

**Exodus: Towards Lecture Moses on Theology, Exodus 14:12b**

The three major English translations each treat this sentence in much the same way. For example, the New American Standard:

**Exodus 14:12b** - ... better for us to serve the Egyptians then to die in the wilderness.

The word “better” translates the Hebrew qal infinitive, *tôb*. It is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *agathos* and means “good of intrinsic value.”

In both cases, the words describe God’s will, plan, and purpose for the believer as opposed to sin, human good, and evil.

Here is a definition of *tôb* as it is used in Exodus 14:12:

**Botterweck, G. Johannes and Helmer Ringgren (eds.) Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Vol. 5. Translated by David E. Green. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986; pp. 307-15 passim:**

In the midst of the perils of the wilderness, it appears better to the Israelites to return to Egypt than to go forward, because there they had enough to eat. The emphasis is on securing the necessary or accustomed conditions of life, either in strictly economic terms or with political overtones having to do with peace and prosperity.

In its ethical and theological use, *tôb* points to something that appears beneficial to someone for the purposes of his own life.

Conduct in accordance with the law of Yahweh’s covenant can be termed *derek hattôbâ*, “the right way of life.”

The direct opposite of *derek hattôbâ* is *derek lo’ tôb*. This “not good” way is further characterized as being “wicked.” *Derek hattôbâ* includes the element of secular prosperity, or “living securely.”

NOTE: *Derek* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *trochia* which in both cases is best translated “wheel-track.” Thus, *derek hattôbâ* can be translated “wheel-tracks of righteousness,” and *derek lo’ tôb* as “wheel-tracks of wickedness.”

As “the good” par excellence, *tôb* has two senses in religious contexts. As an abstraction, *tôb*, that which is good in itself, refers to Yahweh; it is personified and identified with him.

Human beings experience God’s goodness in the form of good things ... the reference is to material goods that make for a happy life.

In essence, the panic-struck Jews have decided in their emotional revolt to give Moses their theological analysis of the situation. They claim that the plan of God for their lives—the good—is found in Egypt as slaves.

*“Life is hell but we have a steady diet. The taskmasters may flog us with regularity but they are not apt to kill off their labor force. If we surrender and go back peacefully maybe they’ll start giving us straw again. It’s all God’s will, plan, and purpose for our lives.”*

This so-called doctrinal conclusion has no foundation in promises, doctrinal rationales, or in logic.

God has clearly stated that He will take His people into the promised land:

**Exodus 3:8** - I have come down to deliver My people from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.

He has clearly stated that He does not approve of their status as slaves nor their treatment by the Egyptians:

**Exodus 3:9** - Behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.

It was God's plan to free His people from this yoke by sending Moses and Aaron as His emissaries to Pharaoh.

**Exodus 3:10** - Therefore ... I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.

God's persistence and perseverance to achieve this objective was made clear in His repeated working of miracles in the face of Egyptian demonism. Exodus 7–11.

And we have just reviewed how He led them out of Ramses to Etham; how the Lord Himself led them from Etham to the Bitter Lakes; and how He is visibly in their presence at the shore of Little Bitter Lake. His intent is to slaughter Pharaoh's army in the waters of that lake.

In the face of all this knowledge confirming that it is God's desire that they keep moving, these Jews have the temerity to lecture Moses on the theology of the plan of God.

Again, we see the sad conclusions reached by the three arrogant skills. Self-righteous arrogance plus self-centered fear equals human viewpoint theology. Self-absorbed people distort doctrine to their expedient advantage. Self-deception concludes that the plan of God is a return to Egyptian slavery. Resultant denial of the true plan of God causes them to opt for a resumption of oppression in exchange for a steady diet.

Cowardice fears dying so much that it will inevitably choose life, even though miserable, rather than face death in the pursuit of freedom. Fear of dying causes life itself to be extremely complex. Confidence and courage take the fear out of dying and make life worth living.

In the complexity of fear, every pressure increases the fear and causes the person to live a life in either self-centeredness or self-pity. Both were in evidence in the souls of these Jews. Self-deception caused them to deny any responsibility for their mental condition. As they project blame upon Moses, the venom in their souls is expressed by strait-face lying, bad-mouth talking, and mean backbiting.

**Exodus 14:12** - Is this not the word which we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Why don't you just leave us alone that we might be slaves to the Egyptians?' Because to us the plan of God is serving the Egyptians rather than dying in this desert.