

# GOD LED THE PEOPLE ABOUT

## **TEXT: EXODUS 13:17-22**

### **Introduction:**

1. The children of Israel were getting ready to leave Egypt for Canaan, the Promised Land.
2. The fastest and easiest route from Egypt to Canaan would be to travel along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, but the Lord did not want the Israelites to take that route because it would have meant going through the territory of the hostile and warlike Philistines (Exodus 13:17).
3. Israel's experience in Egypt had not prepared them for war. Humanly speaking, the short and direct route would have meant their utter destruction.
4. We prefer the short route, the most direct route, but oftentimes the Lord leads us in an unexpected way. We prefer to go the fast way, and what appears to us to be the easy way.
5. But the Lord is omniscient and knows many things we do not know. For example, the Lord knew the Philistines were fierce warriors. And He knew the Israelites were inexperienced in battle.
6. But though the Lord sometimes does not lead us in the way we would prefer, the fact is He does lead us (Ex. 13:17, 18).
7. Three times in our text, we see the Lord leads His people.
  - “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines” (Ex. 13:17).
  - “But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea” (Ex. 13:18).
  - “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night” (Ex. 13:21).

## **I. SOMETIMES THE LORD LEADS US IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY**

1. The most direct route is not always the best route (Ex. 13:17, 18).
2. When we pray, we should always ask the Lord to direct us, and He will always direct us the best way.
3. Sometimes, God's ways do not seem to make sense to us, but we know that God will never lead us the wrong way.

4. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).
5. The Lord often leads us in ways that seem unusual (cf. Joshua 6:1-21).
6. The Lord is trying to teach us to trust Him more (Judges 7:1-17).
7. In Exodus 13:17 and 18, the reason is given for the longer route, but oftentimes in this life we never find out why God led us a certain way.
8. But we will surely find out when we get to heaven.
9. At the end of their 40-year journey, the LORD said to them, “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deut. 8:2).
10. The Israelites probably wondered, “It very well might be difficult traveling through Philistine territory, but it will be difficult no matter which way we go. So what difference does it make?”
11. There is a very big difference between the perfect will of God and the permissive will of God.
12. There are no “shortcuts” in the Christian life. Sometimes a man will say that God has called him to preach, but the man does not want to go to Bible college. The dean of my Bible college used to say, “A call to preach is a call to prepare.”
13. Sometimes God will lead a man directly into the ministry without going to Bible college or seminary, but that is rare.
14. One of the greatest preachers of all time was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who never attended college or seminary.
15. This is from a biography written by WY Fullerton, a close friend and fellow Baptist pastor:
16. The question of going to a theological college for further study occurred to him again and again. He was inclined toward such a course, but did not wish to take it at the expense of other people, and besides, he says (writing to his father), “I am now very well off, I think as well off as any one of my age, and I am sure quite as happy. Now shall I throw myself out, and trust to Providence as to whether I shall ever get another place as soon as I leave college?” At which, in view of the future that awaited him, we can afford to smile.

But at length he had some definite thought of entering Stepney

College, now Regent's Park College (*now a part of Oxford University – JB*), and when Dr. Angus, the principal, visited Cambridge on February 1, 1852, to preach at St. Andrew's Street Chapel, he expressed a desire to see the young preacher. It may be noted here that Joseph Angus for two years had been pastor of the church at New Park Street, London, to which Spurgeon was later to be called; that for some time afterward he was Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and in later years was on the committee which issued the revision of the Scriptures in 1881.

An appointment was made for Dr. Angus to meet Mr. Spurgeon in the house of Mr. Macmillan, the publisher. Punctually the young man called, and was shown into the drawing room, where he waited for two hours, feeling too much impressed, as he says, by his own insignificance and the greatness of the tutor from London to venture to ring the bell and make inquiries as to the unreasonably long delay. At length he ventured to ring, and was informed that Dr. Angus had waited a considerable time for him in another room, and had at length been compelled to go to London by train. The stupid girl who had put him in the drawing room had forgotten to tell anyone in the house of the young man's arrival, and so it came to pass that the two men, anxious to see each other, were in the same house at the same time and missed each other.

Of course, Spurgeon was much disappointed, but that afternoon, on his way to a village appointment, he was walking over Mid-summer Common to the little wooden bridge that used to be on the road to Chesterton, when, in the centre of the common, the word of the Lord came to him. A loud voice seemed distinctly to say, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." And then and there he renounced his thought of a collegiate course.

Dr. Angus made a mistake, to which as a college official he was, of course, liable, when he wrote two days later to Mr. Watts, "I should regret for your friend to settle without thorough preparation. He may be useful in either case, but his usefulness will be much greater, it will fill at all events a wider sphere, with preparation than without it." Which, of course, is all true, but the writer was quite oblivious of the fact that Spurgeon was already serving his apprenticeship and learning his business in practical ways.

17. Here we see how the Lord providentially led Spurgeon in an unusual way, and he used a silly young woman to do it.

18. There are many reasons why the Lord led Israel the way He did. For one thing, the longer route would make them appreciate the Promised Land. W. Graham Scroggie said, “Great blessings easily come by are generally little thought of. It is the man who does not earn his wealth who often squanders it. The things we value most are the things which have cost us most. We should never pray that we may be easily enriched, for it is not the gold which drops from the sky which we value, but that which we dig from the earth. The long road teaches us to appreciate what we find at the end of it.”
19. The Lord taught us to pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). That is what the Lord was doing for the children of Israel, and that is what He does for us.
20. During their long journey through the wilderness, God was preparing Israel. They had been slaves in Egypt, but now God was transforming them into a great nation.
21. “Travail must precede birth. Struggle must go before sovereignty. Training must be undergone in order to accomplish anything worthwhile. Only the long road brings us to Canaan” (Scroggie).

## II. WE MUST TRUST THAT GOD WILL LEAD US

1. God has mapped out a specific route for us, but we must have faith to follow His pathway. Psalm 37:23 says, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.”
2. Exodus 13:19 says, “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.”
3. Back in Genesis 50:25, Joseph said, “God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (cf. Joshua 24:32).
4. Joseph’s statement reveals his faith in the promises of God – “God will surely visit you...” Joseph believed that the children of Israel would reach the Promised Land just as the LORD had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
5. That is why Hebrews 11:22 says, “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”
6. God did not forget about Joseph’s bones, and God will not forget about you and me. Our Lord said, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not

therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6, 7).

7. God led the children of Israel, and God leads us too.
8. Away from the mire, and away from the clay,  
God leads His dear children along;  
Away up in glory, eternity's day,  
God leads His dear children along. – George A. Young
9. I was amazed at all the great hymns that speak of being led by the Lord. Unfortunately, one of my favorites, "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah" is not in our songbook.
10. Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land.  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.  
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more;  
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield. – William Williams

11. We should not be surprised at all the beautiful hymns that speak of being led by God, when we consider the hundreds of Scriptures which teach this wonderful promise.
12. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:1, 2).
13. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).
14. "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:5).
15. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Psalm 25:9).
16. "For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me" (Psalm 31:3).

17. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psalm 32:8).
18. "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles" (Psalm 43:3).
19. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).
20. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2).
21. "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:9, 10).
22. "And the LORD shall guide thee continually" (Isaiah 58:11).

### III. HOW DOES GOD LEAD US?

1. In Exodus 13:21 and 22, we see that the LORD led the children of Israel by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire.
2. Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18 teach that today God leads us by His Holy Spirit.
3. Our Lord said in John 16:13, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."
4. In Exodus 13:11, God promised the Israelites that He would bring them into the Promised Land. In John 14:1-4, our Lord has promised to return and bring us home to heaven.
5. In Exodus 13:22, the Bible says God never took away the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. In John 14:16, our Lord has promised to never take away His Holy Spirit.
6. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16, 17).
7. God leads us with His Word.
8. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).
9. "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:130).
10. The Lord leads us as we pray and ask Him for direction. You will remember how Abraham's steward prayed in Genesis 24:11. "And he said O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the

men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master” (Genesis 24:12-14).

11. That prayer was answered immediately and specifically when Rebecca came out with her pitcher and everything went precisely the way Abraham’s servant prayed (Gen. 24:15-20).
12. God leads us by His providence. We see that in the life of Joseph, and Boaz and Ruth, Mordecai and Esther, and Daniel, and many others in the Bible.
13. In preaching and when soulwinning, I often quote Ephesians 2:8, 9 – “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”
14. But consider the next verse – “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”
15. God has already mapped it all out for us.

### **CONCLUSION:**

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;

Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain. – William Cowper