

STUCK BETWEEN



A Rock and a Hard Place

Have you ever found yourself in a predicament? We have a lot of word pictures in the English language to describe being in a predicament. We hear phrases such as, “you sure have painted yourself into a corner,” or of being caught “between a rock and a hard place,” or being “up against the wall” or “in a pickle.”

One person defined a predicament as being, “A lawyer who specializes in suing doctors for

medical malpractice now finding himself in need of major surgery.”

Moses and the people of Israel found themselves in such a predicament. The Israelites were trapped between Pharaoh’s Army and the Red Sea.

I hope that after today’s lesson you are not going to be like the story of this little boy.

Nine year old Joey was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday School that day.

“Well, Mom,” replied Joey, “our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind the enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge, and all the people walked across safely. He used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters and call in an air strike. They sent in bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved.”

“Now Joey, is that REALLY what your teacher taught you?” his mother asked. “Well, no,” replied Joey, “but if I told it the way the teacher did, you’d never believe it!”

After the death angel’s appearance resulted in the death of all the first born among the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to go free. Exodus 13:18 tells us,

“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.”

1. Examine Exodus 14:1-2 and discuss why God’s plans do not always appear to be logical.

- a. In Exodus 14:1-2, God ordered a change of direction which to many of the children of Israel must have at best seemed strange and at worst, risky and dangerous.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.”

- b. The children of Israel were in effect asked to take a direction which in a very short time would place them with the Red Sea on one side, on the other side a trackless wilderness and an insurmountable barrier of mountains. They were boxed in, there was no escape! It was like running for your life from a gang intent upon taking your life and realizing that you have just turned down a dead-end street. They can’t go back and they can’t go forward. The future looks impassible and the present seems impossible.

Moses tells us how God guided the children of Israel in Exodus 13:21,

“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.”

The great pillar lead the children of Israel in their journey. The pillar took on the appearance of smoke by day and fire by night. Today’s passage teaches us four thoughts regarding God’s plans.

GOD’S PLANS ARE NOT ALWAYS LOGICAL

GOD’S PLANS ARE ALWAYS MADE IN ADVANCE.

GOD’S PLANS DO NOT NEED OUR HELP, ONLY OUR OBEDIENCE

GOD’S PLANS ARE NOT LIMITED TO WHAT IS HUMANLY POSSIBLE

- c. But you need to understand that they have been led to the place they now stand, not by Moses, not by coincidental wandering, but by God Himself. Often God seems to place His children in positions of profound difficulty, leading them into a wedge from which there is no escape, designing a situation that no human judgment would have permitted had it been previously consulted. The very cloud directs them there.
- d. You..., may be involved in a situation like this at this very hour. It seems perplexing and mysterious to the last degree, but it is perfectly right. The issue will more than justify Him who has brought you there. It is a platform for the display of His almighty grace and power. Not only will He deliver, but in doing so He will give a lesson that no one will ever forget."

2. How does Exodus 14:3-9 support the idea that God's plans are made in advance? How does this fact help us?

- a. God was not surprised, he knew how it would end before it ever began. In verse three we are told,

"For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. ⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so."

ILLUSTRATION

"Gladys Aylward, missionary to China more than fifty years ago, was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led more than a hundred orphans over the mountains toward Free China.

In their book "The Hidden Price of Greatness," Ray Besson and Ranelda Mack Hunsicker tell what happened:

"During Gladys's harrowing journey out of war-torn Yangcheng ... she grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13-year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. "But I am not Moses," Gladys cried in desperation. "Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but Jehovah is still God."

When Gladys and the orphans made it through, they proved once again that no matter how inadequate we feel, God is still God, and we can trust in him. When the situation seems impossible, just remember to have a personal confidence in God, practice obedience to God, and understand that God has a purpose in all the experiences we have with Him."

b. God said to Moses

“Now look, here is the plan. Pharaoh will hear that you are wonder back and forth in the desert and he will think, ‘Now is my chance. They are headed back to Baal-zephon, I’ll trap them and they will not escape.’

But it was a trap for Pharaoh, not Israel. God had arranged it all ahead of time. He always does.

c. According to verses five through eight Pharaoh fell for the plan. Pharaoh pursued the children of Israel with 600 chariots and in verse nine we are told:

“But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD.”

3. Why did the same Israelites who had just witnessed the remarkable power and deliverance of God, now become fearful and murmur against Him? - Exodus 14:10-12; (also see Exodus 12:38; Psalm 106:7-8).

a. Not all the company were Israelites. Exodus 12:38 reveals that a “mixed multitude came out of Egypt with Israel.” Israel did not have the written Scripture at this point in their history to turn to. As slaves they had always lived at the edge of subsistence and were easily given to fear. The text says the Israelites were not just afraid, they were “very” or “sore” afraid, and I believe that even this does not do justice to the terror they felt.

b. Israel’s response was to give in to fear. We need to notice what fear does. Look at Exodus 14:11-12. “Then they said to Moses,

“And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? ¹² Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

Israel was afraid because they had their eyes on the Egyptians, not on the LORD. Fear causes them to distort the truth, to be ruled by doubt rather than by faith. Their statement that it would have been better for them to have served the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness exhibits a remarkably short memory. But then, do we not do the same? Sometimes we act as if we regretted stepping out in faith when we find what is involved?

c. The Psalmist records in 106:7-8,

“Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea. ⁸ Nevertheless he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

It is interesting to consider that Israel had trusted God for their deliverance **but not for their circumstances**. But this is not new. David despaired and said, "I will perish one day at the hands of Saul." Elijah hid in a cave and asked to die (1 Kings 19:4).

- d. If we are Christians, we have trusted Him to save us from sin but all too often we will not trust him with our circumstances. May we trust God even in our circumstances.

4. How does Exodus 14:13-16 support the idea that God's plans do not need our help; only our obedience?

- a. God's answer through Moses to the murmuring Israelites is found beginning in verse 13,

"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. ¹⁴ The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

- b. God's instructions through Moses are four-fold.

1) "Fear Not." He instructed the people first of all not to be afraid.

2) "Stand Still." To "stand still" might be better understood to say, "Stand firm" – They were to reflect in faith and confidence on the delivering power of Jehovah.

3) "Watch." Moses says "see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day." God does not need your help. You don't need to fight, you need to stay out of the way. Just watch Him work.

4) Keep silent

"Hold your peace." Often the hardest for us to do is this, because we feel that we just have to tell somebody about the predicament that we are in. But the only one who can do anything about our predicament already knows, He is waiting for us to look to him and be silent.

All of these instructions are directed to natural human responses to panic. **First**, we are afraid. **Second**, we run. **Third**, we fight. **Fourth**, we tell everyone who will listen.

- c. God now speaks to Moses and says in verse fifteen and sixteen,

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: ¹⁶ But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."

Literally God told Moses to stop praying and start moving. There is a time to pray and when we have direction we need to stop praying and start moving.

5. Read Exodus 14:15-22 and discuss how God's plans are not limited to what is humanly possible.

- a. In Exodus 14:21-22 we read,

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² 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.”

Some attempt to explain away the miraculous aspects of the crossing of the Red Sea. One popular view is that the Israelites crossed in a generally shallow and marshy district which had been cleared of water and made dry by the natural action of a strong wind. The difficulty with this naturalist reasoning is if this were indeed merely shallow water, it is difficult to see how the Egyptians could have been drowned.

- b. How wide an area was provided for the crossing is not given in the text. But here is something to think about. To get the two million plus Israelites through the Red Sea in one night was quite a feat.

“If they were to go through the Red Sea five abreast, the line would be forty-five miles long, and it would take 4 days and nights to get through. So, they had to have a space made through the Red Sea from one to three miles wide, so they could walk from 600 to 5,000 abreast. This way they could get through the Red Sea in one night.”

- c. The conclusion of the story is told beginning Exodus 14:23-30

The return of the water brought an end to the Egyptian force that had committed itself to the pursuit and destruction of the children of Israel.

Verse 31 reveals, “

“And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.”

Conclusion

What I want you to see in closing is that coming to the Red Sea is just as much a part of God’s plan as crossing it. A predicament in God’s hands is only a highway to the Promised Land.

Why does God allow these predicaments to happen in our lives? Because it often takes these tight places to get us to look up to Him for our help.

“It may be that you have developed a rather materialistic lifestyle. Like Moses, and the children of Israel you have rubbed shoulders with folks in Egypt most of your life. You work with Egyptians. Think like Egyptians. Read Egyptian newspapers. Listen to Egyptian music. Do commercial battles with Egyptian entrepreneurs. You’re in the competitive world of the Egyptians, so its only natural that you react like them.”