

## Ramses to Little Bitter Lake; Wheel-tracks of Abuse, 1-13

### II. Forced March to Little Bitter Lake

Three ancient roads link the African continent with Asia. (See map: Harper Atlas of the Bible, p. 57.)

- a. Following the Mediterranean coast from Egypt into Canaan is the Via Maris, the “*Way of the Sea*,” called in Scripture, the “*Way of the Land of the Philistines*.”

**Exodus 13:17** - Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby; for God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt.”

- b. Further south was the *Via Shur*, or the “*Way of the Wall*.” The Egyptians maintained a wall at the frontier and controlled its eastern borders with troops. Incoming and outgoing traffic was monitored along this wall.
- c. The third route was the “*Way of the Wilderness*,” or the “*Pilgrim Route*.” It followed the coastline of the Gulf of Suez on the west of the Sinai Peninsula and then cut across toward the east and the Gulf of Aqaba, then northward past Ezion-geber (EE-ze-ahn gee-BUR).

The Lord did not lead the Jews along any of these roads but they did start out in the direction of the Way of the Wilderness, or the Jornada of the Sinai Peninsula.

The Exodus began at Ramses and progressed southeastward toward the eastern border of Egypt.

The Mediterranean Sea was connected to the Red Sea by means of several lakes linked by rivers. Two of the largest lakes lay just north of the Gulf of Suez and were known as the Great Bitter and Little Bitter Lakes.

Stationed along these frontier borders of Egypt were lookout posts referred to as a *migdol* which means “tower.”

We are going to pick up our study of the Exodus where the Jews are encamped on the eastern shore of the Little Bitter Lake. The location has not been confirmed geographically but the site is identified in Scripture:

**Exodus 14:1** - Now the Lord spoke to Moses saying,

**Exodus 14:2** – “Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth [Pi-ha-HY-roth], between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon [BAY-ahl SEH-fawn], opposite it, by the sea.”

Every source book I have indicates that the escape of the Jews from the Egyptians did not transverse the Red Sea or its northwesterly Gulf of Suez but rather Little Bitter Lake, north of the Gulf.

A casual look at a map readily shows that a crossing of the Red Sea would cause them to travel south of the Sinai Peninsula, taking them into the Arabian peninsula instead.

The location of the crossing is referred to in Scripture by the name *Yam Sûp*, translated the “*Sea of Reeds*.” It is interesting to observe our Lord’s military maneuvers as he leads the nation of Israel to freedom.

He knows that the Jews are incapable of defending themselves. They have not been free long enough to properly conscript an army nor have they, as slaves, been permitted to personally arm themselves. Therefore, the Lord must protect these people until they are able to muster an army, a conscription which does not occur until the book of Numbers.

His military tactics are designed to lure Pharaoh into a death trap at Little Bitter Lake. By fainting toward Etham on the edge of the wilderness, and then swinging southwest to the west side of the Bitter Lakes, the Lord is able to convince Pharaoh that the Jews are lost and wandering.

**Exodus 13:20** - Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness.

**Exodus 14:3** - For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness [the *Jornada*] has shut them in.’

Encamped with Little Bitter Lake to their east, Egypt from which they are trying to escape to the west, and the *Jornada* to the south, Pharaoh advances towards them with his army from the north.

**Exodus 14:9** - Then the Egyptians pursued them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his cavalry and his forces and they overtook them camping by the Sea [Little Bitter Lake] beside Pi-hahiroth facing Baal-zephon.

Two-million Jews are boxed in. They face a hopeless situation and are helpless to do anything about it. Rather than casting their faith upon the Lord, who performed the ten miracles which won their freedom, the Jews collectively enter into fear and panic.

However, their lack of faith did not deter the Lord from executing His plan. His intention was to bring Pharaoh's army to a place where He could eliminate it as a threat to His new Client nation.

The Lord performs a miracle which at first provides a way of escape for His chosen people and then becomes a fatal trap for Pharaoh's army.

### III. Miracle at Little Bitter Lake

#### A. Wheel-tracks of Abuse Produce Fear & Panic

**Exodus 14:10** - Now when Pharaoh had caused his army to approach, the sons of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold, the Egyptians were advancing after them, consequently, they became afraid and screamed in panic to Jehovah.

The English translations do all right on the fear part. The KJV says they were “*in great fear.*” The NIV tells us “*They were terrified.*” The NAS reveals that “*they became very frightened.*”

The verb in question is the qal imperfect of *JARE*, plus the adverb *MEODH*, which mean, “*they were extremely frightened.*”

The verse tells us that the sight of Pharaoh's advancing army served as a vector which elicited extreme fear in the souls of these Jews. Over four centuries of persecution had taken its toll on the psyche of the Jewish people. What was it about the approach of Pharaoh's army that immediately elicited paralyzing fear in the souls of these people?

Although the exact dates of the Jewish sojourn in Egypt is debated by archeologists and therefore identification of the ruling Pharaohs involved vary, all accounts reveal that the Jews indeed did spent over four-hundred years under Egyptian rule, almost three hundred of which was under conditions of slavery.

By the time of the Exodus, this history of oppression was ingrained in the mentality of the people and was a part of the accepted Zeitgeist of the nation.

It is of value, I believe, to give you an overview of that history so that you might better orient to the mental attitude of these people as they look back and see Pharaoh's army advancing towards them.

**Wood, Leon J. A Survey of Israel's History, rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986; pp. 90ff: Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt during the Twelfth Dynasty.**

*Given the fertile land of Goshen, and being unusually blessed by God, Jacob's descendants prospered. God gave Jacob seventeen years to see this prosperity. Crops grew, and the population increased until "the land was filled" (according to Exodus 1:7) with the children of Israel. For the most part, the descendants of Jacob remained together and expanded their holdings to fill the Goshen area completely.*

*Joseph lived seventy-one years after his family came to Egypt. This means that he died c. 1805 B.C., during the reign of Amenemhet III, approximately twenty-five years before the end of the Twelfth Dynasty. Apparently, Joseph continued in high office even after the famine and, if so, would have been able to do much for the benefit of his loved ones. Life would have been good for Israelites as long as Joseph lived.*

*Because of the magnificent leadership provided by Joseph and the wonderful prosperity enjoyed by the Egyptian people as a result, the Israelites continued to be blessed by association with Joseph long after his death.*

*Over a period of 200 years—c. 1700-1500 B.C.—Egypt gradually came under the rulership of the Hyksos, Semitic people from northwest Asia.*

**Myers, Allen C. (ed.). The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987; p. 509:**

*Their rise to power was a gradual process of infiltration facilitated by the decentralization of Egyptian authority at the end of the Thirteenth Dynasty.*

*The first of the Hyksos rulers is identified in Exodus 1:8 as the king "who did not know Joseph."*

Note the problem: Egypt did not control immigration, foreign people systematically moved in, they eventually took over the government, its new rulers had no knowledge of Egyptian history, and, consequently, enslaved the Jewish portion of the population out of both fear and ignorance.

Principle: The more the United States allows immigrants to enter the country without knowledge of our history, its constitutional foundation, and the principles which have made us a free people, then in time these "*new citizens*" will elect a "*new king*" who does not know, for example, George Washington, George Mason, Patrick Henry, John Adams, James Madison, James Monroe, and others whom we regard as our Founding Fathers.