez Canal, but just to give you a picture of, they would have been moving in that direction towards the Suez Canal, where you'd see it on the map today.