

**Exegetical Notes, Exodus 13:17-22**  
**“The March Begins”**

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**Exodus 13:17-22**

**Verse 17**

*When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”*

- The “road through the Philistine country” was the northern route from Rameses, the capitol city of Egypt, to the Promised Land. It lay along the banks of the Mediterranean Sea. The NIV translation, “Through the Philistine country,” can be translated “to Philistine country.” This is probably the better translation since the Israelites were not passing through Palestine but going to Palestine. This road was a major trade route and was heavily guarded by Egyptian troops. God reasoned that the Israelites would be discouraged by military opposition so early on in the journey and would want to surrender.

**Verse 18**

*So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.*

- The route that God chose was, perhaps, the most indirect route from Rameses to Palestine. As it was longer and went through the desert, it was more difficult in every sense except that it was not heavily guarded and there was, therefore, less likelihood of armed military confrontation.
- Notice what Israel was prepared for -- battle. They went out armed for battle.

**Verse 19**

*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”*

- The story is told in Genesis 50. (see verse 25). Joseph was the faithful follower of YHWH who had been led to Egypt to save God's people during a time of serious international drought. Though Joseph had great favor in Egypt, he knew that Israel's stay there was just a temporary solution to a problem. He understood that God would, eventually, take Israel back to Palestine because that land had been promised to Israel through Abraham by God. Joseph had left instructions that his remains were to be carried to the Promised Land and re-interred there. .
- No detail is forgotten by our faithful Father.

### **Verse 20**

***After leaving Succoth they encamped at Etham on the edge of the desert.***

- This agrees with the information given in Exodus 12:37. However, it is confusing to us because the journey is south rather than east. As the trip begins, Israel appears to be moving in the wrong direction, deeper into Egypt than away from it.

### **Verse 21**

***By day YHWH went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.***

- At the edge of the desert only a few days into their journey, Israel was given two clearly visible symbols of God's presence with them; a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.
- These pillars had two specific functions. First they guided the Israelites and second they protected them (see 14:19-20).

### **Verse 22**

***Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.***

- The symbols of God's presence never left the people. They were a continuous reminder that God was with them.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The March Begins*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)