

God our Great Guide

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[0 : 00] As we see in the passage, in fact the two passages that we read there, God, the great guide, God, our great guide. Three points to follow in the first passage that's supported by the second one.

God's unexpected leading, God's considerate leading, and God's constant leading. Let's think first of all of God's unexpected leading, and we have to say that it's a truth that we really all need to understand and to apply by faith.

That God the Lord doesn't always lead his people in the way that they expect, in the way that we expect. Now, we've seen that as we just read there in the case of the Israelites.

It's the Israelites as they're about to leave Egypt. We're not told exactly how many people there were, but the estimates vary. But there's no doubt that certainly the numbers might have been something up to two million people, all assembled, all ready to leave Egypt, all ready to leave for the land of Canaan, all ready to leave for the promised land.

They're going to need food. They're going to need shelter. They're going to need strength to resist their enemies. They're going to need to care for their children. They're all the elderly to consider.

[1 : 28] Surely the shortest route to the promised land is going to be the ideal route for all these people, with all these particular needs to deal with. Surely the shortest route straight across the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.

Surely that's going to be the best route. Yes, going through Philistine territory before they reach the land promised to them. What did we read?

We read there that God directed them on a very different path. God directed them on a much longer route. A route, if you look at a map later after the service, you'll see the route went all the way down the Sinai Peninsula, and then all the way across the peninsula, and then to the Red Sea.

And of course, a much longer route, a more difficult route, and then reaching the Red Sea. How are they going to cross the Red Sea? Yet that's the route that God led them.

It's going to be far more treacherous. It's going to be more dangerous. Far longer than any of the Israelites would have expected in knowing that they were leaving Egypt for the land of Canaan.

[2 : 41] And that route, of course, is going to involve much faith. Faith, trusting for God to provide the people with their daily needs as they take that very dangerous route.

They're going to need food. They're going to need water. They're going to need shelter. And especially, they're going to need that strength, especially as these people have been slaves for all these years.

Their strength's going to be weakened. How are they going to cope in that difficult and dangerous path that God has set them on? But God is the all-wise, all-knowing God.

God's wisdom was such that there was a very, very good reason why God sent them on that more difficult route. Because God's wisdom is perfect wisdom.

And we're going to see in a moment why God sent them on the more difficult route than the so-called easier route. But before we do that, we have to look at the very, well, the very fact of God's unexpected leadings of his people.

[3 : 45] You might see God's unforeseen guidance towards his own. And the very, very first thing we have to say is this, that God leads.

God guides. That's what we saw there in the very first verse that we read. We read there of God leading, verse 17. And then the verses that follow that one, telling us that God was in absolute control of the very route that the Israelites were taking in their exodus.

God is the leader. God is the guide. God going before his people. And we see that principle elsewhere in Scripture.

We read, for example, Isaiah 40, verse 11. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those who are young. You see, God leads you in your life. He leads you in kindness. He leads you in love. He leads you in grace. He leads you in his care over you.

[4 : 51] He leads you in his gentleness. And when we think of, you know, God as our leader, of course, immediately we're drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. We're immediately drawn to him who's our good shepherd.

Our Savior who leads his flock in good pastures. Yes, we can surely say, those of you who know him as Savior, as the good shepherd, that the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall lack nothing. But you know this. We can so often forget. Yes, the Lord is your shepherd in life. Absolutely. But it's wonderful to know that the Lord Jesus is our shepherd even in heaven.

There's a beautiful section in the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. And in chapter 7 there, we read there of the, well, the bliss, the experience, the wonder, the joy of the Lord's people there in glory.

And we read in that chapter of the Lord's people being fully satisfied in Jesus. Jesus the Lamb, the Lamb who died. But also we're told there of Jesus the Lamb is Jesus the shepherd.

[6 : 02] Listen to these verses of Jesus in heaven. The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will lead them to springs of living water.

See, that's telling us that the Lord's people in heaven are the flock of God, flock of Jesus. And even in heaven are being led and being guided, we're told, to springs of living water.

In other words, being continually led in the joy of eternal life. The joy of salvation. You who know him, you're being led.

Yes, led even now in your life. But even you have that promise, the assurance of being led in heaven. Given that full satisfaction of eternal life in the glory of heaven.

Will there be no more tears, no more sorrow, no more sin. But be nourished eternally by the, well, the life-giving source that's our Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 05] And so with that truth before you, then we know we have absolute trust in our God who leads his people in life. As well as in the glory, the glory of eternal life and in the glory of heaven.

And yes, of course there are times in the paths that God leads us on, when they are and appear to be and are difficult, troublesome, tiring.

But they are and always will be the right paths that God's leading you on. See, for every Christian, there's that unexpected route that God leads you on.

And God leading you often in very difficult terrain. John Bunyan wrote of that in his allegory, The Pilgrim's Progress. And he wrote in his dream, what he wrote down in his dream, from his dream. He wrote of a portion of the pilgrim's, the believer's journey. He wrote of that journey going towards the celestial city, going towards heaven. And a part of that journey was going on a place called the Hill of Difficulty.

[8 : 16] And on that hill, the pilgrim had to ascend on his way to heaven, to the celestial city. And John Bunyan writes a poem, a little poem, I'm not going to read it all, but he writes a poem on the experience of the believer on that hill of difficulty.

This is it. The hill though high, I covet to ascend. The difficulty will not me offend. For I perceive the way to life lies here.

Come, pluck up heart. Let's neither faint nor fear. Better though difficult, the right way to go, than wrong though easy, for the end is woe.

See, the path that God is leading you on. Well, you may well, even at this point, have reached the hill of difficulty. But you're given the strength to persevere, because God is too kind to be cruel.

Because he's the one, yes, he's the one who leads you to still waters. But he's also the one who leads you in that hill of difficulty. And as he did with the Israelites, that's what he'll do with you.

[9 : 28] He'll provide. He's never going to abandon you when that road, that path that you're on is long and steep and difficult. God has particular reasons for leading you even to that hill of difficulty.

Just as God had perfect reasons for leading the Israelites in that route that they certainly would not have expected to be on. Because we see, secondly, God's considerate leading.

God's considerate leading. We see again in verse 17, For God said, You see, if the Israelites were to go on the easiest route, the route that would take them quickly to the promised land, they'd have to go through Philistine territory, enemy territory.

They would have faced military opposition from the people of that land, that particular part of the land. And at that stage in their journey, the Israelites were in no position to fight. I mean, they'd just left slavery. They would have been weakened by that kind of life. They didn't have the experience to form a united army. And they certainly didn't have the weapons to engage in battle.

[10:48] And yes, I know that verse 18 tells us that they left Egypt equipped for battle. But when you read the words, certainly in the original language, the suggestion, the strong suggestion is that, well, it was more as if they were well organized, like an army.

Well organized, but without the necessary weapons to fight. But the point's this. Had the Israelites encountered fierce opposition, so soon after they're leaving Egypt, there's every likelihood that they would have wanted to go back to Egypt.

We're not just making this up. Because we see that sometime later, even in the first year of the Exodus, when things were tough for the Israelites. And they started to grumble and say, oh, it would have been better for us if we'd stayed in Egypt, rather than, as they thought, perish in the wilderness.

But you know, this is the kind of grumbling that we can so often have in our own hearts. And things aren't happening the way that we want to. You know, when we presume to know better than God, even when we're on that hill of difficulty.

But remember this, God loves you. God loves all who are his. And God's leading you in the path that he's leading you, the particular path that he's leading you.

[12:14] That is part of his considerate love, his generous love towards you. You see, God was showing consideration to the weaknesses of the Israelites there as they were about to leave Egypt.

And God shows consideration to you in your various weaknesses. It's what God's promised in his word. We read in 1 Corinthians 10, 13.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. Because it's God who knows you, God who's formed you. God will show his absolute consideration towards you, even when he's leading you.

Certainly at times that leading appears puzzling. But remember that puzzling, that puzzlement is from our perspective, not God's perspective.

Because God does all things well. Even when God takes you up that hill of difficulty, remember he's on that hill with you. He's the same Lord who's promised never to leave you, never to forsake you.

[13:21] And God's consideration is seen even in the detail. We see that there in the journey of the Israelites, read there in verse 19 to 20, in the detail regarding taking the bones of Joseph from Egypt to the promised land.

We read there, Moses took the bones of Joseph with them. For Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.

And so we're told that the direction that the journey took, even in taking the bones of Joseph. Again, let's just think of the scenario here.

As we said, possibly two million Israelites, Israelites alive, leaving Egypt. But there's one deceased body with them. And it's the mummified body of Joseph.

Now, Joseph had died several hundred years before all this, the exodus. And of course, being a prince in Egypt, his body would have been embalmed in the very traditional burial rites that the Egyptians carried out.

[14:28] That's what we read there in the end of the book of Genesis. But in keeping to Joseph's wishes, Joseph's remains were going to be taken out of Egypt.

And in God's considerate leading, the people would see that sarcophagus in which the coffin of Joseph lay. And that sarcophagus would be a reminder to the Israelites that what God had promised, God would fulfill.

Joseph had said, you know, take my bones out of Egypt to take them to the land of promise. And so the very sight of these, that the, of Joseph, as it were, being led out of Egypt would be that assurance that the land that God had sworn to, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was the land that the Israelites were going to.

And the sign of that promise, even being that very, very sarcophagus that Joseph was in. That sign that God was leading his people in his time and for his glory.

You know, just picture in your mind's eye, you've all seen pictures of these magnificent Egyptian coffins, sarcophaguses. Just picture in your mind's eye that taking of that, no doubt, some kind of wooden transport on which the item was laid.

[15 : 52] The people had seen what they'd never seen before. They'd seen this sign, in fact, more than a sign, they'd seen the presence of Joseph with them. And now they've been reminded that the words of Joseph are being fulfilled.

They were an amazing sight for the people to see. Some of you will know, of course, that last week in Egypt there was an amazing display of 22 royal mummies that were being transported from one museum in Egypt to another.

If you saw any pictures or sound, it was an amazing sight, the sight and sound of all these thousands of years old mummies being transported in these ultra-modern vehicles and the names of each of the rulers and each of the vehicles.

But what a greater sight there was there in Egypt. The coffin of Joseph in the midst of all these people and that representation of the promise of God that what God had promised regarding Joseph and regarding the Israelites.

that promise was being fulfilled in the very sight. And the detail there, the wonderful detail even in showing God's consideration to the people, telling that God is true, God is sure, and God's sovereign.

[17 : 12] And even in the details of your journey towards your heavenly home, remember, God is sovereign. And God will give you, many times, God will give you reminders of his care for you.

These reminders that God is with you on that journey. You have reminders in God's word and his word. You have reminders in verses of scripture that assure you that you're safe and secure in his presence.

These are tokens, God's word that assures you that speaks to your heart, telling you that he is with you, even in the many and varied and often difficult circumstances of your life.

Know that God is leading you with you as he's leading you home because there are no coincidences in the life of faith. God is Lord and God leads and he leads your life not just momentarily but at all times as we see there in verses 21 to 22 where we see God's constant leading this well-known aspect of that leading there in the wilderness the pillar of fire the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire and the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way by night in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by day and by night the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from the people even that even that indication of God's presence with them God in that pillar showing that he is the covenant God of his people God in all his faithfulness the evidence well God had already shown of course his people the evidence of his power of his sovereign power even in the the ten plagues that afflicted Egypt and that God's going to continue to show his power and God's going to continue to show his presence with them in that visible indication through that pillar that pillar of cloud and that pillar of fire and God going before them and is leading his people yes the people had that responsibility they had to follow the pillar they had to follow God but all along God is leading his people isn't that the principle of life that we all adhere to who know him who trust in him who follow our Lord the principle of God leading God taking the initiative God guiding God directing you but it's for you and for me to follow him and to do so wholeheartedly and not turn back and don't grumble at his leading but follow him with thankfulness because it's God who's leading your life

[20 : 12] God who's leading you in the perfection of his righteousness that leading is constant it's continuous this is abiding presence with you now as we say we see that in the passage with the Israelites they have this pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of light the pillar of fire by night and so the Israelites could travel at any time of the day at any time of night depending on their circumstances and as we read there at the end of that section God did not depart from his people now of course God doesn't now lead his people by a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire but God still leads God still leads his people you who know him as Lord and Savior he leads you by his Holy Spirit the Spirit within you you have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to lead and to guide you in all your ways and just as then as God led the Israelites yes in the in many ways the uncertainty of that exit is certainly uncertain in terms of the people and the different aspects of the journey what they would need for that journey well we believe we trust in the same God the same God who led the Israelites out of Egypt is the same God who leads you and leading all who are his even even in these strange and difficult days

God is leading his people he's leading you yes even in the midst of so much anti-Christian venom that's rising higher and higher God's leading his church even in these days when the church of the Lord has been undermined in so many ways these are days even when you may well have asked Lord where are you where are you Lord and be assured that the Lord is with you the Lord is with us and he's with his people constantly he's with us eternally because God's presence has never departed from his people now yes of course the Israelites were going to have to contend with so much in these first days weeks of their exodus that we're going to have to face many hurdles many difficulties to face even reaching the Red Sea and God willing we'll look at that more detailed next week and they were going to be victims of their own faithlessness on so many occasions but God didn't abandon them just as God will not abandon any of those who are his he won't abandon you even in your time my times of waywardness and faithlessness and so as you continue on your journey pray that you'll know that on that journey he is with you so trust in him especially when he's leading you on these unexpected paths paths that you would never have envisaged but know that he is the compassionate

God he's the God of all grace the God of all mercy and that his presence with you is constant so keep in step keep in step the spirit within you but if God is not yet your Lord your guide well ask yourself this in whom am I trusting to whom or what whatever are you looking at to give you guidance and direction in your life well if it's not God the Lord it must be somebody else something else pray that you'll trust in him and yes join with the Lord's people in words of pleading before God in words that well so many of you do know and know well even in these lovely words that we're going to finish with this morning I pray that this will be your prayer prayer of all of you even as you continue in that journey that God is leading you on guide me oh thou great redeemer pilgrim through this barren land

I am weak but thou art mighty hold me with thy powerful hand and in these words let the fiery cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through strong deliverer strong deliverer be thou still my strength and shield amen may God bless to us his word let's pray Lord truly be our great redeemer our great deliverer guide us Lord lead us even by your presence even by your spirit within our hearts guide and lead us we pray that we will follow you forgive us Lord when we have sought our own paths forgive us Lord when we have grumbled at your ways with us but Lord teach us to rest in you to trust in you to follow you all the days of our life Lord continue to bless us now as we as we close and praise before you bless us

Lord and forgive us we pray again our many sins we ask in Jesus name amen