



The Israelites have been in slavery to the Egyptians for just over 400 years before God delivered them through ten miraculous plagues. The last plague, the death of the firstborn throughout Egypt, dealt the final blow and released the hands of Pharaoh upon God's people. The people of Israel were amazed at what God had done, and they quickly left Egypt, plundering the Egyptians on the way out. God then gives instructions to Israelites about the future, namely related to the Passover and consecrating their firstborn to the Lord as a way to remember what God had done in bringing them out of their slavery in Egypt. This brings us to our passage of study for today, a significant passage that will prove to be a guide to the Israelites during their wilderness journey.

**Key Passage:** Exodus 13:17-22

#### Discussion Questions:

1. How does today's passage illustrate the concept of God's guidance in times of uncertainty and fear?
2. Discuss the significance of God leading the Israelites away from the Philistines despite it being the shortest route to the Promised Land. What might this look like as God works in our lives today?

The quickest way to the Promised Land was through Philistine land, but God believed Israel couldn't handle that route. Why? "Lest they change their minds when they see war and go back to Egypt." In other words, they wouldn't be able to handle it. Fear will make you do some crazy things. God knew their heart and that they would rather return to slavery than face danger by having to fight the Philistines at this point in the journey.

Douglas Stuart notes, "Would Israel really be so inconsistent as to give up the conquest and return to Egypt – of all places? And would they do so after all they had seen and experienced in the ten plagues? The answer is yes – decidedly yes. God knew their limited perspectives and naïve expectations full well and thus led them away from Philistine territory."

3. In what ways do our limited perspective and naïve expectations hinder our understanding of God's plans for our lives? What insights can we gain from Adrian Rogers' analogy of God leading us on detours to prepare us for His purposes?

God knows our limited perspectives and naïve expectations, and in turn, He sometimes leads us *away* from things. He sometimes leads us on a different path. When it comes to our limited perspectives, we only know the past, and we only see the present. Every one of us is limited in our understanding of the future. We don't know what will happen in five minutes, much less five years from now.

Regarding our naïve expectations: We expect never to undergo trials or face any pain. When we get frustrated over challenging experiences or seasons of pain, it shows the naivete that we often have in our expectations of life. Adrian Rogers once referenced this part of the Exodus story as a detour, saying, "God is leading us round about because He knows we're not quite ready for some of the things that He has in store for us."

4. How does the story of Joseph exemplify the importance of trusting God's timing and experiencing His provision under challenging circumstances?

The story of Joseph is an excellent example of God's timing and preparation. After Joseph was wrongfully thrown into a pit and sold into slavery, he experienced many bewildering twists and turns that would take him to the mat. He was falsely accused, thrown into prison, and eventually elevated into power, which positioned him to rescue his own family from death eventually. Toward the end of his story in Genesis, we see him at a crossroads where he has the perfect opportunity to exact revenge on his brothers for everything their choices had inflicted on his life. We read these words: "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Joseph understood God's timing and the experience that God brought him through and for what purpose.

Don't underestimate the importance of two things in the Kingdom of God: (1) God's Timing and (2) Our Experiences with Him. God knew the Israelites would be tempted to go back to Egypt if they were faced with battling the Philistines so soon after leaving Egypt. So, He led them in a direction that would fit their present state of readiness. Adrian Rogers said, "God knew they weren't ready for some of the things He had in store for them."

Secondly, never underestimate an experience with God. Sometimes, God has to take you to the wilderness before He can take you to the Promised Land. Maybe you're in a season right now where you feel like you're wandering in a desert, unsure of which way is up and which is down. Life can be challenging and disorienting! When you're in seasons like this, you need to remember that sometimes you have to go through something difficult to experience the presence of God. Always remember, sometimes God is doing things you don't understand, but He's got you on a journey; you're in a season of change and becoming more like Him; that is further preparation for your life.

5. Reflect on the symbolism of the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night as God's guidance for the Israelites. How does this relate to our reliance on the Holy Spirit today?

As Israel leaves Egypt and enters the wilderness, God didn't leave them alone but provided a specific way to be guided: a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were to follow the cloud and the pillar of fire – when it stopped, they stopped; when it moved, they moved. This is an excellent way to live your life, "Lord, unless You're moving, I don't want to move." As followers of Christ, God has given us the Holy Spirit to lead us today. When walking in the Spirit, you'll be positioned to sense God's leading, where He's leading you to stop and stay, and when He's leading you to move forward.

6. Reflect on your own "Joseph journey" or "wilderness journey." How have these experiences shaped your faith and understanding of God?
7. In what ways can surrendering our will to God's will and embracing His plan lead to transformation and spiritual fulfillment?
8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on this week?