

Led to follow

And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.

Matthew 2:21-22

We see in this text two of four times within the first two chapters of Matthew's gospel where Joseph responded promptly to God's leading. In at least two of those instances, he was led by messages from God that resolved dilemmas that Joseph was facing. The first, in chapter one, was indeed the most perplexing, as he was dealing with the situation of Mary's pregnancy and his response, both in the eyes of people and in the eyes of God. There is much that we are not told in the account, but as Matthew notes that Joseph was a just man, it had to have been a painful struggle for him to know what to think, whom to believe, and ultimately what was the right thing to do. God was merciful in sending the angel in a dream to tell him the right answer. In the last, Joseph was in a quandary about where to settle in Israel with the relative threats of Herod's sons ruling in different territories. All four times we see Joseph obeying what God said in the dreams. It is also interesting that the dream messages came through an angel the first three times, but no angel is mentioned in the last one.

Joseph teaches us a lesson with respect to the leading of the Lord. As a just, or righteous, person, Joseph desired to do right, which always coincides with the will of God, since His will defines right. Evidence of Joseph's character is revealed in each case as he does, at his first opportunity, just as he was instructed. Philip Keller has stated something to the effect that "you can know the will of God, if you want to know the will of God to do it, not to vote on it." This principle is exemplified in these four instances of God leading Joseph. By contrast, we can sometimes be caught in the situation of seeking God's will before we are willing to obey whatever He says. Such an attitude should not expect to be led. Let us instead learn from Joseph to be willing always to do what is right according to the Lord, then look for His leading in our lives, through His word and His Spirit.