

CHRIST AND THE CLOUDY PILLAR
Exodus 13:20-22

Intro: Our text has to do with guidance, the guidance which was given to the children of Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. We are told in our text:

And the Lord went before them by day
in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way;
and by night in a pillar of fire,
to give them light; to go by day and night.

Notice that our text tells us that "**the Lord** went before them by day...and by night." The cloud and the fire were visible evidences of the presence of the Lord with His people.

We have a passage in the NT which emphasizes the same truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. It is found in John 10:4 where the Lord Jesus is portrayed as "the good shepherd." And this is what the Lord Jesus Himself said:

And when he putteth forth his own sheep,
he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him:
for they know his voice.

There are lessons in the few words of our text which carry throughout Scripture and down to today concerning the Lord's guidance in our lives.

We need to not, first, that:

I. GUIDANCE WAS NOT REQUESTED BY THE PEOPLE.

The cry of the children of Israel before Moses became their leader was mainly that they wanted to get out of Egypt. How much was known by them about the prophecy which was given to Abraham, we do not know. We know that Joseph expected them to be taken back into the land of Canaan because he commanded the people to take his bones back with them when they went. But many years had gone by. The Israelites who were living in the land of Egypt at the time of the exodus had never known any other home but Egypt. But their suffering had become so terrible that they simply cried out for deliverance. They probably would have been glad to stay in the land of Egypt if the Lord had given them relief, but they wanted to be delivered from their intense sufferings.

The Passover was past. They were out from under the hand of Pharaoh, but not through the Red Sea. The one thing that they needed more than anything else at this time was guidance. But we have no evidence that they felt their need of it. Instead, we simply have the statement in our text that the Lord was giving it to them. He knows the things that we

have need of before we ask, and before we know to ask Him to give us what we need. That is the way it was with the children of Israel, and that is the way it is with us so often.

But notice a second thing about their guidance.

II. THE LORD WAS THEIR GUIDE.

Our text says, "And the Lord went before them." He did not send angels to take charge of their journey. He did not leave it up to Moses, nor to Moses conferring with the elders of Israel. They had not been that way before. Getting them to their promised land was so important that the Lord Himself took charge of their guidance. They were not left to guessing, nor to trying first one way and then another, but He was their Guide. They had an infallible wise and unerring Guide.

What a blessing this is, and how often we rejoice in the Lord's promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Nor does He change His ways or His promises. One of the last things that the Lord said to His disciples before His ascension was, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

Nothing could possibly be more encouraging for us. Twice in Psalm 23 we learned last Tuesday David said, "He leadeth me." "He leadeth me beside the still waters" and "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." But notice that David seemed to be revelling in the truth that "**He** leadeth me." And then David went on to say that the one thing that kept him from fearing "the valley of the shadow of death was that even there the Lord would be leading and He would be there. "I will fear no evil: for **thou** art with me."

What peace the children of Israel missed because they forgot that the Lord was in the cloud, and that they were absolutely safe in His presence.

A third thing that we learn from our text is:

III. IN GUIDING THEM, THE LORD WENT **BEFORE** THEM.

The Lord was not going to follow them; they were to follow Him. He went before so there would be no mistake as to the way that they were to go. The children of Israel did not always like the way the Lord led. They usually felt that they could have done better, and sometimes wanted to turn around and go back. But the Lord went before them.

One time when He went behind them was when the Egyptian army

was pursuing them. The Lord went behind to protect them, but He never ceased to guide them, to go before them.

In this way He was preparing the way for them. He knew the best way for them to go. He did not take the shortest and easiest way because there were dangers in the short way that the children of Israel were not aware of. So their greatest wisdom was in following the Lord wherever He might lead them.

You will remember that the Lord's command to the men who were to be His disciples, was a simple, "Follow me." And, as we can see so often in Scripture, the Lord led in ways that would enable Him to do things in them as well as for them. So often we have something that we want to do, or a bad circumstance that we want to get out of, but the Lord guides in such ways and in such places that His work in us will go forward. His guidance with Moses in going before Pharaoh was like that.

Think also of John 10:4. The Lord is our good Shepherd, and we are His sheep. He goes before us not only to lead us, but to drive away the wolves who would destroy us.

Notice a fourth thing from our text.

IV. THE LORD'S GUIDANCE WAS CONSTANT: BY DAY, AND BY NIGHT.

We have a way of seeking the Lord's guidance when we are facing some special need, or some new trial. But the Lord knew that His people needed guidance moment by moment in the daytime as well as in the nighttime.

We can understand their need for guidance at night. They had no powerful light that they could turn on at night. They would have had some light on a clear night when the moon was full, but there would have been many nights when the visibility was down to nothing. And then they would see their need for guidance because some of their marches were at night.

But whether it was day or night, the Lord gave them guidance twenty-four hours of every day. And He gave them such guidance because they needed it.

It is just as true for us. We are inclined to depend upon our past experiences, or upon what other people tell us we ought to do. But even in the small details of our lives, regardless of how much we have done a particular thing, we need to be depending upon the Lord in simple faith to guide us, to protect us, and to show us what He wants us to do. Often this guidance comes through the Word of God, but it also comes in the Lord's providential dealings with us in our

lives. The Lord guided them by day and night because that is how often they needed to be guided.

Cf. what Isaiah said about the Lord's guidance in Isa. 58:11. And be sure to notice the word "continually." Notice also what He does to us, and what He makes us.

Notice a fifth thing about the Lord's guidance of His people Israel.

V. THE LORD'S PRESENCE AND GUIDANCE WERE VISIBLE.

The cloud was up there every day; it changed into a pillar of fire every night -- and it was there every night. They were aware when it was moving. They were equally conscious of it when it was not moving.

We all would agree that it would be wonderful if the Lord were that visible with us today. However, we have to remember that the Lord still guides even though the cloud and the pillar of fire are not mentioned as being seen Deut. 32:15, and this was in connection with the death of Moses. But the Lord has been guiding His people every day from that day to this. He has never stopped. The problem is that we get impatient, and want to move ahead before we get clear guidance from the Lord.

Two of the prerequisites for guidance are #1, faith, and #2, patience. We need to believe that the Lord is with us and that He will guide us, but we also need to wait for His timing. Please turn with me to Num. 9:15-23. (Read.)

This passage teaches us that God's guidance was not something optional which the people could take or leave; it was an expression of the will of God for His people, and they could not ignore His leading, nor reject His leading, without being guilty of disobedience. If the Lord made them wait for a year before the cloud moved, they were to wait a year. Our trouble so often is that we don't believe that the Lord will lead us, or we just get tired of waiting.

We know far more about the ways of the Lord today (or should know more about the ways of the Lord) because we have the completed Word of God. The more we know about the Word, the more we see how God has led His people in the past, the greater will be our guidance. God has always given His people all of the guidance that they have needed, and He has always made His way clear even without the cloudy pillar which became fiery at night. They could never have said that they did not know where the Lord wanted them to be; their problem was that they so often wanted something else. His

ways don't always satisfy us, but His ways are always better than ours. And if we trust Him, and wait for Him, He will never leave us without the guidance which we seek. We walk by faith, not by sight. This does not mean that we act rashly and foolishly, but it does mean that we take the knowledge that the Lord has given us in His Word, look for the evidences of His guidance in our circumstances, and then let the peace of God rule in our hearts (cf. Col. 3:15, 16).

Concl: Guidance is a very personal matter, a matter between each of us and the Lord. Sometimes the guidance we seek involves other people, and we need to make sure that they are being guided as we are. But what we need to know and be sure of is that the Lord will guide us continually just as certainly as He guided the children of Israel. Our circumstances are different, but our need for guidance is the same. And one of the greatest ways in which we come to know the Lord is by trusting Him to guide us, and then to follow as He leads. The Lord never makes us wait unnecessarily, but it is always foolish to move ahead in any decision before we have the mind of the Lord.

GUIDANCE
IN READING
THE WORD,
AND IN
PRAYER.
ALSO IN
WITNESSING.

Guidance is one thing that children of Israel had to be concerned with every day that they lived. The same is true of us. Many places in the Psalms we find the Psalmist praying that the Lord would show him His way, to teach him how to walk. A good prayer for us to pray every day we live is the one David prayed in Psa. 143:8,

Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;
for in thee do I trust:
cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;
for I lift up my soul unto thee.

Many times my thoughts go back to my Seminary days, days of fellowship which Lucille and I had with Lewis and the one who was his wife then, Mary. And I think of my classes, especially those with Dr. Chafer. He always started his classes with the singing of a hymn, usually just one verse, and then he led us in prayer. One hymn which we sang many, many times, and I never got tired of it was the hymn, He Leadeth Me. As I prepared this message I could hear Dr. Chafer leading us men as we joined with him in singing just the first verse of that wonderful hymn. You know the words, but let me close by repeating them for you since we have been thinking and talking about guidance tonight.

He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

He leadeth me, He leadeth me;
By His own hand He leadeth me:
His faithful foll'wer I would be,
For by His hand He leadeth me.

The story of our lives is the story of how well we have followed the leading of the Lord. Let us pray that it will be a good story. It may never be put in print, but records are kept in heaven.

In Psalm 73 Asaph tells us how envious he was with the wicked. They seemed to be having a good time when he was having a bad time. But then the Lord showed him where the wicked were headed, and he realized how foolish he had been. And so he said this:

So foolish was I, and ignorant:
I was as a beast before thee.
Nevertheless I am continually with thee:
thou hast holden me by my right hand.
**Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,
and afterward receive me to glory.**

Our Lord was Israel's cloudy and fiery pillar, and He still guides us by Himself although ours is a walk more by faith than by sight. Let us believe that He guides us, and let us wait until He makes His way clear in those things which we do not know what to do.