

Hebrews 11:29
“Which way to the promise land?”

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I. Introduction

Hebrews 11:29 concludes the testimony of Moses with regards to faith with the truth that Israel demonstrated trust in God’s provision and promise even when it didn’t look like they were going the right way. The story the author uses is again a familiar one as it is the Red Sea crossing described in detail in Exodus 14. It is again assumed by the writer that his readers were well versed in this story as he contains all 31 verses in 22 words.

To understand the illustration, we will need to go back to Exodus in 13:17 where we are told clearly that God was “*leading*” Israel and that it was God who directed Moses “*not to lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer.*” We are even told the reasoning from God for this as, “*Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.*” **The Exodus was the Israelites first experience of being led by God.** And God knew that, not unlike Pharaoh, the Israelites also had commitment and control issues. As such we are told in Exodus 13:19-21 that God was going to do three things in guiding them:

- a. Vs. 19 **He would lead them by faith:** Joseph’s bones were a testimony of one man’s trust in God’s promises above what he could understand or see. They needed to learn to trust God’s word in spite of the consequences. Someone once said that “**Faith was believing God’s Word in spite of the evidence.**” That’s not faith that’s *SUPERSTITION!* No! “**Faith is believing God’s word in spite of the consequences.**”
- b. Vs. 20 **He would lead them step by step:** We all like to have every bit of information we can before we make a commitment to go, but God does not

tell us everything. Instead He was getting them use to moving one step at a time

- c. Vs. 21 **He would lead them by His presence**: today we don't have a cloud by day and fire by night directing our every move. We have something much better the "*sure Word of God*". Ps. 119:105 says, "**Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.**"

II. Vs. 29a I've got them right where I want them

That takes us to the actual journey by faith found in Exodus 14:1-9 and what is clear in this section is three things:

- 1.) Vs. 1-2 God was the one that changed their course. "*Now the Lord spoke...saying turn the camp before "Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, opposite Baal-zephon."*
- 2.) Vs. 4 God had a reason of why He was changing course: "*I will gain honor over Pharaoh...that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord."*
- 3.) Vs. 3, 5, 6, 8, 10 God knew how Pharaoh, Egypt and Israel would see this change of course: "*They are bewildered by the land...why have we let Israel go...so he made ready 600 choice chariots and took his people with him and pursued Israel...and overtook them camping by the sea."* "*And when Pharaoh drew near...Israel saw that the Egyptians marched after them...so they were very afraid...and....cried out to the Lord."*

We are given some strong clues of what this change of direction looked like based upon how **Pharaoh saw it (a military advantage)** and **Israel saw it (a military disadvantage)**.

But this change of direction means nothing unless you have a grasp of ancient Egypt geography. But the reason for these views is geographically God directs them to a place where their backs were to the sea and on the sides were two mountains. **God placed them into a cul-de-sac, which there was only one natural way out and that was the way in which they came**. Pharaoh clearly saw it as a very bad military decision which left Israel trapped. Israel however, didn't seem to recognize this until 600 chariots closed off the mouth of the valley in which they camped.

Here we need to go back and realize the above facts: God had already directed Israel away from the sea route and into the wilderness. God knew that they were not ready to fight for their freedom. These 3 million Israelites didn't comprehend that God

was taking them away from the natural choices. He wasn't leading them the normal direction, but since there were no problems they went along with it. As they are heading out in the wilderness, uncharted territory, God suddenly leads them back the road they came in on, to a place that hems them in. **From their perspective it looked as if they were totally lost while being led by the Lord.** Have you ever felt as though God was making a bad decision in your life as you are following Him? This reminds me of the old T.V. show "**Get Smart**". Don Adams, who played agent 86 "Maxwell Smart", would always find himself in these situations where chaos, the evil organization, had him pinned in. Then he would call Control on his shoe phone saying, "**Chief, I've got them right where I want them!**" **Folk's that seeming dead end place that you find yourself in right now is not an accident, neither is it a demonstration of God's poor ability to lead you; It is a place designed by Him to show you that He alone is Lord and that you follow Him not because you understand the places He takes you in life, you follow Him because of Who He is!**

III. Vs. 29b A God-focused obsession

Kent Hughes book, "*Liberating Ministry from Success Syndrome*", he writes: "There never has been and never will be a thoughtless action of God towards me. There is not a single item of evil in His plans for His people, neither in motive, conception, revelation, or consummation. This does not mean that we are shielded from hardship or misery, it means that God's plans are never for evil in the believer's life, instead they are always with an eye towards their well-being and wholeness – always!" There must be as Kent Hughes says, "*A God-focused obsession in our lives if we are to fully experience the benefit of His promises.*"

Exodus 14:10-14 we have Israel's reaction to God's guiding them into this trap. Not surprisingly their response is similar to how our flesh responds when we are not trusting the Lord's guidance.

- a.) Vs. 10 **Fear**: They were not afraid until Pharaoh's army sealed the mouth of the valley. As long as they could see some way of getting out of their situation they were not afraid, but the moment they were beyond the scope of their intellect they were, "greatly afraid." Trusting God's leading is no problem as long as you can understand the whys.
- b.) Vs. 11 **Unhappiness**: Egypt was known for pyramids which are nothing more than huge crypts. So the Israelites ask Moses, "*Did you lead us out here because there was not enough room to bury us in Egypt?*" They not only question the action of Moses they question his motives as well.
- c.) Vs. 12 **Bitterness**: Finally, they remind Moses that they told him back in chapter 5 that they just wanted him to leave them alone.

Those normal reactions of the Israelites lead to **Moses fourfold exhortation of how to handle the crises of doubt and unbelief:**

- 1.) "**Do not be afraid**": **Fear will either energize us or paralyze us either way it can be destructive.** So the first thing Moses tells them is not to react but rather respond. Don't react to the wave of emotionalism, don't give in to the desire to react to fear. If you allow fear to be your guide, then your reaction may cause you to make a decision you will regret the rest of your life. It appears by the next statement that Moses makes, that their reaction was going to be to run as he next says, (stand still).
- 2.) "**Stand still**": This is the Lord's answer to those in a crisis of faith. **FEAR will demand that you retreat or advance. IMPATIENCE will tell you to do it now. PRESUMPTION, will tell you do what is right before it is time. But FAITH says, stand and while your standing be still!** It is as though God says, "*Hey, don't go out in your own strength and effort, but do go out in Mine!*"
- 3.) "**Look up**": It is interesting to look at these verses in the Hebrew because the word salvation is the Hebrew equivalent for the name of Jesus. This sentence literally says "*See the Jesus of God.*" "*Don't go out and do it in your own strength, **instead look for Jesus your salvation that is God.***"
- 4.) "**Be quiet**": Finally, Moses tells them **not to complain about their troubles.** **All that whining does is show everybody that you are not trusting in the Lord.** Before they are ever to take a step the first thing they are to do is shut their mouths.

The last section of Exodus 14:15-31 reveals the outcome of this exhortation. Egypt had brought 600 chariots and placed them at the mouth of the valley. Pharaoh clearly thought that he was going to exact some revenge. As soon as Moses is done talking to Israel for

God, he talks to God for Israel. But with God there had been a time for prayer and seeking Him but it was now time to act on His answer. As verses 16-22 the “angel of the Lord” which is equated to the Lord being in the pillar of cloud and fire, (13:21). Which a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus surround them, in verse 19. **The Lord was not only there to guide them He was there to protect them from the advancing Egyptian army.**

Further more what was light to the Israelites was darkness to the Egyptians. Next we are told that in verses 21-22 that the Red Sea which is the region north of the Gulf of Suez part of what is now the Suez Canal, which links the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea, became dry land. An article appeared in the L. A. Times in 3/14/92 titled “Research supports Bible’s Account of Red Sea Parting” by Thomas H. Maugh saying, *“Because of the peculiar geography of the northern end of the Red Sea, researchers report Sunday in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, that a moderate wind blowing constantly for about 10 hours could have caused the Sea to recede about one mile and the water level to drop 10 feet, leaving dry land in the area where many biblical scholars believe the crossing occurred.”* I love it when science is actually correct.

The final thing to notice is in Exodus 23-31 where we see the pride of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army. One has to wonder why they would go after the Israelites knowing what had happened to them during the plagues. I think there are three reasons for this and they leave us with three negative examples looking at the Egyptian army of the effects of pride:

- a.) Israel had the fire by night guiding them so clearly they could see the pillar of water on either side, but to the Egyptians all they saw was darkness. They were following several thousands foot prints with out looking on either side. **Pride blinds you of danger.**

- b.) Vs. 24 Tells us that it was only during the mourning watch that they saw what awaited them. The mourning watch goes from 2 am. till sunrise. **Pride keeps us from seeing the light!**
- c.) Vs. 25 Tells us that it is then that they tried to turn around and head back only to have their wheels fall off. **Prides makes it impossible to turn around without our wheels falling off!**