

Numbers 33:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness.

Analysis

They departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham—Etham (אֶתָּם, possibly from Egyptian *khetam*, "fortress") was **in the edge of the wilderness** (בְּקַצְבָּרָה, *bigtseh ha-midbar*), marking the boundary between Egyptian cultivation and Sinai wilderness. Exodus 13:20 notes this was where the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night appeared, providing divine guidance for the dangerous wilderness ahead.

Etham represents the threshold moment—Egypt behind, Red Sea and wilderness ahead. Israel was now beyond the protection of Pharaoh's infrastructure, dependent solely on God's presence. This liminal space tested faith: would they trust the visible cloud or panic at visible dangers? The mention of wilderness's "edge" emphasizes the transition from familiar slavery to unknown freedom under divine care.

Historical Context

Etham was likely located at the western edge of the Sinai Peninsula. This second encampment occurred just days after the Passover (Exodus 12), during the Egyptian's grief over their firstborn. The pillar of cloud/fire that appeared here guided Israel for the next 40 years until they entered Canaan.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What "edge of the wilderness" transitions have you faced where familiar security ended and faith-dependence began?
2. How does God's provision of the cloud and fire demonstrate His awareness of our need for visible assurance in uncertain seasons?
3. Why does spiritual growth often require leaving "Egypt" (comfort) for wilderness (testing)?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּלֹא	מִצְבֵּחַ	יָצַא	בְּאַתְּ מִ	אָשָׁר
And they departed	from Succoth	and pitched	in Etham	H834
H5265	H5523	H2583	H864	
וְאֵת	בְּאֹתֶת			
which is in the edge	of the wilderness			
H7097	H4057			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 13:20 (Parallel theme): And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.