

God's GPS

Exodus 13: 17-18; 21-22

We were all taught in school that the closest distance between two points is a straight line. If we were to plan a trip, especially with gas as expensive as it is, we would most likely choose the closest route.

Modern travel has become more convenient in recent years. Most have a GPS system to guide them along a desired route. If GPS is unavailable, we have detailed maps that we can use for guidance. We have the luxury of automobiles and planes to take us from point A to point B.

Our text today is dealing with the beginning of the exodus from Egypt. The plagues were over and Pharaoh had agreed to let the people go. The heart of Canaan was a few hundred miles north. It would be a long and difficult journey for the people of God.

As I considered the exodus journey, I was reminded that Israel did not have the benefit of our modern conveniences. In fact, they probably didn't even have a vague map of the surrounding area. Moses was the only one who had been outside the borders of Egypt. He fled to Midian on the east side of the Red Sea, but he hadn't made the trip to Canaan.

It would appear that God would have led the people as straight to Canaan as possible, but He chose a much different route. The closest distance in God's economy isn't always the best. These verses reveal God's plan for the trip. It reveals several [principles](#) that are relevant to the journey that we are on. I would like to preach on the thought: [God's GPS](#). As we consider God's GPS there are several aspects that we must recognize.

I. The Journey Involved God's Will (17a) – [And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: We all know the story of the Egyptian bondage.](#) Israel found them-selves in Egypt according to the will of God. Hundreds of years before Joseph had been sold into bondage by his brothers, but this was not a tragic case of hatred, but the sovereign will of God. After 430 years of dwelling in Egypt, with much of that time enslaved, it came time to depart.

- As we've said, it would appear that God would have led them the closest and shortest way, but that wasn't the case. He led them according to His will even though it was longer and more difficult. Had they went by the way of the Philistines, they would've faced war immediately. God knew that they weren't ready to face that yet.
- Moving in itself is often difficult and distressing. It often is associated with fear and anxiety of the unknown. The key to a successful move is to ensure that you are going in the

way that God is leading. It may not be the way that you desired or even considered, but His way is always best.

- Most of us have made some sort of transition in this life. We have been forced to deal with change. Many of us have dealt with a move of some sort or another. Maybe it was a physical move or it may have been a spiritual or emotional move.
- Whatever the case, the principles are the same. Closest or easiest may not always be best. Seek the will of God in your life in every situation and you will never go wrong. That isn't saying that God's way is always easy. It isn't always pleasant, but it is always best and will result in peace and rest. It may appear that you are going the long way around or even the wrong way, but we must trust the Lord and follow where He leads!

I. The Journey Involved God's Will (17a)

II. The Journey Involved God's Wisdom (17b) – Here we discover why the Lord led them on a route that appeared to be the long way around.

A. He Knew Their Hindrance – God knew that the people were not ready physically or emotionally for battle. He knew their weakness. God knew they would repent when they saw war. That has a different application than what you would expect. It doesn't refer to repentance of sin, but has the idea of "*being sorry, to regret, or suffer grief.*" God knew the difficulties of the journey would be enough to face without adding more unto them. He knew their desires and their failures. God led them in a way that would increase their faith rather than create doubt and sorrow.

- Our Lord knows our weaknesses as well. He knows the areas that we are prone to stumble and fall. He knows the things that we are not able to handle. If He hasn't trusted you with it, you are not ready to handle it.
- God desires to lead us in a path that is beneficial for us. As we will see in a moment, that doesn't guarantee the absence of trials, but God will lead us in a way that causes our faith to increase as we depend upon Him.
- God does not desire to see you fail. He does not take pleasure in our weakness and failure. He wants to lead us in a way that makes us stronger Christians. He seeks to equip us so that when the time comes we are ready to face and endure the trials of life.

B. He Knew Their Heart – God knew they would be tempted to return to Egypt. He knew the hearts of His people. He knew the doubts they possessed. He knew the fears they had. He knew that they were a people prone to wander and live only in the moment. They had a hard time seeing the big picture. They had difficulty believing in a land that flowed with milk and honey because they were so consumed with what they would eat at that very moment. [Num.11:5 – We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:](#)

- It is easy for us to look upon them with criticism, but we were not walking in their situation. Yes they had seen the hand of God working mightily in their lives, but yet they doubted. We too are much the same. God has proven Himself faithful and able in our lives and yet we are tempted to abandon the ways of God for the lure of the world. God knows our hearts and He seeks to lead us in His way. We must learn to trust Him.

I. The Journey Involved God's Will (17a)

II. The Journey Involved God's Wisdom (17b)

III. The Journey Involved God's Wilderness (18a) – [But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea:](#) We are aware that they spent much more time in the wilderness than they had too, but it was God who led them there initially. Our modern theology has influenced us so that we have a hard time accepting it, but sometimes God leads us through the wilderness. Consider this wilderness journey. It was:

A. A Longer Way – [God led the people about.](#) That reveals that He didn't lead them in a straight path always. It literally means "*to go about or around, change direction, to turn aside or turn around.*" This all involved God's timing. He took them a longer way to prepare them for what was ahead. He used that time as a time of learning and preparation.

- This isn't a concept that is foreign to Scripture. Joseph spent time in a prison, falsely accused. Abraham waited for Isaac for 25 years. Moses spent 40 years on the backside of the desert preparing to lead this people. Paul likely spent a couple of years in seminary in the Arabian Desert.

- Just because we haven't arrived yet is no reason to abandon the journey. It is likely that God is using that time to prepare us for what is ahead. Often we miss a blessing because we are in a hurry. Follow God even if it seems to be the long way around.

B. A Learning Way – God led them about, [through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea.](#) We know that the wilderness was difficult and they found themselves having to depend solely

on the Lord at the Red Sea. This all involved God's testing. He brought them to a place that they had to trust in Him. They had to trust Him for provision and deliverance.

- The Christian life isn't always easy. Sometimes God allows us to face a wilderness in life or a Red Sea experience so that we will learn to trust Him. We will never be all that we can be or accomplish what He desires if we never learn to trust Him. God uses those times of trial and testing to strengthen our faith so that we will lean upon Him.

I. The Journey Involved God's Will (17a)

II. The Journey Involved God's Wisdom (17b)

III. The Journey Involved God's Wilderness (18a)

IV. The Journey Involved God's Wonder (18b) – and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. Keep in mind that they had spent hundreds of years enslaved to the most dominant nation on earth. A humble group of slaves, even though they likely numbered in the millions, were not expected to prevail against a super power nation. In and of them-selves they didn't, but with the help of God they did.

- It was nothing short of a miracle that Israel ever escaped Egypt. It wasn't the fact that Pharaoh grew tired of the plagues; it was the providence and will of God for them to leave!
- They went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. That is actually a military term. It reveals that they went out "*set in battle array, armed for battle, and in ranks.*" Now I don't think that reveals that they went out with the weapons of warfare that Egypt possessed, but they did go up ready for battle. The battle wasn't theirs to fight; it was God's!
- It would do us good to learn to trust God. We belong to Him. He has already given us everything we need to be victorious. The redeemed have been cleansed in the blood of Christ, placed into the family of God, and promised a home in heaven. The battle isn't ours to fight within our own ability. Sometimes we just need to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!

V. The Journey Involved God's Watch-care (21-22) – And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: [22] He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. They had not been asked to set out on a journey that they knew nothing of by themselves. God was there with them. They enjoyed:

A. God's Glory – The people of God may have been in a difficult wilderness journey, but they were led by a cloud during the day. This actually reveals two things to us.

- The desert can produce unbearable heat from a relentless sun. The cloud provided a means of shade and comfort for them. (Make application.)
- Also we know that this was the glory cloud. God's Shekinah glory filled the cloud. Even in the wilderness they enjoyed the presence and power of God in their midst. (Make application.)

B. God's Guidance – God did not leave them without direction. They were in a land that they had never encountered. Clearly they had no way of knowing the best way to get to Canaan. Had it not been for the guidance of God by the cloud and pillar of fire, they likely would have wandered and perished in the wilderness.

- As long as we are seeking the ways of God we can rest assured of His guidance in our lives. He may lead us into uncharted territory, but we are never alone. The child of God needs not fear being left to find their own way.
- Many times we may feel as if God has abandoned us and is no longer providing direction. God is always there and He will always lead us in the right path. If we are not sensing His direction, it is very likely that we have wandered from the path He has chosen. If we stay close to Him, His guidance will be there!

God's direction may not always be what we desired or hoped, but it will always be best. I had rather follow God into the midst of a wilderness than to remain in a place that appears to be bountiful alone. God's ways are beyond our comprehension many times, but He continues to work in our lives for His glory and our good.

What are you following in this life? Are you following the direction of the Lord or the desires of the flesh? God has a plan and a path for each of us. It is up to us to seek His will and follow in His ways!