

Call to Obedience #259
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
www.schultze.org

If we obey God's red lights, the Lord will give us his green lights.

Beware of Shortcuts

By Reimar Schultze

“And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea” (Exodus 13:17–18).

The two matters I want to bring before you today is: 1) God seldom uses shortcuts, and 2) immediately after our rebirth, God wants to lead us.

I. God Is Not a God of Shortcuts.

In Exodus 13, we have a nation just born and delivered from bondage. Prior to this, Israel was a slave to Egypt, laboring hard under the cruel yoke of Pharaoh from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week. When Israel came out of Egypt, she was exhausted, famished physically and spiritually. She was in her diaper stage, spiritually speaking, and totally inexperienced for war.

This describes the spiritual state of man just after the rebirth. Immediately after conversion, most new converts have never read the Bible, have never heard a sermon, and have never fought a spiritual battle. And if they had heard a sermon or read the Scriptures, they had not understood it, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14). So, there is the natural man; there is a carnal man (3:1); and there is a spiritual man (2:15; also, see Call to Obedience #252).

And here in the Old Testament, three geographical areas Israel experienced correspond to the three states of man. Egypt represents life under the bondage of sin. The wilderness Israel had to pass through represents testing and preparation. And Caanan, where Israel was destined to go and live, represents the Spirit-filled, victorious Christian life.

So here in Exodus 13, God already shows us in typology and shadows the three stages man would experience in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit which began with the day of Pentecost.

Hence, after Israel was born of God through the Passover, which represents conversion by the blood of Christ, immediately God wanted to lead his people. God wants to lead all of his newborn children from the start! Every one of us. We also learn from this that as soon as we are born again, we are on a battlefield we have never been on before. And in the Christian dispensation, we no longer battle with flesh and blood but against principalities, and against powers, and against wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12) .

Now there is something very important we learn here in the birth of Israel that carries over into our spiritual lives, and that is: we are born too weak and unseasoned to get into battles reserved for seasoned saints only. Our text says that “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.”

We know that God is omnipotent, but we have to realize that we are not. God had no trouble going through the land of the Philistines. But God knew that young Israel, because of

her weakness in faith, had she been thrown into the battle, would have become so discouraged by the battle as to return to Egypt.

Here, God gave notice to all Christians, especially to newborn ones, to beware of shortcuts to the Promised Land. Now, if God gives you a shortcut, he will be with you. But seldom will God ever choose a shortcut because, generally speaking, shortcuts are death-traps! Oh, how many thousands of newborn Christians are lost to the church each year because they want to get to the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life via shortcuts. They immediately want to take on the Philistines. Directly after conversion, they want to cast out devils, heal the sick, go to the mission field, get into the pulpit, lead Bible studies, and go after all the spiritual gifts. They want power to do things and become somebody rather than realizing that before the power is given, God has an apprenticeship program for everyone.

Yes, my friend, God wants to do something with you and through you, but do not think for a moment that you can get there by shortcuts. We do not know our hearts. We do not know our weaknesses. We do not know our frame. David says that only God knows our frame, only God knows who we are (Ps. 103:14). Do not let spiritual ambition and enthusiasm take you away from the cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night in order to fight the Philistines.

God delayed Israel's battle with the Philistines because Israel was too weak for such warfare at that time. She was weak because she was spiritually undernourished and immature. She was too weak because she still had too much of Egypt (carnality) in her heart and because she was, as yet, untested and untried. Israel needed to be tested. People who have a murmuring heart, a critical spirit, and hurt feelings are no match for the Philistines. So God tested her at the Red Sea, at Marah, and at Rephidim (Ex. 14:10–12; 15:23, 17:1). Israel needed to see what was still in her heart. She needed to come to the place of utter despair to learn utter dependence upon God. This is what God tried to teach her in the wilderness.

Israel needed a wilderness experience. So God has a wilderness for all of us. The Holy Spirit even took Jesus into the wilderness to be tested and tried so that he might learn to triumph there before he would be endued with power from on high for his ministry on the earth (Luke 4:1–2).

But the Lord does not mean for us to remain forever in the wilderness. We are there only long enough to prepare us for Canaan. Those who will not receive God's tests and trials often end up living and dying in the wilderness, just like Israel's older generation who did not believe and obey God.

Many want to take on the Philistines without having been found faithful in the wilderness, without having Egypt (the old man) slain out of them in that wilderness. Oh, you think you are ready for the Spirit-filled ministry to do great things? Let me ask you:

Have you paid your bills? Husband, have you learned to love your wife as Christ loves the church? Wife, have you learned to submit to your husband as unto the Lord? Is there forbearing and sweetness in your home? Are the children disciplined in the love of Christ, or do you through them have rebellion in your home?

Do you tithe and put offerings in the offering plate at church? Do you keep your promises to your pastor and all others? Can the church count on you, or are you in and out and here and there, confusing your impulses with the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Do you have a servant spirit? Do you take correction and rebuke without being offended? Do you still jest and joke? Do you criticize? Do you judge and analyze your Christian brothers and sisters? Do you hold bitterness and resentment in your heart? Are you faithful in your prayer life?

Ah, my friend, if the answer is negative to any one of these, you are neither ready for the Philistines nor for the Promised Land. Had Jesus failed in any one of these areas, God would not have endued him with the power of the Holy Spirit to begin his ministry!

“God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near.” God is not a God of shortcuts. Carnality likes shortcuts. Carnality always looks for shortcuts. But spirituality knows that God knows best.

II. God Wants To Lead Us.

“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: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people” (Ex. 13:21–22).

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14).

When does God want to begin to lead the new convert? Immediately! God began leading Israel even before she had crossed the Red Sea which symbolizes her baptism (1 Cor. 10:2).

What was the first leading of God? The first leading was a “No!” Don’t go to the land of the Philistines. Don’t take the shortcut. God’s first leading through the Holy Spirit for newborn lambs will be many no’s: don’t go back to the movie theater; don’t turn on this TV program again; don’t continue in the boyfriend/girlfriend relationship that I have not led you into; don’t keep company with the ungodly, the sinners, and the scornful (Ps. 1:1; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Ps. 101:7); sister, don’t wear that short dress again; brother, stop wearing those clothes that reflect worldliness and not godliness; etc.

If you are not faithful to the no’s, you will not come to the yes’s. If we override the red lights, we will be killed. The Philistines will get us, and we will end up back in Egypt where we shall die in the mud as slaves to sin. But if we obey the no’s, we shall get some yes’s. And if we will obey the yes’s, the Lord will begin to reveal his secrets to us; he will begin to speak to us, to instruct us, and to direct us. Hallelujah!

I believe Israel, after it had seen the ten mighty plagues God brought upon Egypt, was full of enthusiasm to take on the Philistines. Her attitude may have been, “Since our God could defeat the mighty nation of Egypt, he certainly can destroy this little camp of Philistines!” That was human logic, progressive human thinking, and faith in reason, yet it was not faith in God! Oh, how often do we take faith in sound reason to be faith in God, and off we run to do this and that without checking with mature, battle-scarred saints of God, “Is this really God’s will or not? Is this really coming out of my head as impulse or my imagination, or is it really of the Holy Spirit?”

So, dear one, where are you? Are you still in Egypt, unsaved? Are you fighting battles the Lord has not led you into? Are you in the mission field or some pulpit out of sheer enthusiasm without the cloud and pillar? Are you still in the wilderness after two, ten, or twenty years, murmuring, complaining, carnal, and unsanctified? Or are you in the land of Canaan, driving out the Philistines in the power and under the anointing of the precious Holy Spirit?

Do you like shortcuts? Well, think twice before you take one!