

Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea!  
Exodus 14:10-15, 31

Have you ever been caught between the devil and the deep blue sea? In other words, have you ever felt trapped between an impenetrable obstacle before you and an implacable enemy behind you, with nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and no apparent way of escape? If so, then you know how the ancient Israelites felt after they escaped slavery in Egypt only to be hemmed in with the Red Sea before them and the armies of Egypt behind them, seeking either to kill them or to capture them and return them to Egypt.

You see, the ancient Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for a very long time. Suffering in their sad slavery, they called out to God and God heard their cries and sent Moses to lead them to freedom. But when Moses confronted Pharaoh and demanded Israel's release, Pharaoh refused. So God sent ten plagues to punish Pharaoh for his stubbornness and to force Pharaoh to free Israel. After the tenth plague, which slew the firstborn of every living thing in Egypt except those Israelites whose homes were marked by the blood of an innocent lamb, Pharaoh finally freed Israel. Pharaoh said to Moses, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone." (Ex 12:31-32)

And so the Israelites left Egypt, heading toward the Promised Land. But after their departure, Pharaoh changed his mind and said to his officials, "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?" So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them." (Ex. 14:5-7) And so it happened that the Egyptian army overtook the Israelites by the Red Sea. So there Israel was, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea! This morning I want to look at three things from the story of Israel caught between the devil and the deep blue sea: first, how they got there; second, why they got there; and third, what they did there.

So how did Israel get there? How did they get caught between the devil and the deep blue sea? Did they get trapped there because of their own poor choices? You know how it is. Through sinful or silly choices we can sometimes put ourselves in a bad place. But that's not how Israel got caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. In this instance, they didn't do anything wrong.

If they didn't get there through their own poor choices, did they get trapped there through the poor choices of others? That sometimes happens. Through no fault of our own, people around us make poor choices that impact us, trapping us between the devil and the deep blue sea. Is that what happened here? Did Moses make some grave mistake as he lead Israel out of Egypt? No, there's no indication that Moses made some grave mistake though the Israelites accused him of doing so. In Exodus 14:11-12

they said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt...it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” No, the Israelites weren’t trapped through any error on Moses’ part.

If they weren’t trapped because of their own poor choices or the poor choices of Moses then perhaps they were trapped by Pharaoh’s decision to pursue them. There is an element of truth in this. Pharaoh was responsible for all the bad choices he made prior to this bad choice, and those bad choices made it hard for him to make a good choice at this point in time. However, the Israelites weren’t trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea solely because Pharaoh chose to pursue them. Rather in Exodus 14:4, God said, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them.” Interesting! God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and because God hardened his heart, Pharaoh pursued Israel. You see, God was involved in Pharaoh’s choice. And this fact points toward an answer to our question about how Israel got caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

You see, Israel got caught between the devil and the deep blue sea because God put them there. Exodus 13:18 says, “God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.” Exodus 13:21-22 refers to the angel of God who went before the Israelite army leading them along the way. And in Exodus 14:1, God said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp...by the sea.” Clearly, God was involved. Friend, if you find yourself in a difficult place, then maybe you’re there because God put you there for a specific purpose. What is that purpose? That brings us to our second point.

We’ve seen how Israel got there – trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea – now let’s see why they were put there. The question arises: Why did God put Israel in such a difficult and dangerous place? Why did he put them between the devil and the deep blue sea? God put them there because he wanted to defeat the devil, glorify himself, and increase their faith!

You see, God wanted to defeat the devil and glorify himself. In other words, he wanted to judge a wicked Pharaoh who had enslaved and slaughtered the people of God, and he wanted the Egyptians to know that he, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was the one true God over all. And so in Exodus 14:3-4, after telling Moses to camp by the sea, God said, “Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has close in on them.’ I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.”

In addition to defeating the devil and glorifying himself, God wanted to increase Israel’s faith by demonstrating his power on their behalf. So God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could pass through and then closed those same waters on the Egyptian army.

Exodus 14:28 says, “The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.” And what was the effect of this on Israel? Exodus 14:31 says, “Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.” They feared the Lord and their faith increased!

Friends, if God puts you between the devil and the deep blue sea it’s because he wants to defeat the devil, glorify himself, and increase your faith. All three of these things happened for the Israelites as they passed through the Red Sea. One or more of these things will happen for you if you cooperate with God whenever he puts you in a hard place. Either he’ll defeat the devil by working some miracle of deliverance on your behalf; or he’ll glorify himself in the eyes of others as they observe your faithfulness under pressure; or he’ll increase your faith as you lean on him in a time of trial or trouble.

This brings us to our final point. We’ve seen how the Israelites got stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea; they were put there by God. We’ve seen why the Israelites got stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea; God wanted to defeat the devil, glorify himself, and increase their faith. Now let’s examine what the Israelites did when they were stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The first thing they did was cry out to God. Exodus 14:10 says, “As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord.” Friend, when you’re caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, the first thing you should do is cry out in prayer. Pray to God! Prayer puts you in touch with the resources of heaven. It is the conduit that connects you with the infinite power of God. And so in Jeremiah 33:3, God says, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” (KJV) Pray!

The second thing you should do is avoid grumbling complaints. You see, it’s easy to complain when you find yourself in a difficult situation. That’s what the Israelites did. In Exodus 14:11-12, “They said to Moses, ‘Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’”

Friend, if prayer puts you in touch with the power of God, then grumbling will often impede its flow. God put up with Israel’s grumbling in this particular instance but grew tired of it over time and even judged them for it on numerous occasions. For example, Numbers 11:1 says, “...when the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about

their misfortunes, the Lord heard it and his anger was kindled. Then the fire of the Lord burned against them...”

Friend, you don't want the fire of the Lord to burn against you. You want the fire of the Lord to burn against your enemies and your obstacles. So you should avoid grumbling complaints. Instead, you should follow Paul's advice in Philippians 2:14 where he says “Do all things without murmuring and arguing so you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation...”

The third thing you should do whenever you're stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea is get good and godly counsel. In Exodus 14:11-12, the Israelites complained to Moses. In Exodus 14:13-14, Moses gave them some godly counsel. “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.’” In essence, Moses told them not to take counsel of their fears but to stand firm in their faith, trusting God for deliverance. It was good and godly counsel.

Whenever you find yourself in a difficult place then you should seek good and godly counsel from spiritual advisors. Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no guidance, a nation falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.” Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed.” And Proverbs 24:6 says, “...by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.”

The fourth thing you should do when stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea is move forward by faith. In other words, don't stand around complaining. Instead, do something, based on prayer and godly counsel, to face down your foes and to burrow through your obstacles. You see, it's easy to be paralyzed with fear as the Israelites were whenever there's an impenetrable obstacle in front of you and an implacable enemy behind you. But you have to shake off the paralysis and move forward by faith, doing something to face down your foes or overcome your obstacles.

So God said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.” (Ex. 14:15-16) And that's just what Moses did. He stretched out his hand over the sea, God parted the waters, and the Israelites moved forward by faith to freedom!

So whenever you find yourself trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea, don't stand around complaining. Instead, say your prayers, get godly counsel, move forward by faith, and you'll soon have reason to praise God for his divine intervention.

After Egypt was defeated and Israel was free, Moses and the Israelites sang a song of praise saying, “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he

has thrown into the sea.” (Ex. 15:1) This song went on for 18 more verses. And when the men stopped singing, Miriam, Moses’ sister, picked up the tambourine and led all the women in another verse: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

So let me close by summarizing some practical lessons from this priceless passage. First, if you ever find yourself stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea, remember, God may have put you there on purpose. Why? To defeat the devil; to glorify himself; and to increase your faith! If you avoid grumbling complaints, if you cry out to God in prayer, if you seek godly counsel and move forward by faith, God will intervene in some way and you will have reason to give him thanks and praise.

So brothers and sisters I say to you what Moses said so long ago to the people of ancient Israel: “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today!” Amen.