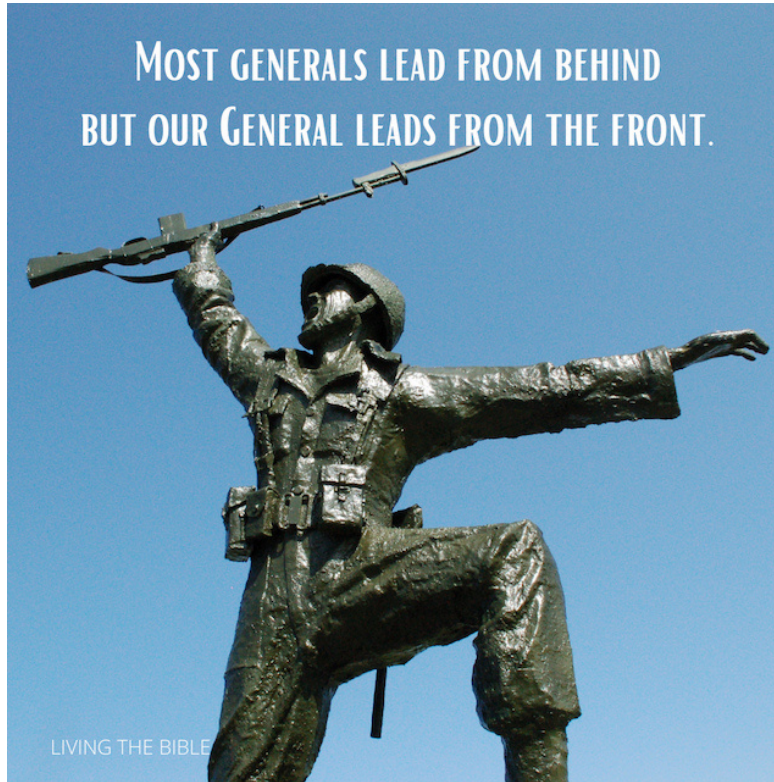

GOD GOES BEFORE YOU

EXODUS 23:20-33



Yesterday was Missions Emphasis Sunday in our church. We heard God's stirring call to go forward with the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We heard what we should do, how we should do it, and why we should do it. We heard from two inspiring missionaries who have obeyed God's call and who have gone forward with the Gospel into a closed country in Central Asia. In all this, God was calling us once again to go forward with the Gospel. It was instructive, inspiring and energizing.

But now Monday morning is here and we fear and hesitate. Forward looks much more difficult and much less appealing today. Fear is easier than forward. But, in Exodus 23:20-33, God has a message that will give us confidence to move forward. God moves us forward by going forward before us.

LEARNING

GOD'S ANGEL GOES BEFORE YOU (20-25)

"Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him" (20-21).

'Angel' means messenger, and here the messenger is the Son of God. At various points in the Old Testament, he took on angelic form, or human form, centuries before he took on human flesh in his incarnation. We know it's no ordinary angel or messenger because of the way God describes him in these verses, especially in these words, "My name is in him" (21). There's a film called Gods and Generals, but here the promise is God is our General.

**MOST GENERALS LEAD FROM BEHIND,
BUT OUR GENERAL LEADS FROM THE FRONT.**

"OK, I'm not terrified now, but I'm still afraid."

GOD'S FEAR GOES BEFORE YOU (27)

"I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you" (27). God promised to work in the psychology of their enemies. He says, "I'll go before you as an invisible psychologist with access to your enemies' hearts and minds, and I'll put fear and confusion there so that they will run away when you appear."

GOD REMOVES FEAR FROM OUR HEARTS AND PUTS IT IN HIS ENEMIES' HEARTS.

"But I still feel so lonely. Any other soldiers with me?"

GOD'S HORNETS GO BEFORE YOU (28-32)

God has already promised his presence with them, his fear before them, and now he promises an additional army of soldiers. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land (28-30). God sends his soldiers with a 'slowly-but-surely' strategy that will guarantee total and complete victory (31).

A SLOWLY-BUT-SURELY STRATEGY ENSURES A COMPLETE AND TOTAL VICTORY.

LOVING

God doesn't stand behind us and push us forward. He goes forward with us and even before us. He commissions us and commits to be with us and even before us. We find Jesus repeating very similar words in Matthew 28:18-20. There he commissioned us, his New Testament people, and committed to be with us always and everywhere. What a rare General! So brave, so strong, so encouraging, so present, so powerful, so victorious.

LIVING

Go forward with confidence because God goes forward before us to secure victory.
