

# DIVINE GUIDANCE

ITS REALITY, METHODS. CONDITIONS

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Of

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# DIVINE GUIDANCE

*“He led them also by a straight way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psalm 107. 7).<sup>1</sup>*

## I. THE NEED AND ADVANTAGE

GUIDANCE by God of the affairs of men is a great fact of history and a great theme of the Bible.

Man is near-sighted and cannot see into even tomorrow; indeed, he does not always see what is going on before his face. Consequently he cannot so wisely order today as that it shall fit into tomorrow, and thus his best laid plans go oft astray. As verse 4 of the above psalm pictures him, he wanders in a wilderness, a desert way. He who has had occasion to traverse a desert will appreciate, as does the writer, the fatal ease with which the way may be missed, and the great difficulty of finding it again. Such is human life, especially in relation to its goal, eternity. None of the sons of Adam knows of himself the best way to order today in preparation for tomorrow, or the true path to bring him at last to a blessed eternity.

How great then, how urgent, is the need of divine guidance. How rest-giving it is to the mind of the traveller to be in the care of a guide who knows the whole country and each turn of the way ahead. How foolish to muddle on personally ordering affairs, instead of availing oneself of the perfect knowledge and invincible power of God, the Unerring. It was the wisest of all the sons of men who said:

*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,  
And lean not upon thine own understanding:  
In all thy ways acknowledge him,  
And he shall direct thy paths.*

(Solomon, Prov. 3. 5, 6.)

Guidance is an individual matter. No one can walk securely by light granted to another. These pages will not be as a father confessor giving authoritative directions that

<sup>1</sup> Quotations are mostly from the Revised Version.

the penitent must follow. But the aim is to set forth principles and conditions that attach to the guidance of God, illustrated by incidents from Scripture and experience, such as may help each to gain the guidance that may be needed from time to time.

## II. ISRAEL AN EXAMPLE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

The psalm above quoted, as to its first intention, is a forecast of the last days of the present age of human history. This may be learned from verse 3, which pictures a gathering together of the people of Israel from all points of the compass. Of old, they were led out of Egypt to Canaan, from west to east. After the captivity in Babylon, some of the nation were brought back to Palestine, from east to west. But never yet have they been gathered to their city from east and west, north and south. This will come, as foretold by Isaiah (43. 5, 6; 49. 12). They were led by God of old and will be so again, as are all today who walk humbly with Him.

From verse 4 onward, the prophet recounts the experiences through which Israel is being led, and is yet to be led, to bring about that joyful regathering. Thus we learn that the guidance of God is already available, and will continue to be so until men of faith have been brought to His goal for them. There is no need to wander aimlessly through life, as lost in a desert. God will guide if we will be led.

## III. GUIDANCE DESCRIBED

The two terse sentences quoted from Psalm 107. 7 cover almost the whole topic of divine guidance.

1. "*He led*". Who led? None less than Jehovah, the eternal, faithful, all-powerful, unsleeping God. Therefore they who would be led must honour Him as God, with an undivided trust and obedience.

2. "*He led*". The Leader goes before; the led follow. This virtually covers all the conditions for being guided. Some of these will be noted in due course.

3. "*He led them*". Who? Those who knew they were lost in the desert, who were hungry, thirsty, fainting, troubled, distressed, incapable, and who then cried unto God (vs. 4-6).

4. "He led . . . by a way", a road. No other eye than His saw any road; it was a wilderness, wild, deserted, trackless, an impossible region for men, except to lose themselves and die. But God saw a way through and beyond.

5. "He led them a *straight* way". Not straight in the sense of a straight line, the nearest distance between two points; but direct, as one may say "The nearest way for you is so and so; it is longer but more direct; keep straight on; do not turn; the shorter way is more difficult to find and is rougher". God's way is always the only right way, the *really* straight way. See this word in Ezra 8. 21. The way from Assyria to Canaan was actually a great detour, north-west, west, and south; but it was the straight way under the then conditions of travel.

6. "He led them that they might *go*." He who will escape from the desert must keep on the go. Lethargy of soul is fatal. He who settles down cannot be led; he does not need a guide. Contentment with this world, satisfaction with the present, precludes guidance. Hence the deadly peril of earthly prosperity and ease. They conduce to slumber in the desert.

7. "He led them . . . to a *city*." The journey thither demands the pilgrim spirit, unresting advance, dogged resistance of the craving for sleep in this enchanted valley; here have we no abiding city, but we *seek* one to come; let us press on (Heb. 13. 14; 6. 1). But God is leading the pilgrims to a *city* — to a place of stability, of permanent safety and peace, to a kingdom which cannot be shaken. He knows the only route thither; faith follows earnestly, restfully.

8. It is a "*city of habitation*", of permanent residence; they go out thence no more. The wanderings, the wilderness are past, though not the enriching knowledge of God there learned; the city of God has been gained; where He has His home they who were led find their home:

O happy band of pilgrims,  
Look upward to the skies,  
Where such a light affliction,  
Shall win you such a prize.

(Neale.)

## IV. MEEKNESS THE CHIEF CONDITION

Perverseness precludes guidance; meekness secures it. Here is God's warning to the perverse:

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in, else they will not come near unto thee." Psalm 32. 8, 9.

Here is His promise to the meek:

"The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way." Psalm 25. 9.

Upon this verse Dr. Arthur T. Pierson writes as follows in *George Müller of Bristol*, pp. 185-187:

In this careful weighing of matters many sincere disciples fail, prone to be impatient of delay in making decisions. Impulse too often sways, and self-willed plans betray into false and even disastrous mistakes. Life is too precious to risk one such failure. There is given us a promise of deep meaning:

*"The meek will He guide in judgment;  
And the meek will He teach His way."*

(Psalm 25. 9.)

Here is a double emphasis upon *meekness* as a condition of such guidance and teaching. *Meekness is a real preference for God's will.* Where this holy habit of mind exists, the whole being becomes so open to impression that, without any *outward* sign or token, there is an *inward* recognition and choice of the will of God. God guides, not by a visible sign, but by *swaying the judgment*. To wait before Him, weighing candidly in the scales every consideration for or against a proposed course, and in readiness to see which way the preponderance lies, is a frame of mind and heart in which one is fitted to be guided; and God touches the scales and makes the balance to sway as He will. *But our hands must be off the scales*, otherwise we need expect no interposition of His, in our favour. To return to the figure with which this chapter starts, the meek soul simply and humbly waits, and *watches the moving of the Pillar*.



One sure sign of this spirit of meekness is the entire *restfulness* with which apparent obstacles to any proposed plan or course are regarded. When waiting and wishing only to know and do God's will, hindrances will give no anxiety, but a sort of pleasure, as affording a new opportunity for divine interposition. If it is the Pillar of God we are following, the Red Sea will not dismay us, for it will furnish but another scene for the display of the power of Him who can make the waters to stand up as an heap, and to become a wall about us as we go through the sea on dry ground.

Mr. Müller had learned this rare lesson, and in this case he says: "*I had a secret satisfaction in the greatness of the difficulties which were in the way. So far from being cast down on account of them, they delighted my soul; for I only desired to do the will of the Lord in this matter.*"

Here is revealed another secret of holy living. To him who sets the Lord always before him, and to whom the will of God is his delight, there pertains a habit of soul which in advance settles a thousand difficult and perplexing questions.

The case in hand is an illustration of the blessing found in such meek preference for God's pleasure. If it were the will of the Lord that this Continental tour should be undertaken at that time, difficulties need not cast him down; for the *difficulties could not be of God*; and, if not of God, they should give him no unrest, for, in answer to prayer, they would all be removed. If, on the other hand, this proposed visit to the Continent were *not* God's plan at all, but only the fruit of self-will; if some secret, selfish, and perhaps subtle motive were controlling, then indeed hindrances might well be interferences of God, designed to stay his steps. In the latter case, Mr. Müller rightly judged that difficulties in the way would naturally vex and annoy him; that he would not like to look at them, and would seek to remove them by his own efforts. Instead of giving him an inward satisfaction as affording God an opportunity to intervene in his behalf, they would arouse impatience and vexation, as preventing self-will from carrying out its own purposes.

Such discriminations have only to be stated to any spiritual mind, to have their wisdom at once apparent. Any believing child of God may safely gauge the measure of his surrender to the will of God, in any matter, by the measure of impatience he feels at the obstacles in the way; for, in proportion as self-will sways him, whatever seems to oppose or hinder his plans will disturb or annoy; and, instead of quietly leaving all such hindrances and obstacles to the Lord, to deal with them as He pleases, in His own way and time, the wilful disciple will, impatiently and in the energy of the flesh, set himself to remove them by his own scheming and struggling, and he will brook no delay.

Whenever Satan acts as a hinderer (1 Thes. 2. 18) the obstacles which he puts in our way need not dismay us; God permits them to delay or deter us for the time, only as a test of our patience and faith, and the satanic hinderer will be met by a divine Helper who will sweep away all his obstacles, as with the breath of His mouth.

An attentive study of George Müller's life yields the impressive lesson that, throughout the over seventy years of his course as a Christian and an active servant of God, he seems never to have missed the way and to have needed to retrace his steps. This indeed should be the normal Christian experience. For the path of the righteous (the man who studies to do always and only what is right before God) is compared to the shining light, rising steadily from dawn to midday (Prov. 4. 18). Now the sun has never been known to hesitate, miss its way, and have to lose time to regain its true course. But such a life can be lived only by ceaseless divine guidance and energy, even as it is God who keeps the sun in its true path.

## V. CONDITIONS OF UNDERSTANDING GOD AND HIS WAYS

1. *Knowledge.* The greatest leader of men of all time was Moses. He took up the colossal task of leading a vast rabble of lately liberated slaves, and he guided and disciplined them through forty years of life in a desert. Feeling the immensity of his responsibility, he prayed thus to God: "Show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee" (Ex. 33. 12-16). To

understand God's ways of doing things is a chief means of getting to understand God Himself. It is in such acquaintance with God that our *eternal* life stands (John 17. 3). For that only is *living* which is in harmony with the Living God; all else is but dead work. So that to walk with God in His ways is as indispensable to our true life as the guidance of God to Israel in the desert. They of Israel who would not walk in God's ways found the desert a place of death. Whereas they who went on with God got through the desert and lived in the land of promise.

But Moses felt keenly that he needed more than God's guidance, he needed God's presence, God Himself with him. Here again the condition must of necessity be that we walk in His ways, for obviously God cannot and will not walk in any other ways than His own. His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways His ways; consequently we must forsake our thoughts and our ways and must learn His thoughts and follow His ways (Isa. 55. 7-9).

Here lies a chief reason why so much of the experience of many Christians is confused, darkened, with little benefit to themselves or others. It is fatally easy to bring over into our post-conversion period the thoughts and ways of our pre-Christian days, even as Israel brought into the wilderness, the ideas, lusts, ways they had followed before redemption. Now life in tents, wandering in a wilderness, a region where no food could be grown, was so essentially different to life in Egypt, one of the most fertile regions of earth, that Israel had to start life over again. And what was true in matters of the body was still more true of the inward man. In questions of right and wrong, good and evil, they had very much more to unlearn and re-learn, and they were all too slow to discard their own thoughts and accept the thoughts of God.

The chief lesson they had to learn was to be *followers*; not to move camp till the Pillar of cloud moved, but to move when it moved, and where (Num. 9. 15-23). To move without the Ark and the Pillar assured defeat (Num. 14. 9-45); but victory was secure when Jehovah went before them (Num. 10. 35).

And corresponding with this outward guidance, the people were to learn to follow also the moral directions of God's law. Those who did this *really* benefited by the outward leading;

the others died in the desert in spite of it. For material advantages, though real, and even when God given, are only transitory, and may leave him who enjoyed them destitute at last. It is when the heart appropriates and the life displays the inward, spiritual guidance and the presence of God that permanent blessing accrues and eternal life advances towards its goal. Then the very desert becomes the path of progress to the followers of the Lamb, whereas to others it is *Kibrothhattaavah*, the grave of them that lusted (Num. 11. 34; 1 Cor. 10. 6).

They who do feel the necessity of the guidance and presence of God will not seek it in vain. It was granted to Moses. But the distinction made in Psalm 103. 7 is searching, "He made known His ways unto Moses, His *doings* unto the children of Israel". The one understood God's ways of going about matters; the majority saw only what God *did*, His visible acts. The principles guiding His acts they did not discern, and so they soon forgot His doing (Ps. 78. 11), and turned again to their own ways to their undoing.

Some learn at school the formulae for working sundry problems in geometry or mathematics; but if they do not grasp the reasons governing the working, they shortly forget the process and cannot longer solve the problems. It is so in the spiritual realm. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom and *understandeth it not*, then cometh the evil one and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart (Matt. 13. 19). Hence the urgency of the prayer, "That I may know Thy ways, and get to know thee Thyself". Then service rises to be co-operation, and God's co-worker attains to some instinctive sense of what God is about and the ways by which He will work out His purpose. Then is life harmonious, powerful, restful, even in the desert; for when the Lord goes before, it is to seek out a *resting place* for us (Num. 10. 33). Then the heart ceases to be surprised or stumbled by the hardships of the wilderness, nor is frightened by its foes or perils. "The people that know their God shall be strong, and do" (Dan. 11. 32).

*O blessed life! the heart at rest*

*When all without tumultuous seems —*

*That trusts a Higher Will, and deems*

*That Higher Will, not mine, the best.* (Matson).

2. *Faith.* But such walking with God implies a further condition, a working confidence in God. Without this the soul will fail at the tests God proposes. Israel could not trust God to defeat the giants and so they would not go up and fight; thus they forfeited guidance and failed to inherit (Num. 13-14). Distrust and disobedience are twins and are inseparables (Heb. 3. 18, 19).

Distrust of God is sadly common even in the express things of God, in the very realms where He is most needed and most entitled to His own way, even in His house, the church, and in the work of spreading His message among men. He made known His ways unto His apostles; they made them known unto others; and the records of these His wishes and ways are given permanently in the New Testament. But, alas, how few have ever persevered in God's ways of worship, of service in His house, of gospel efforts. There is a practical distrust of the Holy Spirit and His ways, and a consequent return to human notions and ways in worship and labour.

Yet they who take this backward course often profess to seek the mind of God from His word; but not having faith to follow the ways therein shown they presently declare that no pattern is therein found, and that so they must follow their own best judgment as to how to worship and work.

Thus did Israel's leaders come to Jeremiah professedly to seek the guidance of God; but not having a real trust in God, they could not act upon His direction to stay in God's land and rely on Him to protect and support them, and they declared that God had not given directions through His prophet. Through distrust of God they were determined to take their own course, and they carried the majority with them. Toward Egypt they set their faces, and it seemed to prosper, for in Egypt they duly arrived, and found there quiet and food. There, to be sure, they even built a synagogue and maintained the form of divine worship. But God was not in it, as Jeremiah forewarned them and as the ultimate issue showed (Jer. 42-44).

Such has been the history of the Christian centuries. In every generation there have been leaders who so acted. Ostensibly they have sought the mind of God as to His church and work, but, with their own plans formed and minds resolved, they have declared and still do declare, that they



do not see in the New Testament a pattern to be followed. Therefore they invent methods of their own borrowed from Egypt; they force the worship and work of the Lord to their own devised patterns, and often they seem to prosper; they carry with them the majority; they get large funds, gather great meetings, perhaps make many professed converts; they create vast organizations and make a fair show in the flesh; but at last God writes on it, Ichabod, the heavenly glory is departed. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and take note that to gain divine guidance and to act upon it demands real faith, a present working in God.

A minister of a great denomination discerned in the New Testament that apostles and evangelists did not receive a fixed salary, but were supported by voluntary gifts. In faith he acted upon this guidance from the Word. Asked by fellow-ministers whether he wished them to follow his example, he answered, "which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned" (Heb. 11. 29).

A number of church leaders in eastern Europe were shown the Lord's plan for His churches and that it did not include inter-church organization, with the attendant details, such as central control, a central fund, human regulations, officials, salaries. They acknowledged that the plan shown to them was Scriptural, but they did not follow it. Asked why, they replied that they agreed that it was the right and best way *for such as had faith to take it*. They had not such faith. Their own official positions and incomes were involved; they could not trust God without these, and so they chose to regard the ways of the Lord as optional.

Only faith can traverse the desert with God; only faith can walk on the waves with Christ; only faith can conquer the giants and inherit the land of promise. Only faith can take God's way; unbelief cannot see His guidance or disobeys it. But if any one intends to do he shall know (John 7. 17).

3. *Waiting.* God's time for action is as perfect as His way of acting. King Saul's position was critical (1 Sam. 13). The Philistines had gathered in overwhelming force and were about to attack. His own men had scattered. God's prophet had not come to offer the sacrifice and entreat the help of God. Saul was unwilling to fight without seeking God but unable to await God's hour. Something had to be

done; the last hour for action had arrived; so he forced himself (ver. 12) to do what he knew it was not his province to do, for he was not a priest; and no sooner had he completed his presumptuous and premature sacrifice than God's hour and God's servant arrived. But Saul had disobeyed the God whose aid he professed to desire and had undermined his position and authority. God's last minute is often a little after our last minute. "Blessed are all they that wait for Him" (Isa. 30. 18). "Who is wise, that he may understand these things? prudent, that he may know them?; for the ways of Jehovah are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein" (Hos. 14. 9, A.S.V.).

God's governmental machinery cannot be overdriven or forced. It works smoothly, accurately, to time, His time. It is dangerous when we force ourselves to take our own course. I had promised to help a young Christian in a difficult affair. That morning I was taken suddenly ill, and fever made it dangerous to leave the house. I was unwilling to disappoint him and unaccustomed to letting my body dictate, so I forced myself against my better judgment and went. Apparently all was well, for we succeeded in getting matters ordered in his favour. But before long I had great reason for regret, because he turned out to be very unsatisfactory, and I was greatly prejudiced by having supported him.

God in His wisdom may not always facilitate, but may frustrate. One of His most faithful servants had to say "He hath walled up my ways with hewn stone" (Lam. 3. 9: cf. Jer. 36. 5). It is folly to try and surmount the wall or break it down. Hindrance may be guidance.

In the impetuosity of manhood's full energy Moses commenced prematurely what was indeed designed of God to be his life-work, the delivering of his people from oppression; but he needed forty years of self-discipline in the desert before he was fitted in spirit.

A zealous young man, desirous of serving in the gospel in a tropical and hard sphere, came to stay with me to talk over sundry serious hindrances in his way. Both I and a still more experienced servant of Christ felt him to be not yet so spiritually developed as to be equal to the land and life in view. He was advised to wait, the view being expressed

that the difficulties were of God to hinder his going forth until he was equal in spirit to the dangers and labours ahead. But he took other counsel, adopted human measures, put pressure on the circumstances, and in connection with a certain missionary magazine and fund he was soon in the land of his choice. After five years of thwarting, discipline, and deep exercise of soul, he owned that his departure had been in advance of the divine leading. It was only then that the Lord opened to him the sphere of work for which by that time he had, it is hoped, become fit.

But in contrast, the man Jesus had such delicate perception of His heavenly Father's will that He would not yield to His mother's suggestion to supply wine at the feast until the exact hour had come (John 2. 4). Nor could he be taunted into action by His unbelieving brothers (John 7. 2-10). He had waited through 4,000 years of human sorrow and need before coming to earth as Saviour, for He would not come of Himself, but only when sent by His Father in the fulness of time, the fit time, at the consummation, the heading up, the conjunction of the ages (John 8. 42: Heb. 9. 26). He has waited nineteen centuries, and is still waiting, His Father's time for His return to reign and to carry to completion His saving work for the earth (Ps. 110. 1). The passage cited is found four times in the New Testament, as if to impress our minds with this thought of the waiting attitude of the Son of God. Let each ask for himself a fulfilment of the prayer, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and *into the patience of Christ*" (2 Thess. 3. 5), for only as far as this is our state of heart shall we be able to recognize the leading of God.

## VI. METHODS OF GUIDANCE

As an embroiderer or an illuminator of books shows his skill by variety of design or colour so does God His wisdom. It is greatly variegated (Eph. 3. 10 *πολυποίκιλος*). He reveals the same variety in His guidance.

This variety serves good ends. By it there is a display of what God is, as superior to others, and thereby He receives glory as doing what none other can do. As long as the magicians could do what Moses did who was to say that his



God was greater than their gods? But presently they were baffled and were compelled to acknowledge the finger of God (Ex. 8. 19).

But not only is God honoured, but the man gains rest-giving assurance, inward peace, by seeing that the great God is acting in His affairs. The soul says, If God be for me what matters who is against me? I will not fear; what shall man do unto me? In this confidence he can wait patiently, act resolutely, be content to know only the next step, be quiet as to the future.

By this process the prayer of Moses is answered; the soul accumulates experience of the ways of God and gains experimental acquaintance with God Himself. Thus is the eternal life in him developed, expanded, enriched; the child of God becomes a man of God, thoroughly equipped unto every good work (2 Tim. 3. 14-17).

One *general* feature of divine guidance is that it is *supernatural*. A pillar of cloud is not a common phenomenon. That something so unsubstantial should stand stationary, should not be dispersed by the violent unobstructed winds of the desert, should move hither and thither by evident control—these features indicate that God may be expected to guide by methods beyond the disposal of any one else. Life under His guidance rises above the commonplace; one must expect the unexpected, be prepared for the unlikely, the unforeseen.

What man can do by his natural God-given intelligence he does not need special guidance in doing. He does not need special guidance to eat food, make clothes, mount a horse, or board a train. But in the many and crucial matters which transcend natural wisdom man is encouraged to ask wisdom of God, assured that He gives it liberally, nor upbraids us for our lack of it. Only he must ask in faith, in the confident expectation that the wisdom needed and sought will most certainly be given as promised. If this confidence be not present the asker will either not wait for the guidance, or not see the leading if granted, or will hesitate to follow it; being double-minded he will of necessity be unstable, unreliable. To what purpose should guidance be given to such an one? (Jam. 1. 5-7).

Of the various God-employed methods of guiding the following may be considered in detail.

1. *The commands* of God are guidance to do or not to do. Thou shalt not commit adultery, nor steal, nor covet (Deut. 5. 18, 19, 21), nor take vengeance, nor even bear a grudge (Lev. 19. 18): these are plain guidance upon the acts or states of heart specified. Many problems of young people are settled at once by the command "Honour thy father and thy mother (Ex. 20. 12: Eph. 6. 1-3). It is deeply distressing to observe how many young Christians will foster in themselves the rebellious spirit of the worldly, and will strengthen their hearts to resist also their heavenly Father by defying this His command to honour their parents. This of necessity induces an insensitiveness to His guidance, which in turn leaves them to their own devices, follies, blunders, and thus many a life of spiritual promise and possibilities is wrecked. Of course, it is supposed here that the parents do not demand some course or act contrary to any command of God.

The precepts of the New Testament are equally binding and useful. A Christian asked if I could help her as to investing £200 that had just come to her. I answered that the matter was made quite simple by Christ's words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth . . . but in heaven" (Matt. 6. 19-21). She had the wisdom and dutifulness to follow her Lord's direction.

There is plain instruction that confession of Christ should be made by immersion in water in the name of the Trinity. It is vain to wait for other guidance. Again, a Christian of many years standing never came to the table of the Lord. His excuse to me was that the Lord had never put it into his heart to do so. This was never likely to be done, seeing that the Lord has said plainly, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22. 19). Further guidance is not to be expected; nor did he receive any special leading during the sixteen years I knew him. To neglect a clear direction in the Word and wait for some unpromised impulse in the heart is simply disobedience. He who will not follow divine direction on one matter may find himself left without it on all matters: a miserable situation.

2. *The vital principles* of God's commands extend the guidance. A countryman may need expert advice as to his well or other water supply, if this gets out of order. Man

needs divine instruction as to his heart, out of which flow the streams of action and influence (Prov. 4. 23), for, as a defiled well, so is man's heart.

The principle of the command not to commit adultery is that one must suppress the fleshly desire that leads thereto (Matt. 5. 27, 28). The command not to kill bids us not to allow a feeling of hatred, for this is the root of murder (Matt. 5. 21, 22: 1 John 3. 15). Some further illustrations may help.

a. The principle of the command (Deut. 25. 4) that the ox should not be muzzled when it treads out the corn, but should be able to eat of the grain, meant for Paul that the labourer in the gospel ought to be supported in material things by those whom he serves in spiritual things. Yet the ox was not compelled to eat; neither is the preacher obliged to accept such support (1 Cor. 9. 7-15).

b. Isaiah 49. 6: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth", pictures what the Messiah will be to all the nations at the time when He will "raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel". But this millennial work of Christ warrants and means that the news concerning Him as the Saviour is to be made known to all men today, not to Jews only (Acts 13. 46, 47).

c. The subjection of the woman to the man required in Christian assemblies is that required under the law (1 Cor. 14. 34: "as also saith the law"). Now the law allowed for the Spirit using women in public prayer and as prophetesses (Ex. 15. 20: Judges 4. 4; 5. 1: 1 Sam. 1. 26; 2. 1: 2 Kings 22. 14: Luke 1. 46; 2. 36-38), and thus Paul sanctioned the same exercises (1 Cor. 11. 5-6). But the law did not allow a woman to hold the office of a public teacher, so neither did Paul (1 Tim. 2. 12: "I permit not a woman to *teach*, nor to have dominion over the man"). Praying and prophesying do not imply authority; teaching does, and so it is reserved for men.

Such use of Scripture requires caution and spiritual discernment. It should correspond with the New Testament usage, be sober, not fanciful or far-fetched. In a certain land there is a mission station named Mount Zion. An evangelist hundreds of miles away came in his reading to the words "ye are come unto Mount Zion" (Heb. 12. 22), from which

he concluded that he was to go to that station and preach. A doubtful conclusion, one may think.

3. *Guidance by circumstances.* The Almighty secretly controls all persons and all events. Because of this, circumstances may afford indications of His present will. We are exhorted to watch affairs and to act accordingly. "When they persecute you in this city, flee into the next" (Matt. 10. 23). "When ye see Jerusalem being encompassed with armies . . . flee" (Luke 21. 20, 21).

The supposition is that God's people are not themselves choosing or manipulating affairs. This would be contrary to the injunction "Lean not upon thine own understanding" (Prov. 3. 5). But it may be that affairs take so unlikely a turn, or there is such a conjunction of events, that the man of spiritual discernment cannot but recognize that it is God who is working and leading.

For some years it became increasingly evident to me that we ought to move our home. Conditions proved this. With our advancing age the country house and gardens were too large, an ever-increasing burden, and the winter climate was too severe, and the lack of indoor conveniences a heavy tax. The landlord really needed the premises for his own family.

But the present acute shortage of houses made long enquiries in many areas quite fruitless. One read Psalm 127. 1 thus: "Except Jehovah show a house they labour in vain that seek it". Then, suddenly, unexpected and unlikely circumstances showed God at work. Two kind friends were about to sell a house but decided to offer to rent it to me. Thus they forwent the advantage of present high prices. There was vacant possession; few repairs were needed; the size and conveniences were excellent; the garden suitable; the situation pleasant; the climate mild. The Ministry of War Transport proved helpful, which saved much money. A remover from the locality of the new house was sending vans nearly to our then house, thus greatly reducing the cost. These, and other circumstances, left no doubt that God was guiding and arranging. I had only the congenial part to follow His leading with confidence and gratitude.

*Conjunction of events* may often show the hand and will of Him who "works all things *together* for good". At the



exact time that Peter had seen the vision that prepared him to visit Gentiles, the messengers of Cornelius arrived at the door to invite him.

In June 1910, I was on the Nilgiri Hills, South India. My esteemed friends, Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Golden, then of Coimbatore, were there and begged me to travel to England by the ship they were about to take at Bombay. The company would have been mutually agreeable, but just then I had no money for such a journey, though only God knew this. Ignorant of this, Mr. Golden wrote to Thos. Cook and Son at Bombay and asked them to offer me a passage on that ship, which they did. By the same post or (perhaps the next), I received from Egypt a letter from an American lady I had met there over a year before. She mentioned meetings she proposed to arrange on the sea shore at Ramleh for the benefit of Christian workers on furlough, and invited my help in ministry. At the same time she enclosed a sum a little more than sufficient to cover the cost of the journey, and the draft was upon Thos. Cook and Son, Bombay, and I had only to forward it to them to book the berth offered.

Again, in 1935, I was travelling by rail from Haifa to Cairo. As I neared the latter I remembered that an Egyptian child of mine in faith, converted perhaps twenty years before, had been sent in Government service to Aswan, the southernmost town in Egypt, perhaps 500 miles from Cairo. It came upon my heart that, in spite of the long journey, I must visit him, and see as to his spiritual welfare. On reaching Cairo I found a letter from his wife. It had been sent to England, and had been returned, reaching Cairo the very day I did so, and it said that, should the Lord again send me to Egypt, they hoped I would visit them, and the money for the journey was enclosed. One interesting item was that the writer, an American, had married my friend some two years before, yet had only now written to introduce herself to me.

Such experiences (and I have been granted many) afford singularly happy confidence that God is leading and will bless, but here also caution and much prayer are required, for it is easy to misread circumstances.

In 1910, when in South India, circumstances seemed to indicate that I was to take a tour in China, entering by the south west via Burma. Events showed that I had miscon-

ceived the leading, and that the indications were designed to lead as far as Rangoon in Burma. There my way was blocked and there a most gracious but wholly unexpected period of three months service was enjoyed.

The events that prevented the journey to China afford another example of guidance by circumstances. The journey was to be first by rail and then in upper Burma by river steamer to Bhamo, covering about one thousand miles. It would take several days. I had money for the fare to that town but none for food on the journey, but this did not burden my heart, for the Lord has taught His servants to live by the day without anxious thought as to the food of tomorrow. The evening before the journey was to begin was passed with friends, one of whom before her marriage had worked with the China Inland Mission. She narrated two or three experiences of how God had provided the fare for journeys at the railway station, not before. I could not but consider why she might be telling me of these events just that night, and whether God was preparing me for some token of His will and care at the station the next day.

In due course I reached the station and found clear guidance as to that day. The departure hour of the daily train had just been brought forward and it was already gone. I could have left the next day; but here my desire to honour the day of rest became guidance, for I must have travelled over the coming Sunday, which for many years I had not, for example's sake, been happy to do. So I resolved to wait till the following Monday. But on the Friday a sharp attack of Rangoon fever put a journey out of the question for several days and made me thankful that I was not on an up-river steamer. The delay consumed the money for the fare; later further attacks of fever occurred; and thus the Lord had His blessed way of keeping me where it was His purpose to use me among a group of Burmese believers. Only this year (1946) I have learned from an English brother, lately in Rangoon, that the spiritual impress of that period remains.

*I stood in the way before thee,  
In the way thou wouldest have gone;  
For this is the mark of my chosen,  
That they shall be Mine alone.* (H. Suso).

Fair Havens (Acts 27. 8) answered to its name only in fair weather; it was not convenient for winter. The master and the owner of the ship and the more part of the crew and passengers decided to sail further and reach a more suitable harbour; "and when the south wind blew softly supposing that they had obtained their purpose they weighed anchor and sailed" (verses 12, 13). The sequel showed that the apparently favourable appearance misled them, and that a man of God on board had given better counsel in disregard of circumstances.

How, then, shall one distinguish? The answer lies in the words (1) "supposing" and (2) "purpose". (1) They had no divinely given assurance; indeed, they had not sought it; they judged simply by appearances; they relied only upon their own experience as practised seaman; they trusted their own commonsense; they *supposed* all was going favourably; they made an assumption (δοκέω), thus leaning upon their own understanding. (2) They had a scheme of their own, a plan they had set before their minds (πρόθεσις). This is the opposite of meekness, as described in Chapter 2 above, and it forbids our being guided.

This leads to another method by which God guides the meek.

4. *Guidance of the Judgment*, as it is said, "The meek He will guide in judgment."

It must be noticed here that *conscience* is no guide. It is not its office. People say: I do this because my conscience does not accuse me; or, I do not do that because my conscience troubles me. Now it is well not to outrage conscience by doing what it condemns, and so far as it goes this may be a kind of negative guidance. Yet consider this fact; that the conscience of one Christian allows what the conscience of another Christian forbids. And this further fact; that at one stage of development conscience condemns a man; but later on, when the same man has gained the mind of God more fully, his conscience sanctions what formerly it forbade; or vice versa. Plainly conscience does not, cannot determine whether an act or course is right or wrong. It is the judge that settles the case: conscience is the officer that enforces the order of the judge. If the judge reverses his ver-

dict the bailiff will reverse his action; but the bailiff does not decide the case<sup>1</sup>.

It must also be observed that *sincerity* and *earnestness* are no guide. One may be in great earnest in pressing on along the wrong road sincerely believing it to be the right road, and yet only getting further from the desired end. The fresher the breeze and the fuller the canvas the faster the ship goes astray if the course has been wrongly set.

It is the province of the *judgment* to set the course, and God guides the meek to form a sound judgment. This involves that before-mentioned weighing up of all the factors and features of a matter before reaching a decision; and when this is done honestly, carefully, prayerfully, God sways the balance in favour of his purpose.

Very often He does this by suggesting to the mind the *spiritual* factors that ought always to outweigh the material. The disciple of Christ is to seek *first* the kingdom of God and the practical righteousness that accords with God's holiness (Matt. 6. 33). This one fundamental principle of the true Christian life will alone settle a great variety of problems.

A Christian man, with a family, asked advice as to accepting or refusing an excellent post in London which had been offered without being sought and which would bring distinct financial advancement. I proposed these considerations. (a) Would the higher post as manager unavoidably involve transacting types of business against which his conscience would protest and which did not arise in his present lowlier post? (b) Would the extra demands on vigour and leisure be such as to imperil soul health and progress and his direct Christian activities? (c) What might be the spiritual effect on him and his family of increased affluence and comfort?

In the issue he declined the post on another proper ground, even that the unlikelihood of securing a house might involve an indefinite period during which he must be very much away from his family and unable to discharge his moral duties towards them as husband and father.

This is an interesting example of how the natural and the spiritual elements may properly combine to aid a decision; for a duty to God-given dependents combines both natural

<sup>1</sup> See the writer's paper *The Clean Heart*, p. 16. "The Heart and the Conscience".



and spiritual factors, and divine love becomes the deciding principle, weighing the scale in favour of the spiritual results against the financial and earthly considerations. This natural factor might have wisely weighed with many gospel workers in other lands, and so might much sorrow and reproach have been avoided which have too often arisen through children having lacked parental influence. I knew a merchant captain who, at financial sacrifice, retired early, so that his sons should have the benefit of his authority and companionship. They handsomely rewarded his sacrifice and devotion.

Again, one of the most devoted women I ever knew spent her life and means conducting in a tropical land homes of rest where Christian workers could secure refreshment at reasonable rates. She had three such centres and was asked to open a fourth. The new district was excellent for the purpose and a real need would be met. It would have been proper to have warned her against overtaxing brain and body; but she was spiritually minded, and I put to her a purely spiritual consideration by saying, "The work is needed and will be valuable, but do not commence it unless you are quite sure you will have leisure for *adequate prayer* over its conduct and details. I knew she had not, and she knew it, and did not undertake it.

It is to be much observed that this method of weighing carefully all the circumstances and considerations is wholly removed from that following of the first impulse that rises to the mind and which many at once obey as of God. The judge guards himself against his own prejudices and impulses and seeks to reach a verdict by facts and arguments.

It is also wholly foreign to that most dangerous state called "passivity". The Buddhist, the spiritist, and others study to reduce the mind to passivity and to wait for an impulse or suggestion to be put into the thoughts. Or they may accept without scrutiny an idea unexpectedly presented to the mind when busy about other matters.

Years ago an ardent Oxford Group member urged me to read a then well-known book they were using at that time as their classic. The writer described himself as having been formerly a worldly, gambling man and editor of a Sunday newspaper. Busy one Sunday in his garden there suddenly flashed into his mind an idea for increasing the circulation of

his paper. He was to invite twelve well-known writers to give their views on religion. These included an atheist, a leading spiritist, and a writer who, as a Jew, rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It must surely be obvious that neither the Spirit of God nor any holy angelic spirit injected into the editor's mind the suggestion to get such enemies of God and His truth to ventilate their false opinions for the purpose of boosting a Sunday paper. Yet when the editor narrated this experience to three then leading Groupists they unitedly agreed that it was divine guidance.

Of all *such* "guidance" let us beware. A mere impulse of our own mind may prove delusive; if it comes from without it may be demonic. It is the *judgment* which God enlightens and sways by relevant facts and considerations, His gracious part being to present these with cogency and weight; but the man himself must ponder and decide.

## 5. EXCEPTIONAL GUIDANCE

### (1) *Guidance by tests.*

Genesis 24. Abraham commissioned his senior servant to find a wife for Isaac. The journey was long, the destination all but unknown; whether there was among the relatives to be visited a suitable woman had to be discovered, and, if so, who she was. A mistake would be more than serious, having regard to the purposes of God for Isaac and his descendants.

The journey being the God-given duty of the servant he was in the path of God's will for him, and could say, "Jehovah hath led me in the way" (verse 27). Thus the assurance of Abraham was justified when he said in advance "Jehovah, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way" (verse 40). Notice here again that the guidance of God is given to one who walks habitually before Him, as under His eye. Observe also that the secret influence upon human hearts by which the guidance is granted may be exerted by angels. There is no other explanation of such distinct and appropriate ideas and impulses as enter godly minds, except it be when the Spirit of the Lord Himself acts.

The servant proposed a double test, the fulfilment of which was to be the sign that a certain damsel was the one chosen of God for Isaac. Many women would go to the well together

to draw the evening supply of water. Every traveller in the East has seen this, as the writer often has. Any one of these would have shown the customary oriental courtesy of giving a drink to a traveller. But he asked to be directed to apply to one who should do unasked an unlikely kindness, even volunteer to draw for ten camels also. This was not a light task. Camels on the march drink much at the end of the day, and the girl might quite rightly have left this labour to the camel drivers. But the angel guided him to speak to the right woman and her to fulfil the request of which she knew nothing.

This proposing to oneself of obstacles, the removing of which the more clearly reveals that God is acting, is often very wise and helpful. A young man known to me fell deeply in love at the first glance at a certain face, and knew he must have its owner for himself. But he knew also that it must be in the will of God or not at all. He adopted a triple test. He was lodging with an elderly lady who had saved his life by nursing him through a dangerous illness. His marriage would involve a complete rearrangement of her life, and he decided that if she felt difficulty about his course he would go no further till that hindrance was removed. Further, though the young lady was of full age and not living at her home, he decided to approach her parents first, and only if they were agreeable would he apply the third test of asking the lady herself. The three steps were taken in succession and ended in a God-blessed union. This was pretty close to the case of Abraham's servant. The first sight of Rebecca attracted him; he then gained first the approval of her relatives, and then her own consent.

(2) *By Special Insight.*

1 Kings 14. The blind Ahijah sits in his house. A woman is approaching to enquire of God concerning her sick son. She is the king's wife, but intends to pretend she is another. Before she reaches the presence of the prophet he calls aloud to her and says, "Come in thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings".

Acts 5. In the house of God, the assembly of His people Ananias and Sapphira made statements that no one present

could suspect to be false; but Peter is divinely enlightened to expose their deceit, and they fall dead for lying to the Holy Ghost dwelling in the church.

In the truly remarkable book *The Scots Worthies* it is narrated that John Welsh, the Covenanting minister of Ayr, was asked by the city officials to advise whether two merchants should be admitted to trade. Removing his hat, he prayed quietly, looking upwards, and then advised that they be not admitted, asserting very positively that the plague was in their packs. They went to another town, some sixteen miles away, sold their goods, and forthwith such an infection developed that the living were hardly able to bury the dead.

Of this man of God there are narrated in the same book various other instances of similar prophetic insight and announcements. A certain nobleman promised to put a certain petition before King James in London but forgot to do so. He informed Welsh that he had presented it but had received no answer. To which Welsh replied, "Nay, my lord, you should not lie to God, and to me, for I know you never delivered it, though I warned you to take heed not to undertake it except you would perform it; but because you have dealt so unfaithfully, remember that God will take from you both estate and honours, and give them to your neighbour in your own time": which accordingly came to pass; for, both his estate and honours were in his own time transferred to James Stuart, a cadet, but not the lineal heir of the family.

The following may interest and help leaders of churches. In my twenty-sixth year I united with a large assembly of Christians and gave myself continuously to pastoral service. More than 200 were in the fellowship. In the first six months I got to know them all and felt in my spirit that about forty were in a spiritual state to be a trouble in the church. I said nothing to any one, but watched. Before long a storm arose; in every case the persons I had noted fomented the agitation, and in due time they left in a body and started an opposition effort not far away. Such discerning of spirits is not that merely natural faculty by which some more accurately than others judge of character; it is a discernment specially given as required, and its practical value is obvious.



(3) *By Visions.*

Acts 16. 9, 10. Paul was moving westward across Asia Minor. As he approached the west he thought to turn south-west but was forbidden; then northward but was restrained; this left no course but to go forward north-west which brought him to Troas on the coast at the nearest point to Europe. What now? He must either retrace his steps and go eastward or cross the sea? Guidance to the latter course came by a vision of the night. A man from the nearest land beyond the sea appeared, beseeching him to go thither and give the divine help the gospel imparts. He went, and the work of God entered upon its attack and conquests in the then world centres.

Acts 10. 9-23. The good news is to be taken to non-Jews, not to Israelites only. Peter is the one who must use the key of knowledge to open this door. He is not prepared to do so and must be divinely constrained thereto. So he is made to see the sheet let down from heaven, indicating that the vision is from above. It contains ceremonially unclean creatures such as the Jew was forbidden by the law of Moses to eat. But the heavenly voice directs him to do this, and assures him that the former restrictions are cancelled, for God has cleansed all foods. Now at last, after many years, Peter grasps the sense of Christ's instruction that made all foods clean (Mark 7. 19), and he is ready to commingle with Gentiles, as in the house of Cornelius.

In this land, as in Egypt and India, I have heard from the parties themselves descriptions of remarkable visions or dreams used by God in connection with men being drawn to the Lord. This was the object of the two visions considered above.

Abraham, Jacob, Balaam, Samuel, Ezekiel, Daniel and others were taught by God in visions. Paul was so instructed (Acts 18. 9: 2 Cor. 12. 1) and John also (Rev. 9. 17). The promise in Joel 2. 28, "Your young men shall see visions" is given present application by Peter (Acts 2. 17).

That God does still so lead (as in Job's day; 33. 13-18) is not open to question; but it is not the rule, and only a fool would dream that every dream he dreams is God-sent. It was a lamentable period for God's people when there was no

frequent vision (1 Sam. 3. 1), for it meant that there was no one enlightened enough to interpret and apply the written word of God, and "where there is no vision the people cannot be restrained" (Prov. 29. 18). Yet we are warned that fleshly men will err in vision (Isa. 28. 7) and false prophets will declare false visions out of their own hearts (Jer. 14. 14; 23. 16). This history of the "Tongues" movement, certainly in its earlier period, gave solemn instances of this erring in visions, by which many honest but simple souls were deceived.

(4) *Guidance by Angels or the Angel of Jehovah.*

Gen. 16. 7. The first mention in Scripture of angelic ministry shows that at times the Lord of angels acts in angelic form. The occasion is moving. A woman slave is fleeing from harsh treatment by another woman, her mistress, a course justified in itself, and later sanctioned by statute (Deut. 23. 15). The Son of God Himself, as the Messenger of God, intervenes in this domestic strife, and the divine counsel to the wronged yet difficult (verse 4) Hagar is "Return, submit". Let this heavenly counsel be weighed. It put Hagar on the path of disciplining the pride, self-will, indignation, impetuosity, self-guidance that had led her to flee from troubles known to risk worse troubles in a desert, to spring out of the frying pan into the fire. Nearly 2,000 years pass, and Paul, Christ's messenger among men, takes exactly the same course with a runaway slave, Onesimus; he constrains him to return to his master. In both instances the homes of Abraham and Philemon, though not perfectly ordered, were spheres where God was owned and present and would bless; to flee thence was to leave a sphere of grace, to forfeit a place in the counsels of God being there wrought out, and to risk life in the world where the fear of God did not restrain evil.

Return! face the trials, not flee from them. Submit, not revolt; submit, not indeed to the mere circumstances, but to the will of God met in them. To submit is a key to Christian conduct in the commonest relations of life, those in which we all must stand daily. See Ephesians 5. 21 to 6. 9, "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ". Therefore wives are to be in subjection; husbands are to love (and therefore to serve, even as love ever does); children are to obey; fathers are to nurture (and therefore to toil to provide

spiritual nourishment and training); slaves are to be obedient, to see the will of God in their circumstances and to do it from the heart; and masters are to do the same things unto them. See also Colossians 3. 18: 1 Timothy 2. 11; 3. 4: 1 Peter 1. 5: Hebrew 13. 17: 1 Peter 5. 5. The younger in the church are to submit to the elder; the elders, as all others, are to gird themselves with humility to serve, as the Lord of all put on the towel of the slave to wash the feet of His followers (John 13. 4): and 1 Peter 2. 13 teaches subjects to submit to the God-sanctioned actions of civil authorities.

The human heart (Hagar) says, Rebel! Escape! and so until this day all classes of society are afflicted with agitation, unrest, upheaval, overturning, collapse, and all relationships of life are embittered, ruined, miserable; for force, the all but universal method of fighting injustice, does but aggravate sorrow; whereas the divine method gives to those who follow it quietness of spirit in the trials. But only he who possesses and is possessed by the Spirit of Christ can follow this method.

That great Angel of Jehovah, who first gave this counsel of perfection to a humbled, wronged, female slave, later humbled Himself to become on earth the Man of Sorrows, poor despised, rejected, oppressed, outraged. In these, in themselves wrong and godless conditions, He met and honoured the will of His Father for Him; and when leaving this scene of His afflictions He bade His followers to follow His steps, promised to them His Spirit to make this possible, and bequeathed them His peace, that tranquility of spirit which they had always seen in Him under all adversity. They accepted His yoke and found it true that they

*“ Who serve Thee with a quiet mind  
Find in Thy service rest ”.*

In this old-time counsel of the Angel, “Return, submit”, is the exact guidance and the only guidance that is needed in a thousand of the irritating circumstances which perplex and provoke the natural man. Kinder and wiser counsel was never given. He who follows it will say “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119. 105). The earthwork smothers the shell; the stone rampart bursts it and is smashed.

Genesis 31. 3. The same divine Angel spoke to Jacob in a

dream and informed him that the time had arrived, after twenty-one years, when he should leave Syria and return to Canaan.

Judges 13. 3, 4. An angel visited the wife of Manoah with directions as to her food and drink while carrying the child she was to bear. She was not to drink any intoxicants nor to eat unclean food. The Mosaic regulations as to food were directed primarily to the securing of health in a hot climate. Well indeed had it been for mankind if all women expecting to become mothers had known and followed this angelic instruction.

Matthew 1 and 2: Luke 1 and 2. At that unique hour in the annals of eternity when God became man by birth of a virgin, again angels acted as the messengers of the Highest, to instruct both Zacharias as to the birth of John, and Mary and Joseph and the shepherds as to that of Jesus. Later an angel guided Joseph to go to Egypt to protect the Infant from kingly malice; and what an advantage it was to benefit by angelic fore-knowledge of the purpose of the king of the direction to take for deliverance, and of when safety had returned.

Matthew 28. 5-7. After the resurrection of Christ, an angel gave light and comfort to godly women, and commissioned them as the first announcers of the glorious event.

Acts 8. 26. It was an angel that directed the evangelist Philip to leave a flourishing work and go to a desert on an unannounced errand. The event proved that a man was to be reached by the gospel who could carry it to a far off land; and, Acts 10. 30-33, it was by an angel that the Lord directed Cornelius, another Gentile, as to how he could attain a saving knowledge of truth as it is in Jesus.

The subject of angelic service as a whole is not here opened, but only as it bears on the theme of divine guidance.<sup>1</sup>

Such angelic guidance was given in relation to domestic friction, child-bearing and training, the return of a man to his own land and relatives, the thwarting a murderer of his

<sup>1</sup> On the general subject as presented in the New Testament, there is a useful book by Rudolf Stier entitled "*The Words of the Angels*" — English edition, London 1879.



fell purpose, and as to the divine work of causing the divine message to reach seekers for truth.

There is a further phase of this angelic ministry worthy of notice, bearing upon one method by which it may be rendered. The prophet Zechariah speaks of "the angel that talked in me" (1. 9, 13, 14). "The very rare expression seems meant to convey the thought of an inward speaking, whereby the words should be borne directly into the soul, without the intervention of the ordinary outward organs". See Numbers 12. 6-9; Habakkuk 2. 1 (Pusey, and Baron, on Zech. 1. 9).

Without discussing the matter of visible angelic visitation later than New Testament times, it will be enough to mention what is certain, that truly godly persons have often been suddenly illuminated as to truth or suddenly guided in action by a clear presentation to the mind of ideas or directions. These come without premeditation, are presented with extraordinary vividness, as distinctly as if a voice spoke, and the sequel shows them to have been from God. For faith, this guidance is as real and effective without an outward sight of an angel as with it.

In *Praying is Working* (p. 21) I described as follows such an experience when I was about twenty-three years of age :

The following circumstances, which formed perhaps the earliest such lesson in praying that I had, are recalled from memories of some forty-five years ago. I was then a worker in a certain Y.M.C.A. The Committee arranged for an address by a well-known higher critic. As this address was to be given to the Bible Class I then led, my duty to protest was clear. The Committee peremptorily rejected the appeal that was organized, and the appointment was confirmed. One evening, after conversing sadly with some friends as to the defeat of our stand for truth, I was walking to my lodgings, when suddenly, in the street, there was brought before me, almost as by a voice, the promise, "I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18. 19), accompanied by the direction, "Go back to Mr. M. and ask him and his wife to agree with you in

asking that — shall not come as arranged". Never before had I had such an experience; but I went back, and we together presented the request. About three weeks later there appeared in the local papers an announcement that the ecclesiastic in question would be unable to keep the engagements in that city; and the reason was entirely unique. An epidemic of typhoid was raging in the assize town of his county, and the Judges decided to hold the courts elsewhere. They fixed upon his city; and it became his duty to conduct public worship as is customary at the opening of the assizes, and he could not leave.

I had been in Egypt for eighteen months. Towards the end of June, 1915, while waiting on God in the early morning, a voice in my heart said suddenly and distinctly, "This and that and a third service for which you came to Egypt are finished; now you can go to England." I announced this at breakfast, and after ten days left Cairo for Port Said. The Mediterranean was dangerous from submarines and shipping was scarce, but ten days later I was on the water and reached England without incident.

Certainly not every idea presented to the mind is to be accepted. Evil spirits may inject thoughts, and Peter become the spokesman of Satan (Matt. 16. 23). Satan may appear as an angel of light. No suggestion is to be adopted unscrutinized. One fearful wile of evil spirits is to assert they are the Holy Spirit, and to require instant obedience on the ground that to doubt, to examine, to delay obedience is to sin against the Holy Spirit. Thus even Christians being deluded are hurried into foolish or evil action, or failing to obey are plunged into despair as having committed the unpardonable sin.

The teachings of requirements of the Word of God are to be the test of every spirit-given utterance. The prophet from Judah was deceived by the prophet at Bethel and lured to disobedience and death; but he ought to have discerned that the latter was lying to him when he gave as from God a message contrary to the already received command of God (1 Kings 13).

Devotees of the "Tongues" movement have often resolutely refused to test the spirits speaking to them. To one

such, a close personal friend, a zealous Christian, I sent a paper of my own on the subject and begged for its perusal. It was returned unread with the remark, "The Lord will not allow me to read a thing like that". Such souls cannot avoid being deceived.

But in spite of this peril it remains the fact that many do receive true divine leading by inward speaking; and it also remains true that angels are sent forth to serve the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1. 14), and that children of God are encouraged to welcome strangers on the ground that "thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13. 2). If this reason for hospitality does not mean that by so doing we also may entertain an angel it seems to be no reason at all.

*Whene'er a guest draws near thy house  
Then take him warmly by the hand,  
And welcome him, at morn or late,  
And see if Christ before thy gate  
Doth make an angel stand.*

*So many all unknown have had  
An angel sent as guest by God;  
But minds were blind from other things,  
And as they saw no pair of wings  
They deemed him but a load.*

*Nay, should a guest draw near thy door,  
And though but meanly be he dressed,  
Survey him closely, he may be  
An angel sent of God to thee,  
And all thy house be blessed.*

*Perhaps thou long hast borne a load  
That heavy on thy heart hath sat,  
And, all unhop'd, he sets thee free,  
And from distress thus saveth thee:  
How angel-like were that;*

*Perhaps thou hast a fretting thorn  
That long thy wounded heart doth strike;  
He draws it forth, thou know'st not when,  
And strengthens thee with comfort then:  
Were that not angel-like?*

*Perhaps there is a thorn of sin  
Which yet more painful woundeth thee,  
Of which no heart, nor thine, well knows,  
But he, with love and kindness, shows —  
An angel true were he.*

*Nor yet that he but shows the thorn;  
Ah, no, he then thy way doth show  
To Christ, who only hath the skill,  
Like true physician, hearts to heal —  
Oh, work not angels so?*

*So comes a guest, then lay to heart  
That welcome warm he has from thee:  
May grace suffuse thy countenance;  
Nor rob thou him of confidence;  
He may an angel be! (From the German)*

(5) *Guidance in the spirit or by the Spirit.*

Genesis 6. 3. Early in the history of man the Spirit of God exerted influence upon the spirit of man. This was resisted until it ceased, whereupon the race was doomed and destroyed, save Noah who walked with God, and seven others for his sake.

Genesis 41. 38. To fulfil a certain purpose of God, Joseph was so inwardly endowed that a heathen king recognized that "spirit of God" was in him. The same was the case later with Daniel (4. 8; etc.).

Exodus 28. 3; 31. 3; etc. To prepare a material dwelling for the Most High, an artificer was filled with "spirit of God", and so with wisdom. A spirit of energy was infused into Zerubbabel and others for the similar work of building the second Temple (Hag. 1. 14).

Numbers 11. 17, 25, 26, 29. To qualify men for leadership among the people of God, the Lord put His Spirit upon them. Moses longed that this might be the experience of all the nation. In Judges we learn of fulfilments of this desire in the case of Othniel (3. 10), Gideon (6. 34), Jephthah (11. 29), Samson (13. 25; etc.). Later, the same took place with Saul, David, Elisha, and others.

The same divine inward impulse and direction is the portion

of those heavenly servants of Jehovah styled the cherubim (Ezek. 1. 12, 20). Ezekiel shared it (2. 2; 3. 12; etc.), and he was caused to announce a future sharing of it by all the repentant and godly (36. 26, 27 — See Joel 2. 28, 29; Zech. 12. 10).

Fulfilments of this promise are shown from the beginning of the New Testament.

Luke 1. 17. John the Baptist was linked with Elijah, in spirit and power.

Luke 1. 47. Mary's spirit was joyful when, naturally, sad forebodings would have weighed a virgin to the earth.

Luke 2. 27. Simeon was drawn by the Spirit into the Temple at the exact minute when he should meet God's Salvation.

Luke 11. 13. The Lord encouraged His followers to expect for themselves the gifts of the Spirit, and that one effect would be that, on occasion of special need, their minds and speech would be guided by the Spirit (Matt. 10. 20), and also that He, as the Spirit of the truth, would guide them to a knowledge of the truth entire (John 16. 13 *εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν πᾶσαν*). Here is inward guidance of the most elevated order in the most exalted realm. Of course the meaning is not that they would become omniscient, for the finite cannot become infinite, but that they would be guided to an understanding of all the truth that God intended to communicate to man, according to his capacity, and to his need for accomplishing his allotted share in the counsels of God.

This promise having been fulfilled to those to whom it was given, the apostles, there is no more of the truth intended that remains to be revealed; but the same Spirit abides with the humble to make experimental to each the further word, "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One and ye know all things" (1 John 2. 20, 27). Only he who wishes to be thus guided in his understanding must be perpetually willing to be guided in conduct also, to carry into action the guidance given inwardly, to obey all truth opened to his mind by the Spirit, for to this very end is truth made known. There is nothing revealed but it is intended to be known; the Spirit, the Revealer, understands the deep things of God and has been given to us that we may know them (1 Cor. 2. 6-16).

Matthew 3. 16 - 4. 1: Mark 1. 10-12. There was a glorious



accomplishment of Moses' desire when Jesus, the Son of Man, was anointed with the Spirit of God, who was in Him a Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge, and in such perfection that He never missed the mind or path of His Father for Him (Isa. 11. 2). This inward constraint took Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

Acts 8. 29. Guidance in service to souls was given to Philip by the Spirit. "The Spirit said, Go near and join thyself to this chariot". Some (as Chrysostom) have taken "the Spirit" here to refer to the angel who had lately directed Philip to go to the desert. In this case the incident falls under the preceding section. But the word is generally understood of the Spirit of God. In this case it is rightly used as proof of His personality, and also it shows His readiness to give exact directions in labours in the gospel. Not a few have experienced such precise and opportune impulses in the spirit, and acting upon them have been used by the Spirit, as was Philip.

Acts 10. 19; 11. 12. In the same way the Spirit spake to Peter, informing him that men were at the door enquiring for him, and he was to go with them.

Acts 13. 2. Similarly, the Spirit uttered the directions that Paul and Barnabas were to be set apart for special itinerant ministry.

Acts 16. 6, 7. As noted above, Paul, and his companions, when on the border of Asia (the south-west corner of Asia Minor) were "forbidden of the Holy Spirit" to enter that province, and then, when attempting to go north into Bithynia, "the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not". This is noteworthy as an example of explicit guidance. In this, as in the preceding instances, an inward motion of the Spirit upon the heart must be understood, for spirit, not having physical organs, acts after its own nature upon spirit. Also, this guidance may be by positive prohibition or by restraint of spirit. He who would walk in the communion of the Spirit, must not, as did King Saul (see above, p. 14) force his spirit when it forbids, or even is only reluctant, unhappy about the course in view. This ability to read one's spirit is of deepest importance and highest value.

The incident is further instructive by showing that even one so practised in walking with God as was Paul, was liable to miss the path of service and needed divine leading. Thus

one whose utterances as a commissioned teacher were infallible, outside that sphere of service was not infallible. Peter, also, could say of himself and others that the good news was preached "in the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven" (1 Pet. 1. 12); yet he could err in practice as at Antioch (Gal. 2. 11-16), and need to be corrected. This will prevent the rest of us being surprised when our own plans fail, and will forbid that we beguile ourselves with the notion that we do not need the leading or hindering of God.

The use in the New Testament of the personal and human name "Jesus" is very rare after the Gospels, and, also, the above is the only instance of the Holy Spirit being called "the Spirit of Jesus". Surely the lesson is that he who would know the guidance of the Spirit must be of the same spirit as Jesus, the Man who was meek and of a lowly heart, joyfully obedient in all things to the will of the Father.

The New Testament shows two features as to ministry of the truth, and they must be considered in conjunction, as covering the matter of such ministry.

1. It speaks of local elders being raised up by the Spirit in each local church and directs these to teach, feed, and shepherd the flock of God (Acts 14. 23; 20. 28: 1 Cor. 16. 15, 16: 1 Tim. 3. 1-7: Titus 1. 5-9: 1 Pet. 5. 1-4). The regular instruction to believers and unbelievers was to be given by these local leaders, by continual guidance and energy of the Holy Spirit.

2. As regards men called to evangelize, to found and build up churches, they are seen moving from place to place, making a brief visit or a long stay by immediate guidance of the Spirit.

In neither case is there any instance or hint of an assembly, or an appointed member of it, arranging ministry. Yet the plan is almost universal in some lands. Ministry is often arranged for long periods ahead. It is sadly general that a speaker receives a request to preach on a given date, it may be a year ahead; he looks at his diary, the date is free, and he books it. I regret that in the distant past I myself so acted until the Lord showed me His better way. This is just as an unbelieving professional man acts. There is no divine guidance in it.

By the regular bringing in of outside help local gift is restricted, and the free ministry of the Spirit with it; and visiting ministry is arranged by men instead of being guided by the Lord. The real lordship of the Head of the church is curtailed, and human ways supplant the guidance of the Spirit. Is it any wonder that a minimum of His working is seen and a general dearth prevails? It is *faith* that God honours, not human preferences and expedients.

A devoted leader of an assembly related the sorry state of that company. I said that it seemed that they needed the Lord to send a Timothy or Titus for a time to set things in order (1 Tim. 1. 3: Tit. 1. 5). He agreed, and I added: If the Lord were to send him next week, what could you do with him? I suppose your services are all arranged for the next six months? This was the case.

One March a brother said he would be glad to book me to speak at a local conference. I replied that I would be very willing to serve: when was it to be? The answer was, Next May twelve month! I replied that that would be all right *if* he could tell me how to determine where my Master would wish me to be next May twelve month, for I did not know how to do so.

The ministry of the word is a matter of vital importance. The unction of the Spirit will be known but sparingly until churches and preachers are truly under His guidance, in reality, not nominally. Then he will be owned and will own the ministry more fully.

Instances of this guidance in spirit will help:

In the Middle East I knew well an earnest Christian girl. Before her conversion she had become engaged to an unconverted man. After long patience and pleading she saw that he had no intention to turn to Christ, so she ended the engagement. He was then in a land some 10,000 miles away. This was guidance by the command of Scripture, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (11 Cor. 6. 14).

She then came to Europe to visit relatives. Sunday morning she sought a certain assembly of Christians, but arrived late, and slipped into a seat near the door. There was in that gathering an estimable young man who had been waiting upon God to provide him with a wife. Here was true wisdom. As soon as this entire stranger quietly entered, his



heart suddenly heard the announcement: "This is the one God has appointed for your wife". She returned to her home, and after due enquiries on both sides they became engaged.

Later she felt the time had come to go to Europe and be married. She therefore went to the shipping agents and asked for a berth, naming a quite early date to which she felt guided. They answered that all berths were engaged on that boat and had been so for a long time, but they had one vacancy for the following week. She answered that she did not wish a passage for that boat, but for the week preceding. The Agents said it was quite out of the question. But a few days before sailing a berth unexpectedly became vacant, and she sailed on the date which had been laid on her heart. She had been gone but a day or two when, without notice, her former lover arrived designing to recapture her; but through the inward guidance given she was spared the distressing conversation that must have followed.

Thus was each of these believers given inward leading of spirit, and it is only natural that a marriage so plainly ordered of God has been blessed by Him, as I witnessed in their home.

Let us turn to the matter of a servant of God leaving one sphere of service for another. How many such changes are made on merely human grounds, sometimes upon even such low grounds as that the church is larger, socially higher, or offers a larger stipend. But the issues are so momentous that the clear direction of the Head of the church is vital.

As mentioned above I laboured for some time among one company of Christians. After about seven years, there arose in my heart a growing feeling that my time at that place was not to be prolonged. There was nothing at all to cause this. The church was harmonious, the work prospering. As the feeling persisted, I asked of God that, if it was indeed to be thus, the work might make even more progress, so that no reproach might be caused by a suggestion that I was leaving through failure. Forthwith conversions increased and the work advanced. The more I saw this the more I felt my departure neared. Of all this I said not a word save to my wife.

After two years, my wife's sister came to England from her sphere in South India. She mentioned to me the need of English ministry on the Nilgiri Hills at Coonoor and Ootacamund, where there are Christian residents, and where workers in the gospel gather in the hot season. At once I knew in my heart that this was the call for which I had been listening for two years, and my wife also knew this as soon as her sister mentioned the matter to her.

I made all arrangements to leave, but before the departure date was fixed news came that other servants of Christ had filled the two spheres mentioned. Thus there seemed no need for me to go; but the Lord had called and I went. On reaching Coimbatore, at the foot of the Nilgiris, I met the brother who had been labouring at Ootacamund. He had just been ordered medically to leave India, and so need of the ministry of the Word had suddenly arisen and my arrival was the Lord's provision. As Philip was led to the very point in the desert where he would meet the eunuch, and at the exact hour, so God had ordered that a journey of thousands of miles should end the very week that the need arose.

The first three months of 1910 I was in Rangoon, Burma. As March was ending I felt the time had come to go further. But whither? The way to the north and to west China was closed, nor was any other path opened. One whole morning was spent in seeking the will of God. There formed in my spirit a clear sense that I was to return to "Brooklands", the home of rest at Coonoor, and pass the hot season there seeking to help workers gathered. There was no outward indication of this. The journey would be 1200 miles by sea and 300 by land, and my purse was empty; but so sure did I feel, that I wrote to my sister-in-law, who had gone up to "Brooklands", to say that I expected to leave Rangoon by a boat about ten days later, and to reach Coonoor on a certain date.

On going down stairs to post this letter, I found that one had just arrived from the head of "Brooklands", Miss Bishop, to ask that, if I had no other leading for that hot season, would I come to them as her guest and minister the word among them? On my arrival I learned that, after having written, she had delayed to post the letter for ten days until feeling quite sure it was of the Lord. It was then posted in

exact time to arrive 1,500 miles away at the very hour that I was writing to say I would go to that very house. Forthwith money came from different lands, gifts arriving together as arranged by Him to whom the silver and the gold belong (Hag. 2. 8); a berth was available on the ship proposed; the voyage was passed in safety, though plague was on board; and Coonoor was reached on the day notified.

In Warsaw there lived a certain Roman Catholic priest. To a retreat for priests he took his younger brother, a mere lad. The boy remembered nothing of what passed but only that during the days there came upon his heart a deep sense of the reality of God. Growing to manhood he became a lawyer and obtained a post in the Polish Home Office. Passing one day a building he heard singing and entered. It was a meeting of Baptist believers. Here also nothing remained with him of what was sung or said, but there came again upon his heart that sense of the reality of God. This time it produced an acute sense of his personal sinfulness and unfitness for God. This conviction of sin intensified until it was unendurable; but like most Catholics he knew nothing of the Bible or the gospel or how to gain relief of conscience.

In the month of July there suddenly came into his mind the singular impression that if he would ring up a certain telephone number he would get into touch with someone who could help him. Only the number came before him and he had no idea whose it might be. To his trained mind the thought of ringing up an unknown phone number seemed fantastic and he felt reluctance. But his need was urgent and the impression insistent; yet there was this strange reservation in the direction, that he was not to ring up until after he should have returned from his vacation at the end of August. In the sequel it transpired that the man he was to meet would also have been from home.

After his return, just when about to leave his office on a Saturday, he called the number. The janitor of a suite of offices answered and informed him that the staff had left till Monday. He enquired whose number it was, and was startled when the name was given as Zebrowski. For this man was very well known in Warsaw. He had been a Roman

Catholic priest and had taken the full seven years course in philosophy and theology; he read Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and spoke with ease in Polish, Russian, German, and English. He could interpret any one of these languages into any other of them. And he was a charming, lovable personality.

But he had run amuck of the Pope and got himself excommunicated, a dangerous situation in a Catholic land. Nothing daunted, he persuaded numerous other priests to join him and they started a new Catholic church minus His Holiness. Then the 1914 war sent him to Russia, where two Christian Russian ladies led him to the saving knowledge of Christ. In due course he returned to Warsaw, became a success in the world of insurance, and yet more in the kingdom of God. He told me in 1924 that he knew of over 200 persons he had led to Christ.

In the lawyer's mind there sprang up a fear that perhaps this aggressive man would want him to take a similar preposterous course; nevertheless his distress of mind provoked him to take the risk, and Zebrowski soon led him to faith and peace in Christ. I saw Zebrowski baptize him and his wife in the Vistula. He became an effective witness, holding meetings in his own house and later in a hall. The facts I had from his own lips.

Remembering the immeasurable worth of a man, his fearful need of deliverance from eternal misery, and the inconceivable sacrifice of the Son of God to effect that deliverance, it should seem no matter of surprise that God should take remarkable steps to give effect to the love of His heart and the sufferings of His Son. He is the God who does wonders (Ps. 77. 14). Let it not be said that the days of miracles are past.

Three more incidents may show the value of such inward leadings in practical matters.

In 1928 I returned from a long sojourn in the heat of Egypt and Palestine, and rest of brain and heart was imperative. This required change of residence, for we were in a busy town and the house was at the top of a sharp hill. But where to go for suitable conditions we could not tell. Visiting Exeter I found myself with an afternoon free and decided to spend it with a friend at Teignmouth. He said he was

thinking to leave that region, which caused me to remark that I was looking for a house. He replied, "I wish you would take one I have to let"; and as he uttered the words my heart said emphatically, "Take note of what he is about to say; this is for you"; and it proved to be indeed of God, meeting all the conditions required at the time and remaining our home for sixteen years.

Again. Perhaps twenty years ago there came into my hands one September, at the house of a friend, the printed invitation to annual November meetings at Berlin. The subject for discussion on the two days was Hebrews, chapters 12 and 13. Instantly the same voice said in my heart, "And you will be there and will speak on chapter 12". This was no movement of my own mind, for my treatment of that chapter was likely to provoke opposition from some esteemed leading German brethren, from which I shrank. I took no steps to bring about the visit; but the Lord took them, and I was duly there. Two gifted brethren spoke immediately before me, one of whom was an elderly teacher whose opposition I had most to expect; but if they had designed to prepare my way they could not have done so more usefully than they did; they led right up to the point where what was on my mind started. Grace was given to express what had been shown me in that chapter; there was no opposition, and at the close another principal and gifted teacher said that it had been the high water mark of the conference.

In 1910/11 I visited in Egypt for some nine months. In May I took in Cairo a boat ticket from Alexandria to Tunisia, and journeyed from town to town in the Delta to reach Alexandria the night before the boat was to leave. Money in hand would be only just enough to take me to the port, but I was given a quiet assurance that the Lord's provision would meet me at Alexandria. On reaching my kind host there my fund was reduced to one piastre, two pence half penny. But there awaited me a large English mail, which I opened with much expectation. The Lord however had graciously arranged to enforce a lesson that English workers abroad do well to learn early and thoroughly, even that He wishes that expectation should be from Him, not from friends



or funds in England. The whole mail had no money at all.

The enemy attacked my faith with the assertion that now at length I was undone; I could not get my bags put on the ship the next day. The peace of God soon won this battle. I then asked guidance as to using the evening hours. There were two families to whom I wished to say farewell, one Egyptian, the other Swiss. They were miles apart, in opposite directions, and my solitary piastre would allow the tram to one only of them. Presently my spirit felt clear that I was to go to the Swiss friends, though I knew not why.

But on arriving I learned why. The other family were out of town, and by having gone to them both the time *and* the precious piastre would have been lost.

A second reason was that the evening gave good opportunity to press the claims of Christ upon two amiable but unconverted daughters of the house.

The lady urged that I should spend the night there rather than return late to the city. I had but just closed my bedroom door when it was opened gently, her hand put a packet in my hand, and she shut the door. It was a loving gift of five golden sovereigns. I for my part had no doubt that I had been rightly guided as to that visit.

It is a pity to be a millionaire and such sweet experiences to be impossible. It is better to be a sheep led to the green pasture than a clever dog that finds its own scraps.

This form of guidance through the spirit differs from that through the judgment which has been before considered (Section 4), in that the latter is effected by the mind being called to weigh facts relevant to the matter to be decided, whereas the former guidance is by a single impression that this or that is to be done without facts or reasons to enforce it being given till later.

In some respects this is perhaps the highest and most delicate type of guidance and therefore may be the more easily missed or misread. As the climber nears the summit of the mountain the air indeed is purer, the views clearer and farther, but the path is steeper and more perilous. Yet such guidance is commonly so unusual, distinct, and imperative as

not to be easily mistaken, though it can be disregarded to great loss.

(6) *Guidance in Prayer.* Here may be considered the profoundly important matter of guidance by the Spirit in prayer. It is part of the weakness of our finite state that "we know not how to pray as we ought". To be effective, prayer must be in harmony with the will of God (1 John 5. 14, 15); but often we know not what that will is, especially as to the affairs of others, and sometimes by sheer impossibility of knowing. Here it is that "the Spirit helpeth our infirmity; Himself making intercession for us according to God", that is, in entire conformity with the character and the purpose of God (Rom. 8. 26, 27).

In New Jersey America, a Christian woman prayed perseveringly until she reached assurance that God was ready to work in the town. She narrated her exercise and conviction to the minister and elders of the church she attended. But they were not in the communion of the Spirit as to this and refused to appoint special meetings. Then she announced meetings in her own home and a gracious work of God showed that her prayers had been guided by the Spirit. This is narrated in C. G. Finney's *Revivals of Religion*, chapter 6.

In 1910 I was attacked with fever in Rangoon, as mentioned. I was in a tiny room in a large hostel, among strangers, and felt the situation. That night the Lord who visited Paul and said "Be not afraid . . . Be of good cheer" (Acts 18. 9; 23. 11), graciously came to me in what almost seemed physical contact and filled my whole heart with a quiet and comfort quite indescribable. I learned later that that same night my eldest sister, then in England, had been awakened by severe neuralgia, which, however, she shortly forgot because of an intense burden of prayer for myself. She knew nothing of my whereabouts or circumstances, save that I was in India or that direction. After a season of this conflict her burden passed away, the neuralgia had ceased, and she slept again.

Prayer can be guided by the written Word of God, as when the statement that the will of God is our sanctification leads to prayer that one may be made more holy in life (1 Thes. 4. 3). But in a great variety of conditions no passage of

Scripture may afford detailed leading, and it is then that the guidance of the Spirit in prayer is so indispensable. And it is available to such as walk in His fellowship by habitual obedience to His leadings.

This method of guidance in prayer by direct constraint of the Spirit of God bears no relation to the human plan of praying by a Prayer List, in which districts occur by routine and names in rotation, as arranged by the compiler.

(7) *Guidance by Special Applications of Scripture.*

It has been observed above (p. 18) that a command or instruction found in Scripture is guidance upon any matter it touches, and that the principles involved in such scriptures extend the guidance (p. 18). But beyond this, the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures has quite notable skill in the application of them to circumstances which seem beyond their scope.

Peter MacKenzie was a well-known Wesleyan lecturer and preacher fifty years ago. I heard him twice. He had been a miner of rough life, but was converted, and soon learned to read the Bible. One Sunday two Christians of his district were due to take a service in a chapel. Each said that he had no message and hoped the other had. They knocked at his door and made the proposal. Peter said he had never preached but he would ask his Father about it. He went to his bedroom and prayed. The reply that came into his mind was that he would find the answer in Acts 10, verses 19 and 20. Only the reference was given and he had no idea what those verses said. Opening the Bible he read, "And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold three men seek thee. But arise, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting". I heard Dinsdale Young narrate this in his lecture on Peter MacKenzie.

Would that every call to preach had been so evidently of God.

In about my twenty-third year I was serving an Insurance Company in Bristol. The Company was purchased by a Norwich Company, the Manager of which made me an excellent offer to enter their head office. I said I would give the

reply to my Manager a week later. I had been through one such amalgamation, and had then been guided to go with the buying Company, and reason would have concluded that under the same circumstances the same course would be right. Especially would this have seemed prudent seeing that the salary was double and the prospects far better.

But some good while before, my daily reading had included 11 Samuel 5. 17-25. David had been made king over all Israel. The Philistines made immediate attempts to smash the new kingdom before it could be consolidated. They came up the valley by which the railway from Lydd now reaches Jerusalem, and spread themselves in battle array near the city. David was a trained soldier and an experienced commander. Yet he did not lean to his own understanding but inquired of God as to the battle and its issue. He made a frontal attack like a flood sweeping down a valley, and drove the enemy back in disorder.

But the Philistines returned to the fight, and in the same military formation. David did not rely on previous guidance though the situation was as before. He enquired of God again and received quite different directions for the battle. He was to make a flank attack, and to defer this until an appointed sign showed that God Himself was on the march. Here was sound strategy. It may be assumed that the Philistines had strengthened their front to meet an assault expected there as before. But they were out-manoeuvred and suffered overwhelming defeat.

From this I put away in mind the lesson that similar circumstances may have to be met differently and that the guidance of God must be sought on every separate occasion. By this I was guided to wait for fresh leading on the occasion described. This is an instance of the value of reading the Bible first to understand it, without particular present application. It will be applied as need arises.

The day came when I had promised my answer. My Manager went to his room and I knew he might at any time ring for me. Yet I had no definite sense of the will of God. I went to an empty room and told the Lord that I had waited for His direction; that now I must have it; would He be pleased to give it. Looking at the New Testament I was immediately directed to Paul's exhortation to Timothy (1 Tim.

4. 15), "Be diligent in these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy progress may be manifest unto all". These words might seem wholly remote from my circumstances but they spoke to me with light and force. I saw instantly that if I was to meditate on *these* things and give myself more and more thereto, it could not be the will of the Lord that I accept the proposed appointment, for my previous experience of such a transfer assured me that for the first year or two I should have to give much more, not less, time and strength to business until the welding of the old Company into the new had been completed. I declined the offer. Indistinctly I questioned whether possibly that verse might indicate that some day I might be called to give my life wholly to these heavenly things. This came later.

By the same guidance I refused also the next appointment that offered. It was a good and safe job, but for one month of the year I would have been required to give every evening to preparing the Company's annual accounts. I was not willing to give annually one twelfth of my spare time to things secular, instead of to the work of God which already engaged it all.

"Whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance" (Matt. 13. 12). By no choice of my own I had four changes of employment. The Lord in His great grace having given me a heart to use my leisure in His service added the opportunity for this. Each of the changes brought shorter office hours, and more time for the things of God. My first hours were 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.; in the final appointment the hours were 9.30 to 4.30; and then I was called to devote all time to the gospel and the church of God. The circumstances that cleared the way for this call give another instance of guidance by direct application of Scripture.

I was writing to a brewer regarding his fire insurances. Suddenly a Voice in my heart said: "If you were to meet this gentleman outside the office, and a fair opportunity came, you would not mind telling him that, in your opinion, were his premises burned down and never rebuilt it would be a public benefit: yet you are taking part of your salary for arranging for that to be done which you consider ought not to be done."

It was a moment of crisis; the future was at stake, the



secular and yet more the spiritual. My work was congenial; conditions of employment were easy; prospects were favourable, there were fine plums at the top of the tree for those who cared to climb. If I gave up this sphere, I asked, to what other could I turn for which I had any training? This evil trade, like an octopus, has its tentacles almost everywhere. If I went into a bank I should keep its accounts; if into a railway office I should handle its traffic sheets.

Moreover, I knew it would be difficult to justify the step in view, even to many brethren in Christ. The manager of the branch office where I worked was a decided Christian, an elder of his assembly, justly respected, and a personal friend to me; but he did not share my new scruples. So it was imperative that I should have a clear "Thus saith the Lord" before I acted. This is of much importance. One may be too precipitate in taking a right step, and act before any reasoned or adequate justification can be given to one's own mind or to others. In such case doubts may afterwards arise, weakness supervene, darkness of soul follow, perhaps the right course taken may be abandoned, and permanent spiritual paralysis result.

Therefore I prayed and pondered. One evening I started from my lodgings in Clifton to go and consult an intimate friend, a man of God. On Richmond Hill that same Voice said suddenly with a quiet imperativeness, "*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee, with mine eye upon thee*" (Psalm 32. 8). I said, "Very well, Lord", and went home. How little each knows what may be passing in the heart of another. During those weeks no one knew the deep exercises of my mind, the tax on the spirit by the uncertainty, and the misgivings as to the future.

But after some weeks that Voice suddenly spoke again, unmistakably, distinctly, with authority, with full illumination as to my duty. It used the words of Colossians 3. 17: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

The whole matter was instantly clear, as clear as sunlight. I said to myself; You dare not go down to that low pub you surveyed for insurance a few weeks ago, where men and

women are hurried to perdition sooner than they need go, and say to that poor bloated barman, In the name of the Lord Jesus I have come to arrange that this place can be rebuilt if it be burned down, so that this business may go on, and I thank God my Father that I can do this! Of course I dare not so use the Holy Names. Therefore, I must sear my conscience, stultify my profession as a Christian, wreck my spiritual career and forfeit my heavenly prospects, or I must resign my post. Thank God, *this* problem did not take thirty seconds to settle. At the end of May 1899 I wrote a letter of resignation, and the ink of my signature had not yet dried when there flowed gently into my spirit entire tranquillity; no sense of anxiety remained, the very peace of God Himself suffused my heart; for all the concern it was to me, it might have been someone else's matter and future and not mine. And that peace as to outward affairs has remained unbroken during these subsequent 47 years.

The explanation of this calmness is easily seen. A man may have business tangles which are beyond his wisdom or resources, and harass him. At length he goes to a lawyer in whom he has confidence and hands over the affair to him. That evening he may say to his wife, I have put those matters into Mr. So. and So's hands; they will be well handled now. Thus he has rest of mind. By the step described I had actually, in literal fact, put my life and future into the hands of God the Almighty, and I knew that all things were bound to work together for good. This assured peace. "He leadeth me beside waters of rest" (Ps. 23. 2). The committal has never been revoked from my side and so the peace has never been recalled from God's side. "The meek He will guide"; and this divine use of Holy Scripture is one of the most effective and soul establishing means of guidance. How emphatic also is its testimony that the only book that God so uses is indeed God's Book.

This guidance can be known in various affairs. It has been my right noble privilege to be a preacher of the gospel for nearly fifty-five years. It is very long now since I chose my subjects or texts. Occasionally, when assured in my heart that it is of the Lord, I have accepted requests to speak on given subjects; but for many years my usual course has been to remind myself and the Lord that I am only a messenger,

and a messenger cannot choose or invent his subject or he is not a messenger. A messenger must have his message given, and it may be given to him only just when he is sent to deliver it, given to him by the One who sends him. It is my constant experience to have some theme or passage of Scripture presented to my mind with distinctness and force, as spoken to me by Another; and at such times a sudden illumination is given of how to treat the theme or text, of its inner meanings and messages. I know and am sure that this is a primary secret of effective, fruitful ministry. For still the voice of the Master speaks in His message, the Voice which, heard first by the messenger, is then heard by his hearer; the Voice which he who hears may hate, yet cannot ignore, and which works eternal life in the obedient.

The following may illustrate that sudden illumination of Scripture just mentioned, which is one way by which the Spirit of Truth guides us into the truth (John 16. 13).

Some forty-five years ago I read G. H. Pember's view that sharing in the first resurrection and therefore in the millennial kingdom are privileges that are forfeitable by a child of God through misconduct. This involved such a deep variation from what I had always been taught that I hesitated greatly and let the topic lie on one side for a considerable time. Feeling led to preach on the words "Follow after peace with all men", I set myself, as always when preparing to speak, to consider the context (Heb. 12. 14-17). Enquiring what precisely were "the rights of the firstborn" which Esau despised, and sold for a passing gratification of appetite, I found them to have been: (1) a double share of the inheritance, that is, that the eldest son received twice as much as any other child of the family (Deut. 21. 17); (2) he acted as the family priest, and (3) by the authority of the father he ruled the household, as when David's elder brother commanded him to attend the family sacrifice (1 Sam. 20. 28, 29; Exod. 4. 22; Ps. 89. 27; etc.).

Now Pember had not drawn attention to this passage in Hebrews, and as I searched it my mind was not even remotely concerned with his views; but suddenly the Voice said in my heart: "Do you not see that here is the very teaching

you could not accept when shown from other scriptures? The people of God today are 'the church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in heaven' (Heb. 12. 23). This is their double portion, even a place in the heavenly section of God's kingdom, as compared with the earthly portion of the saved of Israel and the nations; and they are to be priests and kings unto God (Rev. 1. 5, 6). And they are here warned lest they forfeit these privileges as did Esau."

This was one of those crisis hours in which spiritual progress is either greatly accelerated or greatly retarded. Yet God does not demand premature decisions or haste: "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28. 16). But He does require honesty and diligence; and just as the guidance of the judgment is to be afterward confirmed by the opening of the way, so I proceeded to test this view of Hebrews 12 by further consideration of Scripture. And forty years of the most critical examination of which I am capable have fully confirmed that sudden illumination of Hebrews 12 as having been given by the One who loves to instruct him that hath an ear to hear.

Some scorn the idea of miracles. Let the honest ponder whether the following incident does not deserve the term, meaning thereby an event which can be explained only by the intervention of a supra-human agent.

My boyhood was spent at Sidcup, Kent. For a time I walked to Bexley Heath to school, four miles. Occasionally they wanted me home early and I walked two miles to Bexley Station and took a train. From Bexley a few boys came up the hill to our school, and these had a standing quarrel with a group of rough lads at Bexley Heath. The latter waylaid the former and there would be bad words and rough deeds. The way from the main road at Bexley Heath to Bexley lay then over fields and was entered by a narrow footpath, perhaps a hundred yards long, which lay between high iron railings and the high wall of the churchyard. One afternoon I was in the middle of this path, alone, when three or four of the street boys entered at the far end. I thought to my self that they would take me for a Bexley boy and that I was in for trouble. There was no escape, so I instantly resolved on being "brave", answering them cheekily, taking



what blows were unavoidable, and slipping through when possible, for I knew they would not outrun me. I was small of size but swift of foot.

Sure enough they stopped me, and the biggest of them said, "There's a chap back there wants to speak to you". I turned round and saw that their leader had come into the path behind me. I was trapped. Will Almighty God, occupied in the vast public affairs of heaven and earth, concern Himself with a petty squabble between a few lads? Is He sufficiently interested in a small boy of ten to save him from a bruise or two? At that instant, that Voice spoke which I was afterwards to hear many times. There rang in my heart words that I did not remember ever to have heard or read; they were quite new to me, but there was something about them that told me they must come from the Bible. The Voice said, "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15. 1). In the whole of the great Book there is nothing more exactly appropriate to that moment. I had been trained to honour God's Book; it had already led me to trust in Christ as my own Saviour: instantly I changed my purpose, explained quietly that I was not a Bexley boy but lived at Sidcup and was going to the station. They passed a few words with each other, and the leader said, "Let the bloke go, he doesn't belong to that set".

It was fifty years after I left that school before I saw again that, to me, hallowed spot. The district has changed, the path is gone; but to an aged gravedigger in the churchyard I told the story of his youth and my boyhood, and he listened intently.

As I now review the more than sixty years since that hour I see that by that gracious intervention God gave a determining direction to my heart and life. It fixed deeply on my mind the wisdom of God's counsel and the wisdom of instant obedience. It established confidence to appeal to the Book and to act upon it. Unbelievers may doubt, argue, or scorn the Bible; my life has been a perpetual testing of its teachings and promises, with ever increasing confirmation by experience that God does speak thereby with veritable and recognizable voice. My brethren may assert that times and conditions change, so that in the church and in the work of the gospel the methods shown in God's word are no more



suitable, and they must adopt ways of their own; but I at least have heard the Voice of the Lord on this as on other departments of life, and I know its teachings and examples ought to be practised, and I know and have seen that they can be practised.

God guides by His Word, either by its obvious teaching or by special application, and he who has an ear to hear can say,

*We cannot doubt, when once the ear of listening  
faith has heard,  
With all-responsive thrill of love, the music of His  
word:  
He gives the witness that excels all arguments and  
sign,  
When we have heard it for ourselves we KNOW it  
is DIVINE.* (Havergal.)

#### VII. CONCLUSION.

The foregoing may serve to establish the reality, illustrate the methods, and emphasize the conditions of the Guidance of God. But it must be specially observed that to be so guided by no means implies that the path will be free from difficulties and dangers. The inner man should indeed be able at all times to say "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside waters of rest" (Ps. 23. 1, 2). Yet at the same time the outer circumstances may be disturbed. But they should not be disturbing. Israel was in God's path though the Red Sea barred the way and Pharaoh pressed on their rear. Paul was in God's path in the dungeon at Philippi and in Nero's grip in Rome. Jesus was in the path of His Father for Him at Gethsemane and Calvary. Death is the unavoidable path to resurrection.

Moreover, God tests and develops faith by keeping the future obscure and giving guidance for the next step only. He chooses to lead by an unknown path, for which course He has the best of reasons. "My reader, let me speak to your very inmost heart. It is by no means enough to set out cheerfully with your God on any venture of faith. Tear into smallest pieces any itinerary for the journey your

imagination may have drawn up. Nothing will fall out as you expect. Your Guide will keep to no beaten road. He will lead you by yawning gulfs, and under beetling cliffs, such as you never dreamt your eyes would look upon. He knows no fear, and He expects you to fear nothing whilst He is with you. The clinging hand of His child makes a desperate situation a delight to Him. A true walk with God will do more to waken awe, wonder, and amazement in your soul than would a century of travel through the sights of the earth. It is your business to learn to be peaceful and safe in God, in every situation time or eternity can develop, in this and in any other world to which He may lead you. To take you to His 'end' *by the way you know* would profit you little. He chooses for you a way you know *not*, that you may be compelled into a thousand intercourses with Himself which will make the journey for ever memorable to Him and to you" (C. G. Moore, *Out of His Treasure*, 75).

The pilgrim facing the trackless desert must grip firmly the fact that *Guidance is promised*, and must settle it in his heart once and for all that *it will be given* as needed, if the conditions are fulfilled. These conditions are not arbitrary. Nothing that God does is capricious or fatalistic. He is guided by love, wisdom, righteousness. The way He takes, the conditions He imposes, are determined by kindness, by their suitability, their rightness. A perfect Being is bound to take the most perfect measures of which a given situation allows. And faith says, "As for God, *His way is perfect*", and "He maketh *my way perfect*" (Ps. 18. 30, 32).

Thus assured of Guidance, faith expects it. This gives peace of mind. Faith is sure it will not be left in the lurch, for God "Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee; so that with good courage we say, I will not fear; what shall man do unto me"? (Heb. 13. 5, 6). What indeed? only that which God permits and will turn to good. The meaning of God's dealings with Joseph is stated in Joseph's words to his cruel brothers, "Ye meant evil . . . but God meant good" (Gen. 50. 20). And Paul, forsaken by his friends, but not by his Lord, and about to be slain, says, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly

kingdom; to Whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen " (2 Tim. 4. 6, 16-18).

"George Müller believed, and because he believed, prayed; and praying, expected; and expecting, received" (*George Müller of Bristol*, p. 92).

And because faith expects *it waits*; it "waits patiently for the Lord", even though it has to wait in a pit of tumult and in miry clay (Ps. 40. 1, 2). It will not make its own way of escape. The hungry Son of God would not make bread for Himself (Matt. 4. 3, 4), though He would make it for others.

It would seem that at the outset of Israel's journeys even Moses did not feel too sure that God would prove a sufficient guide, for he begged his relative Hobab, as one bred in the deserts, to go with them and be "eyes" to them (Num. 10. 29). But forty years later, when reviewing the long wanderings, and pointing their lessons, Moses says of Israel, "Jehovah *alone* did lead him, and there was no foreign god with him" (Deut. 32. 12). It is a constant and painful tendency of the natural heart to rely on God *and* Hobab. In all affairs we dread to be brought to the situation of the poor soul who had drawn the last pound out of the Savings Bank and moaned, "Now I've no one but *the Almighty* to trust to." What a predicament, to be sure.

The Jewish people is a national illustration of this baneful state of heart. In their dire extremities the few may cry formally unto God, but the vast majority ignore Him; and they appeal for help to this power and that, or in desperation embitter their very friends by wild efforts of their own. God in His mercy is leaving them to struggle in the seas of adversity until, like a drowning man, their strength is exhausted; then He will intervene; and in that day the pious remnant of Israel shall say, "Lo, this is our God; we have *waited for Him*; and *He* will save us: this is Jehovah; we have *waited for Him*; we will be glad and rejoice in *His* salvation" (Isa. 25. 9).

Why did Moses add "there was no *foreign god*" with Israel? Because it is the native way of man's wicked heart to put something else in the place of God. This wholly forfeits divine guidance. Jehovah cannot lead while Israel fol-

lows and honours another god. At such a time He will say, "Go and cry unto the gods that ye have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress" (Judg. 10. 14: 2 Kings 3. 13).

A foreign god was a deity not indigenous to the land or race. The Christian by his new nature is a native of *heaven*. He has been born from above (John 3. 3; R.V. mgn). It is there that his mind should dwell (Col. 3. 1, 2), and whatever does not befit that realm of God is to be regarded by him as *foreign* to his nature and home-country. But alas, how many of God's children are still guided by gods that are foreign to heaven. This Christian's life is regulated by the desire to be rich; that man is directed by ambition to be of note in the world, its society, its science, commerce, war, politics; another Christian's life is so ordered as to secure ease, luxury, display. Now all such guiding principles are *foreign* to God's world; they are foreign gods. The holy angels do not worship them, or suffer their minds to be ordered by such false desires. Fallen angels do follow the principle of self-pleasing, which includes all such other deities; it is the god of gods in this foreign world: and men have kinship with these rebels when they suffer any end *foreign* to the kingdom of God to regulate and guide.

Therefore he who would benefit by the guidance of the God of heaven must put away every foreign god, must direct his heart unto Jehovah, must serve Him *only* (1 Sam. 4. 3). He must adopt once and for all the principle by which our great Example regulated life, "Get thee hence Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him *only* shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4. 10). The carrying this out in detail will be a life work; but the holy resolution must be definite and unreserved. The believer, by a distinct decision at a given hour, must "sanctify Christ in his heart as LORD" (1 Pet. 3. 15); as LORD over his thoughts, opinions, desires, purposes, ways, words. Then will the direction of his life be in the line of the purpose of God, and of course God will control, order, guide that life, for it will be part of His own plan for the universe.

Saul was a Jewish boy, of uncommon power even among that notable race. He was reared in a chief university city,

Tarsus, and finished his education at the capital of his people, Jerusalem, under one of the most celebrated teachers of the day. He early made a name and place for himself and had excellent prospects as a leader of Jewry. But of all that period of his life he afterward gave this as the key, the essential explanation: "I verily *thought with myself*" (Acts 26. 9). His life was *self-directed* and in consequence was wholly *mis-directed*.

Later, as Paul the slave of Jesus Christ, he gave this as the key, the explanation of his career as a Christian: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3. 5). This powerful brain had learned to distrust its own workings, and to draw its ideas and conclusions from God. Intellect when exalted to the directing place is a foreign god to heaven. The great angels of God are not such fools as to trust their own brains, devise their own schemes, rely on their own energies. *They* are God's *messengers* (angels), and therefore wait for *His* instructions; they are so mighty in strength as to be able to fulfil His word, which self-sufficient brain-proud man finds impossible; and this wisdom and energy they have by "hearkening unto the voice of His word"; humility is the secret of their greatness (Ps. 103. 20).

This brainy man Paul put this question to people of one of the chief centres of intellect and education of his day; "Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him"? Yet many Christians are foolish enough to try and add to the wisdom of the All-knowing God the "Hobab" of their own "common sense". Therefore they are abandoned to the folly of the latter, and life is muddled, darkened, disappointing. This foreign god also must be put away, and the man of God must consent to be always a *child* of God, in the spirit of Newton's lines:

*As a little child relies  
On a care beyond his own;  
Knows he's neither great nor wise,  
Fears to stir a step alone;  
Let me thus with Thee abide  
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.*



In such there shall be a fulfilment of the desire of Moses, yea, the desire of their Lord, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets", that is, men to whom God communicates His counsels. They shall pray with Moses, "Shew me now Thy ways, that I may know *Thee*", and the desire shall be granted to them as to him. They shall have experience of that promise of their divine Guide, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of Life" (John 8. 12). Thus guided by God even their mistakes shall be turned to an increased acquaintance with His forbearance and superior wisdom; they shall increase daily in the present enjoyment of their Father; and, when the discipline of the desert shall have served in the whole Israel of God its designed end, these lines shall be found true:

*When to Canaan's long-loved dwelling  
Love divine thy foot shall bring,  
There, with shouts of triumph swelling,  
Zion's songs, in rest, to sing,  
There no stranger God shall meet thee —  
Stranger thou in courts above!  
He, who to His rest shall greet thee,  
Greets thee with a well-known love.*

(J. N. Darby).

And then, with fulness of meaning and fulness of praise, shall it be said:

*"He led them by a straight way,  
That they might go to a City of Habitation."*

"LET US PRESS ON."  
(HEB. 6. 1).

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