

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 14:1-4

To understand more about how God's direction sometimes looks aimless to the world.

Read the Text:

Then the LORD said to Moses, 2 "Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. 3 For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' 4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." And they did so. (Exodus 14:1-4, ESV)

Study the Text:

Camping

After leaving Succoth, the Lord brought the people to the edge of the wilderness through an alternate route away from the Philistine armies. Beginning in chapter 14, the LORD told Moses to "turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon" (Ex. 14:1). It is here that God once again hardens Pharaoh's heart to pursue the Israelites since he believed they had been trapped by the wilderness into which they were going. Below is a breakdown of some key themes and concepts.

THE SETUP

In verse 2, God tells the people of Israel not to continue toward the wilderness but to double back and encamp near the sea, facing the Egyptian territories. Given that there are essentially four waypoints (Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, the sea, and Baal-zephon) described in the passage, there is no lack of clarity where the Israelites were, geographically speaking. "Pi-hahiroth" should probably be understood to mean something like "the mouth of Hirôt," which was likely a river or a canal. There are a number of Egyptian fortified towns referred to as "Migdol" in various Egyptian sources. The sea, of course, is Red Sea. "Baal-zephon" is generally thought to be located in the vicinity of Lake Sirbonis. Moses was commanded to turn and face Egypt and camp there.

EQUIPPED

Recall in Session 31 that though the Israelites were led away from the Philistine armies, they still came out of Egypt "equipped for battle" (Ex. 13:18). The road (as we will discover) to Canaan is long and arduous and full of enemies on all sides. The people were prepared for the inevitable attacks they would face along the way, beginning with one last attempt from Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh would see the people camping and will think they are trapped by the wilderness. God will once again "harden" Pharaoh's heart in order that he will have the courage to do what he has wanted to do from the beginning: pursue and destroy the Israelites. Now seething from the humiliation of the plagues and heartbreak of the tenth plague, Pharaoh will become resolute in his hatred for the Israelite people.

Forecasting

Verses 1 through 4 set the stage for a monumental moment in the book of Exodus, and one that God has been alluding to throughout much of the story so far. Below is a breakdown of what both Pharaoh and Israel will learn about the LORD in the coming events.

WHAT PHARAOH WILL LEARN

Prior to the seventh plague, recall what God said to Pharaoh: “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go” (Ex. 9:16-17). Here God will solidify that there is no God but the LORD. Even now, after enduring the pain of the plagues, Pharaoh believes he still has power to bring the Israelites back into submission, and he will see them camping on the outskirts of the wilderness by the sea as evidence that they are struggling and are thus weak and compromised. This will, however, result in the ultimate destruction of his armies and a final blow to his pride. Though Pharaoh himself will survive, God will have shown Himself to the nations as a conqueror of Egypt.

WHAT THE ISRAELITES WILL LEARN

Prior to the eighth plague of locusts, the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that **you** may know that I am the Lord” (Ex. 10:1-2). Once again, the LORD is going to demonstrate His faithfulness to His people just as He said He would in Exodus 10. Pharaoh will soon begin to pursue them, and they will learn once more of the LORD’s power to save.

Not All Who Wander Are Lost

In July of 1954, the first book of a trilogy was published titled *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Written by J. R. R. Tolkien, the book became an instant classic and has spawned films and TV shows since. Woven throughout the book are sets of poems and songs, a unique feature to the book that isn’t always captured on screen. In one such poem, titled “The Riddle of Strider,” Tolkien penned a line that captures well the Israelites in Exodus 14:1-4: “Not all those who wander are lost.”¹ While Pharaoh believed the Israelites were wandering around, lost in the wilderness, they were being Divinely guided for a purpose. Sometimes, the guidance of the Spirit looks aimless to the world, but no act of God is aimless in the end.

What About Now?

One major takeaway is the way in which God leads His people without giving full detail of the plan. God has given the Israelites what seems like a very confusing path. But Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The Israelites have made it to the edge of the wilderness where they thought they were to go serve the Lord, and then are told to turn back to be pinned against sea. They were dressed for battle but were not facing any army. They were given gold and then driven out by the Egyptians who are now going to pursue them. God’s plan is not for us to

¹ The full poem reads: “All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost; the old that is strong does not wither, deep roots are not reached by the frost. From the ashes a fire shall be woken, a light from the shadows shall spring; renewed shall be blade that was broken, the crownless again shall be king.”

understand His purposes, but that we may know that He is the Lord. He wants them to walk by faith and not by sight. He wants the same from you.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 14:1-2. What did the LORD say to tell Moses?

2. Read Exodus 14:1-2. According to the notes, what does “Pi-hahiroth” mean? Where is “Migdol?” What about Baal-zephon?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 14:1-2. Which direction were the Israelites to face when they made camp? Why was this probably significant?

2. Read Genesis 14:3. What would Pharaoh say when he saw them making camp?

Day Three

1. Read 1 Kings 8:39. What does this verse tell you about what God knows of Pharaoh’s heart?

2. Read Exodus 14:4. What did God say He would once again do to Pharaoh? What will the results be of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart?

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 9:4 and Luke 9:47. What does Jesus know about the hearts and thoughts of men?

2. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. What does this passage indicate about the ways in which God carries out His plans in the lives of His people?

Discuss the Text!**Week 32 Discussion: Wandering or Following?**

This small part of the story shows a pattern that we will see through the remainder of Exodus. God directs Moses and the people of Israel to listen to Him and follow His instructions. Sometimes they do, as is the case in this instance (“and they did so”) and sometimes they do not, or they do while grumbling. However they respond, God is constantly telling them about the best path for His purpose and sometimes it does not make sense to them in the moment, but if they listen to His voice and follow His lead then He will protect them. They may be equipped for battle, but the battle is the Lords. Talk as a group about how sometimes following the LORD means not knowing the path that lies ahead.

1. Icebreaker: Does God still lead His people today?
2. Is it hard to do the “next right thing” when you don’t know where it will take you?
3. Do you like “having a plan?” Does it make you uncomfortable when plans change in the moment?
4. Do you ever feel like there is no plan for your life? Why or why not?
5. Has there been a time in your life where you felt you were following God, but it looked to the world like wandering?
6. Does the church do things that look backward to the world?

Takeaways:

1. The LORD led His people to stop and camp facing Egypt.
2. Pharaoh saw the Israelites camping and interpreted it to mean that they were stuck in the wilderness.
3. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart to pursue the Israelites.