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FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

5. GUIDANCE

Reading: Exodus 13:17-22

In eighteenth-century Wales, a young man named William Williams graduated from the University as a Doctor, but quickly changed professions to become a physician of the soul, a minister of the gospel. Being warned against “*fanatical dissenters*,” such as Wesley and Whitefield, Williams, decided to become one himself, becoming a Calvinistic Methodist. During his forty three years of itinerant ministry, Williams travelled over 95,00 miles, and his impassioned preaching drew crowds of 10,000 or more. Once he spoke to an estimated crowd of 80,000 noting in his journal, “*God strengthened me to speak so loud that most could Hear.*” William Williams is best remembered, however, for his hymns, becoming in Wales what Isaac Watts was in England. In all, he composed over eight hundred hymns, his being a personal prayer. Williams had lived as a pilgrim, pressing on through the snow of winter, the rains of springtime and the heat of summer. He was beaten by mobs once within an inch of his life, he was cheered by crowds, but in all his travels he sought only to do the will of God. His constant prayer was the hymn that he composed,

*“ Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land
I am weak, but Thou art mighty
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.”*

Guidance ! A subject on which so much has been written, and on which so little has been done. George Truett said, “*To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge, to do the will of God is the greatest achievement.*” A.T. Pierson said, “*To go as I am, to go when I am led, to go where I am led it is that which has been for twenty years the one prayer of my life.*” You see, as sinners we need a Saviour, as captives we need a Deliverer, and as pilgrims we need a Guide. And the God of grace who from heaven beheld us in our lost estate, and gave His Son to be our Saviour and Deliverer, has also given us His Holy Spirit and His Word to guide us. Now we may not always understand the way God chooses, or even agree with it, but His way is always the right way. We may confidently say, “*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.*” (Ps 23:3)

Now had there been any military strategists in Israel that night, they probably would have disagreed with the evacuation route God selected because it was too long.

The Lord seemed to be taking them on a round about way to the Promised Land. Do you ever feel like that ? That God is taking you on a detour ? Do you know frustrates me terribly ? Detours !

Do you know what its like driving up the M1 to Belfast and suddenly you see a sign “ *Traffic Diversion.* ” And you're behind time, and you push the panic button, as they divert you onto the Hill Hall Road and you see the cars stretched a long way in front of you. That's the time you want someone to appear to guide through all the back roads, and bring you out on the east side of the city. *Now do you ever feel that you are on a spiritual detour ? Do you ever feel that you are just going around in circles ? That you're making no progress ? That you seem to be going nowhere in a hurry. I wonder is that how the Children of Israel felt as God led them from Egypt to the Promised Land ?*

Did they think to themselves, “ *What is God doing here ? This is not the nearest way ! This is not the easiest way ! This is not the best way.* ” Is that how you feel this ? Do you feel that you are out in the wilderness and all you're doing is going around in circles ? (Job 36:22,10) Well, sometimes God uses this method to educate us spiritually. Now the simple geographical fact referred to in (Exodus Ch 13) is that when God led Israel out of Egypt He did not lead them directly to the Land of Promise, but led them indirectly. The result, was, of course that the journey took not a few days, as would have been the case had they travelled through the way of the land of the Philistines, but the journey took a long time. Now in order to open up this passage to you, there are three phrase's here that I want to draw your attention to.

(1) “ GOD LED,” THIS IS GODS GUIDANCE

You see, Israel’s exodus from Egypt wasn’t the end of their experience with God, it was the new beginning.

“ *It took one night to take Israel out of Egypt, but forty years to take Egypt out of Israel,* ” said George Morrison. If Israel obeyed His will the Lord would bring them into the Promised Land and gave them their inheritance. Forty years later, Moses would remind the new generation “ *He, the Lord brought thee Out of Egypt to bring thee in to give thee the land for an inheritance.* ” (Deut 4:378-38) My the same thing can be said of the redemption we have in Christ, God brought us out of bondage that He might bring us into blessing. A.W. Tozer used to say that “ *we are saved to as well as saved from.* ” You see, the person who trusts Christ is born again into the family of God, but that’s just the beginning of a new adventure that should lead to growth and conquest.

The Lord liberates us, and then leads us through the varied experiences of life, a day at a time, so that we might get to know Him better. Now notice this first phrase in our passage. Look at (13:18) In (13:17) its put another way. The fact of God's guidance expressed in these verses is later expanded in (13:21-22) You see God's guides His people. (Ps 25:9 32:8) Dr. W. E. Sangster was so sure of this fact that he entitled his book on the subject of guidance, **God does Guide us !** Indeed if you look at this passage you'll notice that:

(a) **GODS GUIDANCE IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE:**

“ *God led them not through,* ” (13:17) “ *God led the people about,* ” (13:18) God chose the way

for His people through the wilderness. Ill: George Muller once said, " *I never remember in all my Christian course that I ever sincerely and patiently sought to know the will of God by the teaching of the Holy Ghost through the instrumentality of the Word of God but I have always been directed.*" Are you wondering about the future ? Are you uncertain as to the course that you should take ? My be assured that God's guidance is always possible. Always possible to those who are,

(1) REDEEMED BY HIM:

For lets remember that the Children of Israel had just been redeemed from the bitter bondage of Egypt. They had known the protecting blood and the mighty hand of Jehovah. (12:13 13:9) Moses put it this way, " *Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed.*" (15:13) You see, God is pledged to guide only those who are His people through faith in His Son, the Lamb of God. My are you one of His people ? Have you been redeemed by His precious blood ?

(2) RULED BY HIM:

God led His people, his people followed. How do we know ? Well, when the Cloud lifted they journeyed, when the cloud tarried they stayed. (Exod 40:36-38) In other words God was acknowledged not only as their Redeemer but as their Ruler ! Do you want to know God's guidance in your life ? Then there must be a spirit of willingness to be led. The Lord Jesus stated this principle when He said, " *If any man do His will he shall know*" (Jn 7:17) Are you prepared to pray with Horatius Bonar,

*" I dare not choose my lot,
I would not if I might:
Choose Thou for me, my God:
So shall I walk aright."*

(3) RESTING IN HIM:

Was this not the problem with the children of Israel, time and again as they made their way to the Promised Land ?

They were restless ! Guilty of idolatry, of fornication, of murmuring, of limiting God. (1 Cor 10:6) The Lord loves to have us not only to submit to His authority but to submit restfully, knowing that His will is best. Paul speaks of the will of God as being " *good, and acceptable, and perfect.*" (Rom 12:2) The hymn-writer put it like this,

*" Whatever my God ordains is right
He never will deceive me
He leads me by the proper path
I know He will not leave me*

*I take content
What He hath sent
His hand can turn my grief's away
And patiently I wait His day."*

(b) GODS GUIDANCE IS WONDERFULLY PROGRESSIVE:

“ *And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud*” (13:21 Num 9:17-18) From Rameses (12:37) they went to Succoth, from Succoth to Etham and so on. (13:20) In other words the Lord was leading them a step at a time. (Num 33:1) Is this not exactly how God deals with us ? Sure, God has a definite plan for each of our lives (Eph 2:10) but He usually does not reveal to us more than the next step in it ! Do you recall that this is how He led Philip ? Imagine being told to leave a great gospel campaign where souls were being saved and demons were being exorcised.

(Acts 8:12 17) And a city turned upside down and inside out for Christ. But the Lord came and said to Philip, “ *Arise, and go toward the south*” (8:26)

He received no further details. He had, as, it were, to go with sealed orders. Do you know what Philip did ?

“ *And he arose and went.*” Then he received the next command. “ *Go near and join thyself to this chariot.*”

(8:29) The result ? The Ethiopian eunuch was gloriously saved. You see (b) God does not set down before us the whole blueprint, but rather He reveals to us one step at a time. Why ? That we might continually trust in Him. The psalmist says, “ *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.*” (Ps 37:23) “ *And as thou goest step by step the way shall open before thee.*”

(Prov 4:12) So God's guidance is (a) (b) but,

(c) GODS GUIDANCE IS SOMETIMES PERPLEXING:

Here were Israel on the borders of Egypt. Canaan was their destination, God was their guide but how perplexed they must have been when they discovered the way God was leading them ! It certainly was not,

1. THE NEAREST WAY:

Look if you will at (13:17) As the crow flies, the route to Canaan from Egypt was through the land of the Philistines. This way would have been along the north side of the wilderness along the coast of the Mediterranean, through the land of the Philistines entering Canaan on the south west. This would have been the most direct route but it was not God's way. God knew that if the Israelites stayed near the sea, they would face fierce resistance. Northern Sinai was a militarised zone in those days. The Egyptian army maintained a strong military presence in the region. There were also the Philistines to consider. And what about the Canaanites ? Now had they headed

straight for Canaan, they would have arrived there in less than two weeks, rather than the forty years it eventually took them. (1)

2. THE OBVIOUS WAY:

“ *God led the people about.* ” (13:18) He took them south away from Canaan, into the wilderness.

It was not the most obvious way, it was not the most direct way, but it was the best way because it was God’s way. God knew what His people could handle, and He knew that they needed to take the long way home. They were not ready to wage war. In fact, they would have turned and run back to Pharaoh at the first sign of danger. (Num 14:4) You see, the Lord knew what He was doing, as He always does. Are you perplexed this as to the way God is leading you ? Listen, His thoughts are not our thoughts, His ways are not our ways. And sometimes His leading is to us the source of surprise and perplexity. My because of our finite intellect, our faulty insight, and our foolish interpretation of His guidance we are often baffled and beaten as to the reason for His strange leading. Its at such times we must remember that God is still leading us and we must trust Him, for His way is perfect. Whatever God happens to be doing right now, do you believe that it is all for the best ? Can you say,

***“ My Fathers may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I'm glad to know
God maketh no mistake.”***

“ *God led,* ” (13:18) But there's a second phrase I want you to notice in (13:17)

(2) “ GOD SAID,” THIS IS GODS GOAL

Look at (13:17) Why did God lead His people in this roundabout way ? What did God have in mind for His people ? What goal or objective was to be achieved by this strange leading ? Well in (13:17) we notice:

(a) GODS GOAL STATED NEGATIVELY:

“ *For God said,* ” (13:17) In other words God was saying, “ *If they face war prematurely they might change their minds and return to Egypt.* ” You see God's strange but sure guidance was dictated partly because of the frailty and feebleness of His people. My do you not see here a beautiful instance of the knowledge and greatness of God ? “ *He knoweth our frame He remembereth that we are dust.* ” (Ps 103:14)

When Paul speaks of Gods dealings with Israel he uses this expression, “ *And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness.* ”

(Acts 13:18) Now here is another rendering, “ *God bore and fed them as a nurse beareth and feedeth her child.* ”

My God knew the greatness of Israel's foe and the weakness of Israel's faith and God dealt gently with them and would not " *suffer them to be tempted above that they were able.*" (1 Cor 10:13) That's why He adapted the journey to their strength. Do you know something ? " *A way of escape,*" is often a detour.

Sometimes God conducts us on a " *roundabout way,*" that we might escape hills that are too steep, currents that are too strong, ordeals that are too bitter. My the meandering path we wearily tread sometimes irritates us, yet if we saw truly, we would glorify the wisdom and grace which finds for us at every step the line of least resistance !

*" Then murmur not at the winding way,
It is our Father's will
To lead us home by the zigzag path,
To bring the force of the hill."*

Do you feel that you are presently travelling on a detour ? Do you feel that God is leading you in a roundabout way ? Fret not, fear not, fail not for there is a purpose in " *the serpentine path, the confused movements, the unaccountable delays.*" (a) But what was,

(b) GODS GOAL STATED POSITIVELY:

You see while on the one hand God did not want a defeated, discouraged and dispirited people, on the other hand He wanted a dependant, developed, and disciplined people. My is this now why He led them the way He did ? (13:18) God wanted them to become,

(1) DEPENDANT:

Our text states that God led His people " *through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea,*" that speaks of barrenness, drought and heat. And God leads us through the wilderness that we may learn that this wilderness world has nothing to offer to us, and that we may look to the Lord for the provision of our every need. As we shall see God's became dependant on the Lord for food, water and victory over their enemies.

(2) DEVELOPED:

As their faith faced a variety of circumstances. Is this not why the Lord often leads us in a roundabout way ? That through the experiences and circumstances we meet on that way our faith might be tested and developed. (James 1:2-4)

(3) DISCIPLINED:

To be able to respond to any emergency not in a spirit of fear, but in a spirit of discipline and self-control. Yet time and again they gave way to their appetites and feelings. My God leads you

though the wilderness and the detours because He is preparing something wonderful thing for you, something better ! I heard about an evangelist whose wife died, leaving him with two little boys to rear. He hired a lady to stay with them while he was on his crusades. When he travelled, he would nearly always return with presents for the little boys. One time, however he forgot to buy their gifts.

“ *Daddy, Daddy,*” they shouted as they met him at the airport. Of course they asked about the presents.

He said, “ *Boys, what we're going to do is let get you anything you want.*” So they stopped at a large store. First they went by the sweet counter. They wanted sweets but their Daddy suggested they keep looking.

They came to two cowboy suits and they wanted to settle on those. Daddy asked them to look further. They moved into the sporting department and picked up basketballs and began to dribble, “ *Daddy, Daddy, we want these basketballs.*” They were excited. Finally, they went to the very back of the store, and against the wall were two beautiful bicycles. The boys left with far more than they bargained for. They started with sweets and ended up with expensive bikes that Daddy wanted to buy all the time. My do you realise that God is not leading you around in circles for no reason ? He takes you on detour because He is preparing something wonderful for you, something better ! (1) (2)

(3) “ GOD GAVE,” THIS IS GODS GIFT

The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night was God’s gift to His people for their guidance. You see, the redeemed were not left to their own devices, rather, “ *The Lord went before them*,” (13:21-22) Now this pillar was the visible sign of the Lord’s presence with His people, its upper portion rising up to heaven in the form of a column, its lower portion being spread out cloud-wise over the Tabernacle. Now when we think of

(a) THE POSITION IT OCCUPIED:

Its remarkable ! For this pillar is said to have occupied three different positions in relation to the camp. Sometimes it went before to guide them. At other times its stood behind to guard them. And then at times it hovered over the camp to govern them. This meant that all their movements throughout the entire journey were governed by the pillar of cloud and of fire.

Notice for e.g.,

1. It stood between Israel and her foes Protecting:

Look if you will at (14:19-20) You see, the Lord placed Himself between them and their foes, and under His protection it didn’t matter how numerous or how great were the forces arrayed against them. The closing verses of (Rom Ch 8) form the counterpart of this. There the challenge to earth and hell ring out in our ears, “ *If God be for us who can be against us ?*” (8:31) It is told of Antigonus that as he was about to engage in a navel battle with Ptolemy’s armada, one of

his men called attention to the fact that they were greatly outnumbered.

“ *Its true,*” replied the courageous Antigonus, “ *its true if you could their numbers but for how many do you value me ?*” My there may be times in which you seem to be hopelessly in the minority but remember that God and one are a majority. 1.

2. It was with Israel through the desert Guiding:

Think of it, two and a half million people in a waste howling wilderness, and with no guide book to direct them, or track to follow. But they were assured not only of absolute protection but also of infallible guidance.

(Num 9:17) So it is today. God is not only for us, He is also with us. “ *They shall His name Emmanuel which being interpreted is, God with us.*” (Matt 1:23) And, the word of Emmanuel Himself to His disciples, “ *Lo I am with you alway.*” (Matt 28:20) The Cloud, 1, 2,

3. It was in their midst Indwelling:

Look at (40:34) The coming of the Lord into the Tabernacle foreshadowed the hour when He took up His abode in the church collectively (Eph 2:22) and in the believer individually. Paul says, “ *What know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you ?*” (1 Cor 6:19) My how are we treating this holy guest ? Are we allowing Him to do in us what He wants to do, to be in us what He wants to be ? Now this three fold position of the Cloud illustrates for us the threefold chain of the N.T. God for us, God with us, and God in us ! But notice not only, (a) but

(b) THE PURPOSE IT SERVED:

For the Cloud was given primarily to guide Israel through their wilderness journey. (13:21) It meant that they were never left to their own devices. All that was required of them was a simple and candid obedience. My we too need an unerring guide for our path is no more certain than theirs. And God has given to us the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures and these are to be our pillar of cloud and fire until the journey is over. Of the Holy Spirit it is written, “ *He will guide you.*”

(Jn 16:13) How vividly this is illustrated for us in the New Testament. Do you recall that Philip was guided by the Holy Spirit when he was used to bring salvation to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:29) ? It was while the leaders of the fellowship at Antioch were fasting that the Holy Ghost said, “ *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*” (Acts 13:2) Sometimes the Holy Spirit *restrains* (16:6-7) other times the Holy Spirit *constrains* (16:10) My do we know what it is to be led by the Spirit of God ? (Rom 8:14) Are we learning to listen for His voice ? (1 kings 19:12) Are we sensitive to His promptings and leadings ? Of the Holy Scriptures it is written, “ *Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*”

(Ps 119:105) The Scriptures show me the steps I should take. Now where there is a clear statement in Scripture concerning the matter on which guidance is desired, no further guidance

need be sought. The Lord has already revealed His will and any seeming guidance which is contrary to Scripture is both spurious and false.

You don't need guidance about dating for God has already stated “ *Be ye not unequally yoked together.*”

(2 Cor 6:14) You don't guidance about believers baptism for God has said, “ *Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.*”

(Matt 28:19) Now have you grasp this ? Nothing forbidden in the Word of God can be the will of God.

The will of God is the Word of God, and the Word of God is the will of God. Therefore if we want to know God's guidance, the most important thing is to get to know God's Word. Do you know why so many of us are ignorant of God's will ? Its because we don't God's Word. I wonder could it be said of us as was said of the Bereans, “ *they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily.*” (Acts 17:11)

God's gift to Israel to guide them was the pillar of Cloud. My God's gift to us is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures. Are you sensitive to the Spirit of God ?

Are you subject to the Word of God ? ***If you are, you will know God's guidance !***