

Message #24

Exodus 13:17-22

Once we believe on Jesus Christ, we are saved forever by the blood of the Lamb. Paul said, “Therefore, having been justified by faith...having been justified by His blood” we have “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1, 9). So the moment we believe on Jesus Christ, we are forever saved.

However, once we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we have absolutely no idea where that will lead us. All we know is that we believed on Jesus Christ and His precious blood has washed away our sins and has given us life and peace with God.

We know that at the very moment we believe in Jesus Christ, we receive God’s Spirit and God’s Spirit starts the lifelong process of cleaning us up and sanctifying us. Thus, when we believe on Jesus Christ, we begin a journey that will eventually take us all the way into heaven.

Now we don’t specifically know the route we will take in life. We don’t exactly know where faith in Jesus Christ will lead us. All we know is that we have been saved and here we go. Probably we will not go in the direction we thought we would go. In fact, our life’s route may take us on a trip we never thought.

That is what happened to Israel. God saved Israel by that blood of the Lamb and it was now time for her to begin her journey to the Promised Land. She is out of Egypt, in Succoth (Ex. 13:20). God has reminded her of the significance of the blood, the firstborn and the leaven and now it is time for her to get moving. But the direction she moves is not the route people would pick; it is the direction God picked.

What we see here is this:

ONCE GOD SAVED ISRAEL AND ONCE ISRAEL UNDERSTOOD THE THEOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF THE BLOOD, THE FIRSTBORN AND THE LEAVEN, GOD BEGAN THE PROCESS OF SPECIFICALLY LEADING ISRAEL TO HER PROMISED LAND ON THE ROUTE HE CHOSE.

I do not believe that what has happened to us since our conversion is a coincidence. I do not believe that where we are right now is a coincidence. If we have believed on Jesus Christ and if we are dealing with leaven issues or sin issues in our life and we truly want God to lead our life, then I am convinced it is happening right now. We may not know exactly why we are where we are at the present time, but God knows. He is the One who has led us to where we are. The route may not be the one we would pick, but God is still sovereign and He is still watching over His elect and directing them.

You cannot help but see that from this text in Exodus.

OBSERVATION #1 – God did not lead Israel in the shortest or fastest route to the Promised Land. **13:17**

Israel is in Succoth and the fastest and shortest route to take to the Promised Land would be a northeast route of about 150 miles. It would be a nice easy, well-traveled route because you could either go north and follow the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea or you could go straight across the Sinai Peninsula and head north to the Promised Land.

But that is not what God did. It is not where God directed. He had a very irregular route in mind. God started moving the nation in the opposite direction of where she was to ultimately go. He started moving her south. He specifically directed this nation to go in the opposite direction of where she was headed.

Now why would God do that? Why not take the fastest, shortest and easiest route? The answer is in the last part of **verse 17**; **because God knew that Israel would see the Philistines that were occupying the land and would see that they would have to have a war to get the land and they would turn around and go back to Egypt.**

Now would Israel really do this? Would this be a real threat? Would she actually not trust God to give her victory and go back to slavery in Egypt? Well, look at her history and you'll get your answer. Has Israel typically trusted God and obeyed God? No way! Her track record is that of a nation that does not believe the Word of God.

God knows where we need to be at every stage of our lives. The sovereign will of God, I am certain, has directed us so that we will be prevented from running into something that will cause us to go back into the world from which we got saved.

OBSERVATION #2 – God led Israel in a wilderness route to the Red Sea. **13:18**

Now apparently the “sons of Israel,” over 600,000, formed some sort of military regiment for travel purposes. They did not just randomly start leaving Egypt; they formed an organized procession and marched out. It was a very orderly march.

They are not trained at this point, nor do they have good weapons. This was a rag-tag bunch of former slaves that were formed for this march. But they were formed. The fact is any group of people who have God on their side are potentially a powerful force.

Verse 18 specifically says that God led them by way of “the Red Sea.” God was actually preparing Israel by this organization for a warfare that would ultimately be necessary when she reached Canaan. So this was a good thing for her to do. Now God specifically led her in a southern route into the wilderness that led her right to the “Red Sea.”

Now the words “Red Sea” occur five times in Exodus 10:19; 13:18; 15:4, 22; 23:31. These words occur four times in Numbers 14:25; 21:4; 33:10-11.

These words occur three times in Deuteronomy 1:40; 2:1; 11:4. These words occur another 12 times in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. So these words are translated in Scripture as the “Red Sea” some 24 times.

Now this point is questioned by liberals. They read these words and say it really does not refer to the Red Sea, but a marshy area known as the “sea of reeds.” Of course if you conclude this, then one may discredit the miracle of parting the Red Sea.

Now we believe it is significant to point out the Hebrew words translated “Red Sea.” The words are “yam-sup” (pronounced “yam sough”). The word “yam” means sea and the word “sup” can mean “reed” or “red.” Now some have said what this really means is that Israel was led to the Reed Sea, not the Red Sea.

Those who say that they were led to the “Sea of Reeds” use four arguments for their conclusion:

- 1) The Hebrew word “sup” is a loanword from the Egyptians that means reeds.
- 2) When the word “sup” is used alone it means reeds (Ex. 2:3).
- 3) Reeds only grow in marshy, fresh water areas so it cannot be the Red Sea.
- 4) Sup does not mean red, but reed and it comes from a mistranslation of the Septuagint which specifically says, “Red Sea” (ερυθρος θαλασσα).

Now these are all good observations that are made, but one critical fact is overlooked; the Hebrew does not simply use the word “sup,” but the words “yam sup.” So the real question here is whether or not “yam sup” may be translated “Reed Sea” or “Red Sea.”

Victor Hamilton does a good job of examining the Hebrew grammar on this and quotes Batto in saying, **“At no period in Israelite history is there any evidence that the combination “yam sup” ever referred to a body of water other than the Red Sea”** (*Exodus*, p. 207).

It is very clear that Stephen believed it was literally the “Red Sea” (Acts 7:36) and so did the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 11:29). The fact is God led Israel to the banks of the Red Sea and it will be right here where she will see God do an amazing miracle.

Now the best description we get of the actual route God leads them is in **Numbers 33**. Specifically, we may observe the travel route seen in **Numbers 33:5-8**. The fact is it is very difficult to identify all these specific places today. But here is what we believe: God led the nation Israel southwest out of Etham, and led them down to a place called Pi-hahiroth, which is near Migdol. From this spot they ultimately crossed the Red Sea (Ex. 14:2; Num. 33:7-8).

Now here is the point we want to see. If the choice were left up to us, we would not choose a wilderness experience that would put us with our backs to the Red Sea. However, the choice is not left up to us. The travel route was God’s route and by choosing this route Israel would get to see God work in some dramatic ways.

If the choice were left up to us, the moment we believe on Jesus Christ we would instantly go to heaven. That would be our choice. But God says I want you in the wilderness for a while because while you are there, you will be able to see Me do many things.

OBSERVATION #3 – Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. **13:19**

Long before Moses was ever born, he made the “sons of Israel” promise that when they left Egypt they would take his bones with them (Gen. 50:25). Joseph knew that Israel was destined for a Promised Land and he did not want his dead body buried outside of it. In fact, in Hebrews 11:22 we learn that this was a tremendous act of faith on Joseph’s part. He realized that God had promised a specific land to Israel and he wanted to be in it. We learn from Joshua 24:32 that he was finally buried in Shechem.

Moses was obviously a great man of God and a great man of integrity and he followed through with it. Godly leaders need to be men of integrity like Moses. They need to follow through with things.

When Mr. Miles retired from GRSBM, a man who lacked scruples came in as his replacement. He actually lied to Mr. Miles and as soon as he became President, he did not follow through on what he said he would do. By the way, the man is no longer in ministry.

I recently learned of a minister who has changed to whole doctrine of a church and all the people are leaving. In fact, he is down to four families. The problem now is that they cannot pay his salary, so they are spending money people gave to other areas of church ministry. They are not following through on what they promised. Sooner or later that minister, who has no scruples, will face the music for the evil he has done.

Moses was a man of integrity and when we give our word in a theological setting that we are going to do something, we need to do it.

OBSERVATION #4 – The people left Succoth and camped at Etham. **13:20**

We are not real sure where Etham actually is. In fact, Victor Hamilton said ask the Hebrews a few decades later where Etham was located and “you will probably get a blank stare” (*Exodus*, p. 208).

Most give its location as being east of Succoth on the edge of the wilderness. The wilderness is probably the wilderness of Etham, which was located on the east side of the Red Sea.

Now probably at this point Israel is thinking we are heading northeast. But that is not where God was going to direct them. Actually, He is going to move them southwest.

OBSERVATION #5 – God directed Israel by a pillar of a cloud in the day and by a pillar of fire by night. **13:21-22**

Even though we may not figure out the route, God knew it and God directed it. He put a huge visible pillar cloud in the sky during the day to lead Israel, and then at night He put a pillar of fire in the sky.

This pillar represented the presence of God; specifically, the member of the Godhead known as the angel of the LORD (Ex. 14:19; 23:20-23/Neh. 9:12). It was apparently a supernatural, huge, great column that rose high in the sky. It was very distinct. So every day the Israelites knew God's presence was with them and every day the Israelites could assume God was directing them.

So what Moses and Israel needed to do every day and night was to keep their eyes on that pillar. You would never wander off on the wrong path if you kept your eyes on that pillar every day and every night.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that we need to fix our eyes on Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Every day we need to set our sights on His leading, for the same God who led Israel is the same God who leads us.

The route we take to doing God's will is probably not the route we would choose. We need to realize that God has planned our route. Nothing takes Him by surprise. We may not always understand what God is doing or where God is leading, but we can know with certainty that He knows where He is taking us.

If we commit our ways to the Lord, He will direct our steps; but the direction He gives us will probably not be the route we would have selected.