

FOLLOW THE LORD WITH CONFIDENCE

13 ¹⁷Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was a shorter route; for God said, "When the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt." ¹⁸So God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea. Now the children of Israel went up out of Egypt armed for battle. ¹⁹Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the children of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must take up my bones and carry them away with you from this place." ²⁰They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹And Jehovah went before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them along the way and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. ²²The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from the people, they were ever present before them.

14 Jehovah said to Moses, ²"Tell the children of Israel to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea—you are to camp by the sea directly across from Baal-Zephon. ³Then Pharaoh will say concerning the children of Israel, They are wandering in the land in confusion, they are hemmed in by the wilderness. ⁴I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them; but I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah." So the children of Israel did so. ⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done? We have let Israel go and have lost their services!" ⁶So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. ⁷He took six hundred of his elite chariots, as well as all the other chariots of Egypt with officers in charge of them. ⁸Jehovah hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; because the children of Israel had marched out boldly. ⁹So the Egyptians pursued them, with all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his horsemen and his troops, and they overtook them as they were camped by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-Zephon.

¹⁰As Pharaoh approached, the children of Israel looked up and saw the Egyptians marching against them. They were terrified and the children of Israel cried out to Jehovah. ¹¹Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt, is that why you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you treated us like this, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Did we not say to you back in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians!?' It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!" ¹³Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see the deliverance Jehovah will accomplish for you today. The Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again forever. ¹⁴Jehovah will fight for you; you need only to be still."

¹⁵Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide the waters. The children of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷And I, indeed, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will go in after them. I will gain glory over Pharaoh and over all his army, over his chariots and

over his horsemen. ¹⁸The Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah when I have gained glory over Pharaoh, over his chariots, and over his horsemen.” ¹⁹Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s camp, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. ²⁰So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. The cloud was present even in the darkness, and it gave light to the children of Israel during the night. Neither camp came near to the other throughout the night.

²¹Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and all night long Jehovah drove the sea back by means of a strong east wind and turned it into dry ground. So the waters were divided ²²and the children of Israel went through the sea on dry ground—the waters formed a wall for them on their right hand and on their left. ²³Then the Egyptians pursued and went into the midst of the sea after them—all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴During the last watch of the night Jehovah looked down upon the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud and threw the army of the Egyptians into confusion. ²⁵He removed the wheels of their chariots, causing them to drive with difficulty, so that the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the presence of Israel; for Jehovah is fighting for them against the Egyptians!” ²⁶Then Jehovah said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians, over their chariots, and over their horsemen.” ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal place. The Egyptians fled from it, but Jehovah swept them into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; indeed, covered Pharaoh’s whole army that went into the sea in pursuit of Israel, not so much as one of them remained. ²⁹But the children of Israel walked through the sea on dry ground, the waters formed a wall on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰So it was that on that day Jehovah delivered Israel out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore. ³¹When Israel saw the great power Jehovah had employed against the Egyptians, the people feared Jehovah; and they put their trust in Jehovah and in his servant Moses. (Ex. 13:17-14:31)

Introduction

I want to tell you the story of two doctors: one followed the LORD’s leading; the other did not. The one was challenged by God to become a medical missionary in Africa; he heeded God’s call and followed God’s leading. He gave up fame and fortune (turning down a \$200 per day position in an American hospital) to treat hundreds of patients a week at a primitive little hospital in the heart of Africa. He is following Christ, he is where God wants him to be, he has the joy of seeing many of those African patients come to Christ the Savior, and his life is satisfying.

The other doctor also was led by God to become a medical missionary and serve in the same African hospital, but he changed his mind and decided to stay in the U.S. rather than heed God’s call to go overseas. He went on to become a very successful doctor with a large and prosperous practice. From the world’s point of view he had everything he wanted. But something was wrong. He went through three

unsuccessful marriages, and while he was still a young man he took his own life (Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Man*, pp.142-143.)

This is not to say that becoming a medical missionary to Africa is the only way to go—that is not the point. This is the point: Following Christ, wherever and however He may lead you, that is the only way to go.

I. Follow the LORD with Confidence, Even When He Leads You in a “Circuitous Route”

When Pharaoh let the people go, when he drove them out of the land (Ex. 11:1,) the LORD was there to lead them. When the LORD calls you to forsake the world and follow Him, (perhaps calling you to give up a job that causes you to compromise your Christian principles, or calling you to come out of a personal relationship which will cause you to violate your Christian standards, or calling you to become a medical missionary to Africa,) He is obligating Himself to take care of you. You may remind Him of His relationship to you: *“You are our Father ... You, O Jehovah, are our Father; from everlasting your name has been, Our Redeemer”* (Isa. 63:16,) and be assured of His faithfulness: *“[the LORD] himself has said, ‘I will by no means fail you, neither will I in any way forsake you.’ ‘So, with sure confidence we say, ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear’”* (Heb. 13:5b-6a.)

The LORD went before the people to lead them by means of a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire throughout the night (Ex. 13:21-22.) Just as the caravans were led through the wilderness by a “pillar of cloud and fire,” issuing from wood fires in iron grates fastened to long poles (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol.2, p.40), so the LORD led His people as their Guide with His own divine pillar of cloud and fire. By means of the pillar of cloud and fire, the LORD provided all that His people needed: shade from the brutal desert heat throughout the day and light to give comfort and protection and ward off the predatory dangers lurking in the night. As the Psalmist testifies, the LORD will provide for us, provided that we follow Him as the sheep follow their shepherd: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing”* (Psl. 23:1.)

But God led the children of Israel by a totally unexpected, circuitous, mysterious route. The LORD did not lead them by the road that passes through the country of the Philistines, even though that route was more direct. Why? Because He knew they were not yet ready to meet the armed challenge of the Philistine armies (Ex. 13:17.) If you accept the LORD’s leading and look to Him for guidance, He may well deliver you from challenges/trials/temptations for which you are not prepared and that you would find to be too overwhelming. So it was that the LORD led His people by the more circuitous route, the route that went into the wilderness down towards the Red Sea. After they had assembled at Succoth (a trading outpost?), they traveled east to Etham (the Egyptian border,) and then south into the desert region along the Red Sea (Ex. 13:18,20.)

Sometimes you may become impatient with the LORD's leading, and be tempted to think, "If I were leading, I would take the direct route, not all these meanderings down the back roads!" Sometimes you may be confused, and be tempted to think, "What is God doing? Why did He cause this to happen or allow that to occur?" In such times remember the words of the hymn writer:

Be still, my soul: the LORD is on your side,
Leave it to your God to order and provide.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heavenly Friend,
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: your God does undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
(Katharina von Schlegel)

Follow the Lord with confidence, even when He leads you in a "circuitous route." His chosen way of leading is intended to develop Christ-like character in your life:

... we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but let us even rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance produces character; and character produces hope. ⁵And this hope shall not disappoint us; because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:2-5)

His chosen way of leading is intended to bring honor to God by your life:

... my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1:20)

II. Follow the LORD with Confidence, Realizing He will Lead You in a Course that will Honor His Name

Consider Pharaoh's reaction to the route chosen by God for His people Israel. As the LORD reveals to Moses, Pharaoh views the route the LORD has chosen for His people as being foolish: the Israelites are wandering around in confusion, those ignorant, superstitious fools! (Ex. 14:3.) The world mistakes the wisdom and the ways of God as foolishness, because it cannot comprehend the scheme and purpose of God's works: "*How great are your works, O Jehovah, how profound are your thoughts! ⁶A brutish man does not know, fools do not understand*" (Psl. 92:5-6.) Note, too, the Apostle Paul's testimony of praise, "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"* (Rom. 11:33-34.)

Pharaoh views this as his opportunity to recapture Israel. Seeing that they are hemmed in with the sea at their backs, Pharaoh musters 600 chariots and confidently sets off to dispatch the “helpless” Israelites (Ex. 14:5-7.) As a modern day example of the world viewing the Christian as “easy prey,” consider the story of D.L. Moody. One day the famous evangelist, D.L. Moody, and a little boy were canvassing a rough neighborhood, inviting the residents to come to church. When they stopped in a local saloon, the patrons, who were “learned” blasphemers, invited Moody and the little boy to meet with them the next week to discuss religion, thinking they could easily expose the “foolishness” of Moody’s faith and dissuade the little boy from following Christ. What happened the next week was not at all what the blasphemers had anticipated (as we shall see ...)

Having considered Pharaoh’s reaction to the way in which the LORD was leading His people, next consider Israel’s reaction to the route chosen for them by their God. There is an initial sense of terror and panic. In the distance they see a cloud of dust, then the gleam of war spears glittering in the sun, and now the sight of Pharaoh’s chariots arrayed against them (like sharks silently, confidently closing in on the prey,) awaiting the order to attack. Then, all in one breath, they raise a cry to the LORD and a blasphemous protest against the deliverer the LORD has appointed: *“Why have you brought this calamity upon us? It was better for us not to have followed you at all!”* (Ex. 14:10-12.) Israel did not like the fact that they had to face adversity on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan. With regard to God’s chosen course for His people, leading them through this present world into His everlasting kingdom, take note of the Apostle Paul’s counsel recorded in Acts 14:21-22, as he and Barnabas ministered to the churches they had earlier established, *“they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, ²²strengthening the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and [teaching] that we must enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations.”*

Finally, but most importantly, let us consider God’s purpose in leading His people by this particular route: *“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and he will pursue them; but I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah”* (Ex. 14:4.) Above all, the chosen course by which He leads His people is intended for His honor and glory, and for the purpose of revealing His divine majesty. This same divine truth is exemplified in the case of the death of Jesus’ dear friend, Lazarus: *“So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, ‘Lord, the one whom you love is sick.’ ⁴But when Jesus heard this, he said, ‘This sickness is not for death, but for the sake of the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it’”* (Jn 11:3-4.) Writing to Christians who were undergoing severe trials, the Apostle Peter explains to them the purpose of such trials:

... now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials. ⁷[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—being of greater value than gold which perishes—having been tested by fire,

may be verified, resulting in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)

The Christian's faithful perseverance in the face of trials will result in "*praise and glory*" for God, because His people deem Him worthy of their continued faithfulness even though they must endure trial for His sake. Furthermore, it will result in "*honor*" for them, an honor that will finally be bestowed upon them because they remained faithful to the LORD their God even in the midst of trial.

Follow the LORD with confidence, realizing that He will lead you in a course that will honor His holy Name, and He will prove Himself faithful to bestow honor upon those who have faithfully accepted His leading.

III. Follow the LORD with Confidence, Knowing that He will Bring You Safely through to Glory

The LORD was sovereignly orchestrating and overruling the entire event. He led Israel into the wilderness and to the shores of the Red Sea; ...He caused Pharaoh to pursue after the children of Israel; ...and He led His people through the parted waters of the sea to peace and rest.

The LORD allowed His people to be confronted by their enemies; ...but He Himself stood watch over them:

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's camp, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. ²⁰So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. The cloud was present even in the darkness, and it gave light to [the children of Israel] during the night. Neither camp came near to the other throughout the night. (Ex.14:19-20)

The LORD allowed His people to be pursued by their enemies; ...so that he might demonstrate His power and glory in the destruction of those enemies:

And I, indeed, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will go in after them. I will gain glory over Pharaoh and over all his army, over his chariots and over his horsemen. ¹⁸The Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah when I have gained glory over Pharaoh, over his chariots, and over his horsemen. (Ex. 14:17-18)

Getting back to our story, what happened to D.L. Moody and the little boy when they returned to that saloon to discuss religion with the patrons who were "learned" blasphemers? Upon returning the next Sunday morning, Moody suggested to them that they first present their arguments against Christianity before he spoke in favor of his Christian faith. As it turned out, Moody never had the opportunity, nor the need to defend his faith. When the blasphemers began

to speak, they contradicted each other, soon their tempers flared, their quarreling turned into brawling, and finally Moody and the little boy were sitting all alone in the empty saloon, surrounded by the peace and presence of the LORD. (taken from a biography of D.L. Moody)

Consider the testimony of the Psalmist:

How great are your works, O Jehovah, how profound are your thoughts! ⁶A brutish man does not know, fools do not understand ⁷that although the wicked may spring up like grass and all evildoers may flourish, it is so that they may be destroyed forever. ⁸But you, O Jehovah, are exalted forever. ⁹Surely your enemies, O Jehovah, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. ¹⁰You have exalted my horn (the horn was the symbol of strength and honor) like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured upon me. (Psl. 92:5-10)

The LORD led His people through the parted waters of the Red Sea, ...to ultimate peace and safety. Darkness was descending as the Egyptians set up camp against Israel (Ex. 14:19-20.) All through the night the LORD caused a howling east wind to part the waters of the sea (vs. 21.) In the middle of the night Israel passes through that valley enfolded by two great mountains of water, and the Egyptians pursue them (vs. 22.) For the Egyptians, it became a passage **into death**; but for Israel, it was a safe passage **through death**. Israel's journey through the parted waters of the Red Sea brings to mind the words of the Psalmist: *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me"* (Psl. 23:4.)

Follow the LORD with confidence, ...knowing that He will bring you safely through unto glory. As the hymn writer, John Newton, testified: "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come, Grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Consider, too, the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *"The LORD will deliver me out of every evil work and will save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."* (2 Tim. 4:18.)

Conclusion

The LORD will direct the course of your life, but it will not be the course that you would choose. Nevertheless, follow the LORD with confidence along the course He charts for you, because it will eventually lead to a glorious destination.