

(#1)“Mysterious Ways” Exodus 33:12-17 11/16/03

Through out our Old Testament challenge we have seen that the ways and workings of God are often times confusing to us. We are struck again and again by the mystery of His ways. Our text this morning is another illustration of that same truth shared in that powerful video story.

The trip that the people of Israel were to make was quiet a simple one. They were in Egypt and were going to Canaan. If you take a look at the screen, you will see the simplest route, called the (#2)**Way of the Sea**. God says, “I’ve come to bring them out of Egypt into a good and spacious land flowing with milk and honey.”

As you look at the map, it looks like a really simple trip from Egypt to the Promised Land. The only bad thing is they have to go through the Sinai Peninsula, which was not pleasant. But it is not a long trip, only about 200 miles from Goshen in the land of Egypt to where the Israelites are heading in Canaan, and they all know the shortest route to get there.

Everybody knows the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. There was pretty much a strait road between these two locations in those days. It was an international trade route called the Way of the Philistines. It was a real road. In Isaiah 9:1 it’s called the Way of the Sea. It was kind of a scenic route because it went right along the Mediterranean Sea. You can see it on the map. The people of Israel knew that this would be the natural and quickest way to go. It would be a short trip-a matter of weeks-not months, but weeks.

But surprisingly, in (#3) Exodus 13:17-18 we are told that God decided on a different route.

When Pharaoh let the people go God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

The desert road was very strategic and heavily fortified. The Egyptians had a large military presence there. God knew the hearts of His people. He knew they were timid and easily frightened. He knew that they did not have much faith. He knew that if they ran into too much opposition they would want to turn back to Egypt. So he did not send them the Way of the Sea.

There was another route that cut pretty much through the center of Sinai. It ran west and east. It would have been a little more out of the way but much safer. However, God did not send them that way.

There was a third road that went almost directly south, called the (#4) **Way of the Wilderness**. This was the road God led them down after they crossed the Red Sea. If you look at the map, you will see that this road went all the way down to Mt. Sinai.

Nobody knows exactly where Mt. Sinai was located, but the general consensus amongst scholars is that it was located somewhere in the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula as pictured on the map. Once there, they remained about 1 year. In other words the first leg of their journey, which was a two-week trip, took them a full year.

Finally it was time to break camp and they left following the pillar of cloud and fire.

They took the road called the (#5) **Mount Seir Road, or the Road to Kadesh Barnea**. It went from the tip of Sinai Peninsula to Canaan. We know how long this journey took because Deut 1:2 says "It takes eleven days to go from Horeb (another name for Mt.

Sinai) to Kadesh Barnea by the Mt Seir Road. This time an eleven-day trip took thirty-nine years.

There is a tremendous spiritual lesson here for all of us. Part of the mystery of God's ways is that (#6) **He is never in a hurry.** God's concern is not ours. We always want to know how fast. How fast does the car go? How fast does it dry wet towels? How fast can it cook a roast? How fast can you get the report done? From God's perspective the main concern was not where they were going but rather who they were becoming. A land flowing with milk and honey was nice, but what about their hearts. Would love, justice, courage and faith characterize their hearts? God's first concern was not how fast his people got to the Promised Land. His deepest concern was that they would be the right kind of people once they arrived. And if it would take forty years for that transformation to occur, then so be it.

So here is the principle (#7) **God would rather have us take longer to get somewhere and be sure that we arrive the right people.**

When we set out on a journey one of the first questions a child asks is, "how long will it take?" and no matter how specific of an answer we give it in no way diminishes the frequency of the repetitive follow-up questions. "Are we there yet?" A parent waits a long time for the day to come when that question is no longer asked, but it never comes. As adults we make a subtle shift, but the real question is the same. "Get me this job and do it now" "Get me into the house, I need to be there soon." "Bring that special someone into my life in the next two months." "Get me out of this difficult situation right now because I can't hold out any longer." And yet God's concern still remains the same. Who

are we becoming is always more important than how fast we arrive at our desired location. “Lord, make me patient, now!”

The mysterious ways of God means being outside of time and space gives him a very different perspective. He created time and invites us to trust Him to lead us in His timing. Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 32. While Moses is up on the Mountain receiving from God the Ten Commandments the people have grown tired of waiting and implore Aaron to provide new leadership. Out of contributed gold a golden idol is made, Moses comes down and confronts the people and smashes the commandment tablets on the ground. Chapter 33 begins with God reaffirming that Israel shall take the Promised Land but look at verse 33:3. God will not go with them. Turn forward to Exodus 33:12-17. Moses realized that the bottom line was the assurance of God’s presence. It doesn’t matter when we get there. What matters is will you be with us through the whole journey and will you stay with us once we arrive? (#8) **“Then Moses said to him, ‘If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us from here.’”**

How about you this morning? Where is God calling you to step back and trust His timing? Application: (#9) Are you in a wilderness right now? What have you learned that is changing who you are becoming? Will you place your confidence in the God of mysterious ways? Will you say the time length is no longer the main focus; the assurance of your presence is all I need. Will you keep trusting?