

So, You Want to Go Back to Egypt?

Have you ever been frustrated, discouraged, disheartened ... and just wanted to quit?

... these feelings of loss, confusion, disillusionment can come from a variety of sources ...

Circumstances ... relationships ... events

Now, we don't live by feelings, we live by faith ...

... but because we were created in the image of God we do feel things ... and we feel them deeply ...

... and how we feel does impact how we live.

So, the real question isn't how we feel ...

... the question is, how will we choose to respond and act regardless our feelings.

How do we navigate through those things in life that discourage and disorient us?

This is what we want to talk about today.

The Israelites have gotten free from Pharaoh and the slavery of Egypt ...

... this a great victory ... a glorious deliverance ...

But when they should be rejoicing they encounter 3 things ...

- Perplexing Paths
- Disturbing Dead Ends
- Bitter Realities

And suddenly when things become difficult ... trials come ... they want to go back to Egypt ...

... as if they preferred the safety of slavery over the discomforts of freedom

Benjamin Franklin once said: *"Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."*

This is pretty much where we find the children of Israel today.

Let's look at the three things that caused these Israelites to want to return to Egypt.

1. Perplexing Paths

¹⁷ Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." ¹⁸ Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt. ¹⁹ Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you." ²⁰ Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹ The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. (Exod. 13:17-21)

God led them 'around' that means in circles – God was leading His people in circles.

... at least that is how it appeared ...

- Was God confused?
- Had God lost His way?
- Did God not know what to do next?

Why would God lead His people in circles? ... verse 17 tells us.

God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines (even though it was nearer) because God did not want them to experience war and return to Egypt.

God knew the Israelites they were not ready for the hardships of war.

God's behavior in their lives, though it appeared to be **negative**, was in fact a **positive**.

What looked like **God's confusion** was actually, **God's protection**.

... I am so glad that God knows what we can and cannot bear ... and He is actively working to protect us.

... what is a wilderness might also be a refuge of safety.

... barren places often become places of great spiritual growth.

And notice: they were led by a *pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night*.

Rabbinic scholars call this the Shekinah ... the glory of God ... this represents the Holy Spirit.

Paul says in Romans 8, "*as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*"

When you follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit it doesn't always make sense to you or to the people around you...

... I've known people to quit good paying jobs and take lesser paying jobs over biblical convictions

... I know a doctor who quit her job as the lead pediatrician in a major medical center to move to China with her husband to be a missionary

... I know a man who (at the age of 40 with a wife and kids) left his career to go to bible college to prepare for the ministry.

... What is happening? What are you doing?

Listen, just because you are walking in circles, doesn't mean you haven't been reading the map or listening to your guide...

... When you follow the Lord, not every step will make sense to the human mind.

... It is possible walk in circles and (at the same time) be perfectly and fully in the will of God.

I say this because when you become perplexed over the path you are on... and all of do at one time or another

... when the path itself seems to make no sense don't throw up your hands and quit ...

... anybody can quit, that takes absolutely no character at all

... quitting is easy

... going back to Egypt looks reasonable ... it did to these Israelites ...

Don't do it

... Don't take the path of least resistance, it is never right to return to the slaveries of our past.

2. Disturbing Dead-Ends

The 10th and final plague has come to Egypt, and as the death angel passed over the land of Egypt, Pharaoh finally agreed to let the Hebrews leave.

However, once the moment of Pharaoh's sorrow had passed and he is reminded that he has freed the Jews and they are gone ...

4 "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." And they did so. 5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said,

"What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"⁶ So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him;⁷ and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly.⁹ Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.¹⁰ As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD.¹¹ Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?"¹² "Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."¹³ But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever."¹⁴ "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward." (Exod. 14:4-15)

First put yourself into the mindset of the Jews.

... all they had ever known was the law of slavery.

... they knew nothing of freedom

... in their lives, if they had resisted their taskmasters in the slightest, they were soon subdued and beaten into submission with the wip.

That night, as a whole, the Jews had fled from the land of their bondage.

I'm sure that it was a moment of wonder and exhilaration ... but now that moment has passed.

They are camped between **Pi-hahiroth** and **Baal-zephon** ...

... in front of them the Red Sea

... behind them the armies of Pharaoh are closing in ...

... the Egyptians were coming to recapture and pull God's people back into their bondage.

A perplexing path is bad enough ... a dead-end is even worse

- They were not here because of some mishap by Moses.
- Their present circumstance was not due to lax leadership.
- Israel is here at this "dead end" because this is exactly where God wanted them to be.

God is using His people, for His purpose of judging Pharaoh and the Egyptians

According to 14:4 God is going to be **honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that God is God!**

Israel was the bait on God's hook to catch Pharaoh.

BUT OF COURSE, THEY DON'T KNOW THIS!

Here are the poor Jews in this strange place huddled together— no military leaders, no combat training, no strategy, no weapons of defense ...

... they are frightened. ... and they cry out to Moses, "Why didn't you just leave us in Egypt like we told you too?"

I've been in places just like this ... and you have too.

Who hasn't?

But in this moment of absolute desperation God says something to Moses that is very wonderful ...

... and it involves three commands:

- **Do not fear, stand by** – that means don't let the fear of uncertainty or difficult situations cause you to run away.

- **See the salvation of the Lord – stand still** long enough, **dwell** in God’s presence long enough, **wait** for God to do what only He can do.

This is what is called “the pause of faith.”

This is the place where faith and spiritual strength grows. *Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary. (Isa. 40:31)*

- **Go forward** – this is not a contradiction of the first command. Too much of our action is merely for the sake of action.

... We are not busy about the father’s business, we are just busy

... before true obedience there is often the pause of faith

- Jesus prayed in garden before he went to the cross
- Peter was in the upper room waiting before he preached on the day of Pentecost ... and so was Stephen ... and Phillip
- Being must come before doing

But we want results NOW!

Decide NOW!

And in our impatience, we jump into action without considering what the fruit of that actions will be ...

... Moses, this is a disaster, let’s just go back to Egypt.

Without the ‘pause of faith’ in our lives our actions will become increasingly more more erratic and misguided as we run ahead of God.

You must stand still and see the salvation of the Lord BEFORE you can go forward.

And of course, we know the outcome of that day.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. ²² The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. ²⁴ At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. ²⁵ He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians." ²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. ²⁹ But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses. (Exod. 14:21-31)

So, although the Israelites were discouraged and ready to return to their Egyptian slavery, God ruled the day, and what a mighty victory!

God gave them a great blessing by NOT giving them what they wanted.

Certainly, now the Children of Israel will know to trust God and follow Moses.

PAUSE ... wouldn't it be great if things worked out that way?

In life, every believer encounters ...

- Perplexing Paths
- Disturbing Dead Ends

Don't hate them ... don't let them discourage you.

As counter intuitive as it may seem, these things are part of the will God

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

3. Bitter Realities

²² Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore, it was named Marah. ²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵ Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. (Exod. 15:22-25)

After the great victory of crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites break into singing this great antiphonal response:

I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has cast into the sea.

The whole congregation of Israel is caught up together glorifying and praising God!

... but then they travel for three days without finding any water ...

... and like the perplexing situation of “traveling in circles” this was God’s design.

... verse 25 says that God led them this way in order to test them.

... Sadly, Israel hadn't learned

... so, it didn't take long before **corporate praise** turned into **congregational complaint**.

What do you do when the bitter realities of your life come your way?

Do you grumble and complain?

Do you lash out at those around you?

These Israelites did ...

... They could not see that this **bitter reality** was actually the result of **divine providence**.

- Not because they had sinned
- Not because God was angry
- Not because Moses was a bad leader
- Not because the devil did it.

Like **perplexing paths** and **disturbing dead ends** ... **bitter realities** are a part of life ...

... every life

... bitter realities not outside the will of God for His people.

But they did not understand this.

... they were immature and so they grumbled.

... and if you are reading through this text rapidly your first thought will be that they were grumbling against Moses.

... but that was not the case at all.

... Look at what Moses says in the next chapter:

The LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumbings are not against us but against the LORD." (Exod. 16:8)

Moses says, "there is something I want you to learn if you are a grumbler, your grumbling is against God."

... And because it is against God. **It is sin.**

... In 1 Cor. 10:10 Paul calls grumbling a sin...

... In fact, the Apostle Paul lists the sin of grumbling along with the sins of idolatry, fornication, and tempting Christ.

But Nathan ...

- **Everywhere they went they were led by the shekinah glory of God ...**
- **“How could they grumble in the presence of God’s cloud of glory?”**
- **“How could they grumble after the miracles they had seen?”**

Here is what separates Moses from the multitude ...

... when they grumbled, he prayed.

So, the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"²⁵ Then he cried out to the LORD

Now pay close attention to the consequence of Moses’ crying out to God in prayer.

... the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

God didn’t miraculously create a tree, or cause a tree to appear ... it was there the whole time.

On the road to Emmaus Jesus showed those disciples how the Old Testament spoke of Jesus Christ ... **here is one of those places.**

This tree speaks of Jesus Christ ...

... In fact, Jeremiah calls Jesus the righteous branch.

... the only thing that can make the bitter realities of life sweet ... is the Old Rugged Cross
...

NOW don't miss this ...

God brought them to a place of dryness and desperation so that he might display to them—a picture of the sufficiency of Calvary.

... this is the lesson every one of us needs to learn so that when bitter times come ... we will remember ...

- Jesus is enough!
- Calvary is enough!
- Grace is enough!

... and here is what God knew that this bunch of grumblers did not ...

... just over the hill was a beautiful oasis ...

27 Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters. (Exodus 15:27)

Instead of complaining when they encountered these bitter waters, they should have done what God had commanded the first time ...

- **Do not fear, stand by**
- **See the salvation of the Lord**

What a wonderful place this oasis was—can't you almost imagine it?

... Right over the next hill—right around the next bend in the road.

Right now you may be camped by some bitter waters and you are thinking, “I’m going back to Egypt” “God has forsaken me.”

- No, He hasn’t, He is proving you.
- You are not outside of the will of God—this is the will of God.
- The glory of God is most clearly revealed when God’s people walk through the trials of life with confident faith ...

Anybody can rejoice when **Pharaoh’s army is drowned** ... the question is can you rejoice **when the water is bitter?**

I want to leave you with 2 quotes that that will help you when you encounter the perplexing paths, disturbing dead ends, and the bitter realities of life ...

... they come from the songs we sang today ...

Lord I would clasp thy hand in mine; nor ever murmur or repine Content whatever lot I see; Since tis thy hand that leadeth me.

*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts above*