

The life of Moses

THE LONG WAY AROUND

Exodus 13:17-22

Chapter 7

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Moses follows God the long way around.

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: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you. And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. 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: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.
(Exodus 13: 17 – 22)

Between chapters eight and fourteen of the book of Exodus we read about how God deals in the lives of the peoples of Egypt and Israel. We studied about how God used Moses during the first plagues that He sent to Egypt. After that God sent the plagues of flies, diseased cattle, boils, hail, locust, darkness and finally the death of the first born child. In all but the last of these Pharaoh was deeply affected but his heart remained hardened. God was

still accomplishing His purpose in all of this. In chapter nine verses fourteen through sixteen of Exodus we discover just what God was accomplishing in the lives of His people and the people of Egypt. Verse fourteen reads, *“that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.”* In verse sixteen God says to Pharaoh, *“I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.”* The lesson that everyone takes from this is that God is, and that He is interested in the lives and the affairs of man. The most profound thing that a person can ever learn is that God is and that He is interested in them. He wants to save them from their sins and has a will for their lives that is wonderful. Finally, in chapter twelve we see God institute the Passover Feast. The first born of Egypt are slain and the people of God are able to leave Egypt after four hundred and thirty years of bondage. Chapter twelve verses thirty-two through thirty-seven is a very special portion of Scripture. Verse thirty-seven and eight read, *“And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.”* Then in verses forty through forty-two we read, *“Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much*

observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.” God wanted the people to remember the night that they left Egypt. This was the culminating proof that God was the great *I AM* and that He had delivered His people. The Lord could have set the people free on the first day that Moses went before Pharaoh. However, had He done so they would have missed so many wonderful lessons. They would not have learned just how precious they were to God. They would have never seen the power of God to deliver demonstrated. They would need this knowledge in the wilderness as they went to possess the land that God had promised. Finally, Egypt would have never known that the God of the Hebrews was the true God of Heaven and that they should come to know and follow Him.

Thus began their great journey that was to take forty years to accomplish. The journey began in a rather unusual way. It was a way that must have puzzled Moses. He had been trained as a military leader and knew the way to Canaan. God was going to lead His people in the opposite direction than they would have chosen for themselves. Notice please in our text for this lesson where it says, *“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: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea: and the children of Israel went up*

harnessed out of the land of Egypt.” Then in verses twenty-one and two it says, *“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: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”* God was leading His people but instead of going northeast along the regular trade routes that lay beside the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, He took them south into the wilderness, away from the land of Canaan. The Northeast route could have taken just a few days or weeks at the most. The way that they were going was taking them away from the destination and putting a body of water between them and Canaan. God had a reason for doing this. I do not think that the people understood the reason but God was doing something for them that would be a great help to their faith in the future. God knew that along the northeastern route were Egyptian outposts to guard the way to Egypt from the land of the Philistines. God knew that the people would begin to have second thoughts and be afraid and try to turn around and go back into Egypt. The soldiers in these outposts also may have tried to stop the people. Along this route also, would be the Philistines. This fierce, warlike people would try to fight against God’s people as they came out of Egypt. God knew that they were not ready to face a fight like that. They were still just a band of slaves, not an army ready to fight a battle. God knew that the path by the sea, though seemingly easier would be doomed to failure. Matthew Henry said that,

“Man proposes but God disposes.” Man makes his plans with the best knowledge that he has but God will cause His will to take place. God needed to take them into the desert for a time to organize them and let them form into a people with one goal and purpose. Many times we will make the plan of our lives but God will not let them take place. He seems sometimes to take us in the opposite direction that we wanted to go. We are goal oriented. We want to accomplish, to get things done. God’s plan is to accomplish something in us. One of the greatest lessons that we as Christians can learn is that God is more interested in what He can accomplish in us than what He can accomplish through us. God can do anything with anybody. He deems to use us in His work but He does not need us. He is developing more in us than we sometimes understand. God could have led the people along the sea and defeated all the enemies and prevented the people from trying to return to Egypt. They could have been established in Canaan in just a few weeks. However, God was more interested in developing the people than accomplishing the task. We must understand that the People of Israel were just a large band of slaves at this time. They were weak. They were filled with the habits and customs of Egypt. They were a mixed multitude. That means, I believe, that there were Egyptians mixed in with the people of God. God was going to accomplish several things for them. He was going to strengthen and organize them into a mighty nation. He was going to strengthen their ability to trust Him. He was going to comb out the influence of pagan

Egypt. To do that, He needed to take them into the wilderness for a time. Think about what they would have missed had they gone the easy way.

- They would never have walked across the Red Sea on dry ground.
- They would have never seen their enemy, Pharaoh, defeated in the sea.
- They would have missed the water from the rock.
- They would have missed seeing the bitter waters of Marah made sweet.
- They would have missed God's provision of Manna.

Often God seemingly takes the long way around in our lives. He could provide the money that we think that we need but He makes us wait. He could heal a disease but He lets us suffer that He might show us a better way. Why must a missionary spend years raising support to serve the Lord in a foreign land? God is accomplishing more in our lives by taking the long way around than we can understand. As we consider these things let us always remember that God is far more interested in what He can do in us than what He can do through us. He is developing our faith and our spiritual depth.

Next, another reason that God took them the long way around was because God was going to prepare them for the battles that they were to experience in the future. Had they gone the easy way, when they had to face the enemies later they would not have been ready for the battle. God knew that one-day they would have to face the Philistines

and the other nations of the land. At this point they were not ready to face them. I Corinthians 10:13 tells us *that, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* I am so glad that the Lord knows just what I am able to bear. He will never allow Satan to tempt us above our ability to withstand. God always gages the trials we face to our strength and our ability to bear them. As we face trials we gain strength for more difficult trials that will come later. When we were freshmen in college we were sure that the classes we were taking were very hard. Later we were amazed at how easy they were. The later year classes are harder than the first but we have gained strength through our study. When we look back we realize that the first classes were easier. God gives us strength to endure the trials we encounter and keeps those that would be too great for us until we have the strength and experience to endure them. If we face them too soon, we would succumb to them. With the strength gained from enduring the earlier battles that we are able to face them as a more mature believer. God's goal is to mature and perfect His people. He wants to teach us to lean on him and draw our strength from Him. God is very interested in teaching us to trust him. He is more interested in building our ability to have faith in Him, than he is in our seeming success in life's affairs. There are times when we must face an illness. When God asks us to go through this kind of a trial what is he trying

to teach us? He wants to show us that He can go through the trying time with us and give us grace to endure and still give Him glory. What do we learn about God during these times? Do we learn to see God give strength where we have none? Do we see other answers to prayer that we would never have seen had we not been sick? God is very pleased when we gain a deeper understanding of who He is and how He works. He wants us to know Him in a powerful and a real way. He wants us to be successful in life but He defines success in a different way than we do. When we learn about the power and faithfulness of God, I believe that He counts that as success. It is success in our spirit and spiritual growth. Let us leave success, as the world defines success, to God and strive for that which is eternal and pleasing to God. God was preparing His people step by step. He knew their weaknesses and planned their exercises of faith accordingly.

God directed the people of Israel to go in a way that was opposite from what they expected. He could have taken them the easy way but He had a lot of important lessons for them to learn that they would not have learned otherwise. Psalm 107: 4 - 7 puts it this way. *“They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”* God led them forth by the right way. It was a hard way. It was a way that caused much fright. Imagine how they must have felt with

the armies of Pharaoh closing in behind them. There were mountains on one side of them and the Red Sea on the other. The only thing that stood between them and Pharaoh was the cloudy pillar of God. We know how wonderful that was but they were going to learn how faithful God can be. Moses stood up before them and declared to them. *“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever.”* As the people followed Moses, at the Lord’s command Moses lifted His rod over the sea and the sea divided and the people walked across on dry ground. Exodus 14:22 is a wonderful verse. *“And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.”* The walls that fell and swallowed the armies of Pharaoh were, to the people of Israel, divine walls of protection. The place that spoke death to the Egyptians was a place where the people of God were safe from all harm. It was God’s wall and nothing could harm His children that day. The way God led was the right way. His people learned to trust Him and He finally defeated their enemies and gained glory to Himself that day. How is God leading you? He has a plan for your life and is leading you in the right way. Commit yourself to prayer and the Word of God. Ask God to show you the right way to live for Him. Learn to draw strength from His Word as you read it and study it each day. Commit your way to His good direction

for your life and even if it seems to be in the opposite way that you would choose you can know that His way is right. Don't be panicked. Don't be impatient. God is leading and perfecting that which pertains to you.

To aid our learning:

1. What is the most profound thing that a person can ever learn?
2. What was unusual about the way God led His people out of Egypt?
3. Complete the thought, "God is more interested in what he can accomplish in us than He can . . ." How has that been true in your life?