

The Red Sea Crossing

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About 1,500 BC Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt after God had sent plagues upon the land. The journey to the promised land began at Rameses where the children of Israel had been working for Pharaoh on the construction of the treasure cities, Pithom and Rameses.

Rameses has been located in the Nile Delta and Pithom close to Succoth. Joseph had given his brethren the land of Goshan 215 years before but after Joseph died "there rose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Exod.1:8) and it seems many had been relocated from Goshan to work in the cities. When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord He sent Moses to deliver



them. Pharaoh's response to Moses request that the people be allowed to leave Egypt was negative and so God sent plagues on the land of Egypt until finally Pharaoh agreed to release the slaves.

No sooner had Moses led the people out toward the land of Canaan than Pharaoh hardened his heart against the Lord and gathered his army to pursued them.

Moses had taken the direct route from Rameses eastward to Succoth on the border of Egypt and then on to Etham on the "edge of the wilderness" intending to travel up the coast road into Canaan, however, the Lord told him to turn south along the west coast of the Red Sea, God said:

*"Speak unto the children of Israel, **that they turn** and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: **before it shall ye encamp by the sea**" (Exod.14:2).*

Migdol was a tower or fortress on the border of Egypt south of Succoth so Moses led Israel south on the west coast of the Red Sea where they camped "by the sea". After they passed **through the sea** they were back in the wilderness of Etham again. The exact location of the crossing is not known but wherever it was it had to be wide and deep enough to sink thousands of chariots, horsemen and foot soldiers; perhaps 10 to 15 kilometers wide.

A similar account is given in the Book of Numbers:

*"And the children of Israel removed **from Rameses**, and pitched **in Succoth**. And they departed from Succoth, and **pitched in Etham**, which is in the **edge of the wilderness**. And they removed from Etham, and **turned again unto Pihahiroth**, which is **before Baalzephon**: and they pitched **before Migdol**. And they departed from before Pihahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and went three days' journey **in the wilderness of Etham, and pitched in Marah**" (Num. 33:5-8).*

The towns of Pihahiroth and Baalzephon no longer exist and cannot be identified but they must have been on the west side of the Red Sea. Marah has been identified as "The Wells of Moses" in the wilderness of Shur located 40 to 50 miles east of Suez which is just three days journey as indicated in Exod.15:22-23).

The route taken is clear from the above diagram. The Israelites journeyed **east to leave Egypt** and pitched at Succoth and then on to Etham further east on “*the edge of the wilderness*”. Next they **turned back to Egypt** and journeyed to the south along the western shore of the Red Sea past Migdol which was a border (fortress) tower north of the Red Sea but south of Succoth. Ezekiel places Migdol as the northern border of Egypt:

“I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia” (Ezek.29:10).

“From the tower of Syene” should read, *“from Migdol to Syene”*. Syene was in the south of Egypt and Migdol in the north.

We know that Israel had come back into the land of Egypt because God said that Pharaoh would think Israel was trapped **in the land** and would say:

*“They are entangled **in the land**, the wilderness hath shut them in”* (Exod.14:3).

Little did Pharaoh realize that it was God who wanted him to think like that way so that the **entire Egyptian army** would be drowned in the Red Sea. The two million Israelites camped by the Red Sea, hemmed in by mountains and wilderness, appeared fair gain for Pharaoh and his army; there was nowhere for them to escape.

Pharaoh’s anger was uncontrolled for he mobilized 600 “*choice chariots*” plus “*all the chariots of Egypt*” as well as horsemen and foot soldiers. The 600 elite King’s



guard was therefore joined by all other chariots that may have numbered in the thousands. Two men rode in each chariot, one drove the two horses that pulled the chariot and he also held the shield while the other was armed with sword, spears and bow and was strapped in the chariot so that his arms would be free

to use his weapons. Both men stood. We read:

*“And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, **and** all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them”* (Exod.14:6-7).

The word translated “captains” is literally “thirtieth” because Pharaoh had a Council of thirty chief men whom he put in charge of all the chariots other than the 600 elite chariots that made up his personal guard. God was not only going to judge Pharaoh but all the chief men together with the entire army. The land of Egypt would be completely stripped of its leadership and of its army.

To mobilize the entire army would have taken some time and this would account for Israel being able to travel to Succoth, Etham, and then southward past Migdol before camping by the Red Sea. Pharaoh knew that the children of Israel could not go any further because they had the sea on their left and barren mountains rising up to 1,000 metres before them and on their right: they were trapped between the desert and the deep blue sea!

According to ancient historians the Egyptian army was highly trained so as Israel camped by the sea, they would have been terrified at the prospect of being caught like a trapped animal with no possibility of escape. However, God had the situation under control. He had led His people by the pillar of cloud and fire and now it moved between the Egyptians and Israel so that the Egyptians could not see through the cloud. When God told Moses to go forward through the Red Sea an east wind blew and the sea parted before Israel mounting up on either side allowing them to cross over on dry ground.

Some have suggested that the sea was shallow and the people were able to wade through but that is absurd. In Moses' day the Red Sea extended much further north than it is today. Today the Bitter Lake to the north of Suez is deep and is a part of the Suez Canal. It is separated from the Red Sea. During the Suez crisis in 1956 there were 20 ships trapped in the Bitter Lake. Archeologists have found sea shells in the soil between the Red Sea and the Bitter Lake which indicates that at some time the

Red Sea continued north of Suez to the Bitter Lake. There are no locks needed in the Suez canal because the land is only just above sea level. The water flows either way from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean according to tides. Fish types from the Red Sea have entered the Mediterranean and vice versa.

Furthermore, there is evidence that part of this area has sunk and some has risen 12 to 15 feet above sea level. This most likely was caused by earthquake action for we know that Alexandria, on the northern coastline, suffered great damage from a devastating earthquake about AD1303 that caused a large area to sink and is now at the bottom of Alexandria Harbour. The Pharos Lighthouse that stood approximately 550 feet high on a stone building 100 feet square at its base, and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was destroyed.

The palace of Cleopatra (died AD 30) has been discovered in recent times by French archeologists who have been diving to examine the ruins of buildings buried deep in silt on the harbour floor at Alexandria. Valuable carvings, sphinx, etc have been recovered and displayed in the US in 2010.

John Urquhart's *New Biblical Guide* Vol.4 Ch.22, points out that several ancient documents state that a city named Heropolitan was located at the head of the Red Sea Gulf just south of Succoth. and that **ships sailed from Heropolitan**. This would require the Red Sea to extend to the northern shore of the Bitter lake.

In addition, a satellite photo (on page 1) shows that one of the arms of the Nile River runs east to the Bitter Lake and in time of flood would have deposited silt in the area between the Red sea and the Bitter Lake filling up that part of the sea. Since the Aswan Dam has been constructed (1976) the Nile has not flooded but prior to 1976 it flooded annually between June and September.

In recent times a theory has been spread that Israel did not cross the Red Sea; that it was actually the Gulf of Aqaba on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula. Also, it has been claimed that Mount Sinai is located in Arabia instead of the Sinai Peninsula. This

is a nonsense because God said that Pharaoh would say that Israel was “*entangled **IN THE LAND***”. The fact that Israel was camping by the sea south of Succoth and Migdol on the border of Egypt should be evidence enough that the crossing was through the Red Sea and not the Gulf of Aqaba.

Moses led the people south from Succoth because God was going to destroy Egypt’s King, Council, chariots and cavalry. At this time Egypt was exercising control over the land of Caanan. The harlot Rahab was an Egyptian living in Jericho and the Tel-el-Amarna Tablets found in Egypt record messages sent 40 years after the Exodus by the city kings in the land of Caanan begging for help from Pharaoh to protect them from the Habiru (Hebrews) who were entering the land. The Tel-el-Amarna Tablets were from the foreign affairs department of the Pharaoh reigning at the time Israel entered the land of Caanan. Egypt had been so weakened at the time of the Exodus that no reinforcements were sent.

We also note that Rahab believed in the Lord for she said:

*“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, **when ye came out of Egypt...** for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath”* (Josh.2:10-11).

When the facts presented above are considered it is clear the theory that the children of Israel crossed the sea in the Gulf of Aqaba instead of the Red Sea becomes quite unacceptable. They would have had to walk 300 kilometres across a wilderness before Pharaoh caught up with them by the sea and considering they had elderly and young children as well as a large herd of animals Pharaoh would have overtaken them long before they reached the Gulf of Aqaba. ●