

DIVINE GUIDANCE

HOW MAY I KNOW GOD'S WILL?

B. A. RAMSBOTTOM



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By

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1. THE PROBLEM

How often there are times in our lives when we do not know what to do! A decision has to be taken; a choice has to be made.

It is not always easy to know what is right. Here is a girl. A boy has written to ask her to go out with him. She feels happy, she likes him; but she does want to know whether it is God's will for her.

Here is a boy. He is looking for a job. Perhaps there are two different jobs which are both offered to him. Which one is he to take? How can he know? He does want to be sure.

It is not always easy to discern God's will for us – in a great matter or a small. And then there are times in our lives when everything seems so clear and other times when nothing at all seems clear.

If there were either a clear command or a clear prohibition, we should know. For instance, if it is an ungodly boy who asks the girl out, she knows immediately (or should know) that the answer cannot be "Yes." God has clearly said, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Or if one of the jobs the boy is offered involves unnecessary Sunday work, the boy knows (or should know) that he cannot say "Yes." God has clearly said, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

But it is those matters where neither the one way nor the other is specially right or wrong. There seems to be no moral principle involved. There is no clear command, nor a clear prohibition.

Perhaps the matter is very important. So much hangs upon it. And perhaps it cannot be left; an answer is required soon.

What shall I do?

2. GOD'S PROMISE

God has promised to guide His people. He has promised to lead them by the right way among all the uncertainties of life.

It is vital that we should understand this. God has a plan for the lives of all His people and it is not His will that they should go the way of their own choice. Most certainly it is not His will that their decisions shall be guided by such things as: "How much money shall I get?" "Will I be really happy?"

In the Old Testament God clearly guided His people. In the wilderness the children of Israel were led by the pillar of cloud and fire. In the day time they could see a dark cloud in the sky. At night they could see the same cloud, but now fiery and bright. If it moved, they were to move. If it did not move, they were to stay where they were. If it stayed motionless for several months or even a year, they must not move. But if they had only just pitched camp in the wilderness the day before and now they saw the cloud moving again, they must immediately pack their belongings and follow.

For forty years in the wilderness God's people were to have no will of their own. They were God's people – a chosen, redeemed people. Every decision, when to move and when to stay, was God's, not theirs. They were to be completely dependent.

Are we to think that God would so clearly lead His people in Old Testament times and leave them to their own devices now?

Also, we read of the Urim and the Thummim (Exodus 28. 30; Numbers 27. 21; 1 Samuel 28. 6), and it is made clear that an Israelite, in doubt as to what he should do, could appeal to the Urim and the Thummim for an answer. So we find David enquiring of the Urim and the Thummim, and receiving his answer. (Solemnly, we find the opposite with Saul when God

God's Promise

rejected him. He enquired of the Urim and the Thummim, but God gave him no answer.)

What were the Urim and the Thummim? This is an interesting subject, and there does seem to be some obscurity. The actual words mean “light and perfection.” The Urim and Thummim were closely connected with the high priest’s breastplate, either part of it or attached to it. If enquiry was made, answer was given. How? We are not told. Some have thought that God spoke with an audible voice from heaven. Others have thought that God so controlled the high priest’s thoughts that he infallibly gave the right answer. Yet others have thought that the letters on the high priest’s breastplate lit up, spelling out an answer. But we do not know. All we know is that God promised to guide by the Urim and Thummim.

Again, are we to think that God would so clearly lead His people in Old Testament times and leave them to their own decisions now?

It is very interesting that one of the longest chapters in the Bible is devoted to the subject of divine guidance. This is Genesis chapter 24 (67 verses). It tells us how Abraham’s servant went to seek a bride for his master Isaac – how he had to pray his way along and how he was most clearly led. There are more verses in Scripture concerning God’s guidance in the matter of choosing a wife for Isaac than there are about the creation of the world!

Right at the beginning of the New Testament, we find the wise men led by a star. Seeing a beautiful star in the sky, its purpose was revealed to them, and following the star they were led to “where the young Child was.”

God does not now guide His people by a pillar of cloud and fire, or by Urim and Thummim, or by a star; but He has promised to guide them by His Word and Spirit.

SOME OF GOD'S PROMISES TO GUIDE HIS PEOPLE

“The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way” (Psalm 25. 9).

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye” (Psalm 32. 8).

“And the Lord shall guide thee continually” (Isaiah 58. 11).

“I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isaiah 42. 16).

“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30. 21).

“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” – *those with an inward burden* (Isaiah 40. 11).

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3. 6).

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119. 105).

“When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16. 13).

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8. 14).

SOME PRAYERS FOR GUIDANCE

“Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths” (Psalm 25. 4).

“Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day” (Psalm 25. 5).

“Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies” (Psalm 27. 11).

“Cause me to hear Thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in Thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee” (Psalm 143. 8).

“Neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee” (2 Chronicles 20. 12).

3. PITFALLS AND MISTAKES

Though God has so kindly promised to guide His people, many of them (at least at times in their lives) find it difficult to discern God's will. No doubt this is due to the darkness and blindness of our minds. Sometimes, also, we fall under the condemnation: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Undoubtedly, too, there are times when our faith needs to be tried.

Yet it is a fact that a person, who at one time has clearly discerned God's will for him, at another time seems to be in the dark; and also that a person spiritually may be enjoying God's blessing in his soul and yet cannot feel clear concerning God's will for him in some decision he has to take.

It is now necessary to warn concerning pitfalls into which some have fallen.

1. Opening the Bible and believing that the first word the eye falls on is the word of guidance.

We need to be very careful as God is sovereign and has at times condescended to lead in this way. But it was never God's intention that His holy Word should be treated thus. (Some of us remember the "promise boxes" – tiny rolls of paper neatly contained in a beautiful box, each one with a text on it; and a pair of tweezers to help one's self to a promise!)

But many seriously minded people do seek guidance in this way. After much earnest prayer for guidance, the Bible is taken down, opened at random, and the finger placed on the page without looking. But God has given no authority for this; the heathen in ancient days used their sacred books like this.

The story is told of a person, following this method, who opened on: "Judas went out and hanged himself." Feeling that this would not do, he tried again, only to be met with: "Go, and do thou likewise." (We have even seen it stated that a third