

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-2-12 PM NOTES  
"MYTHS ABOUT GOD'S GUIDANCE"  
EXODUS 13-15  
Non-Series Message

**Psalms 48:14 (NKJV)** "For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide *even* to death."

**Exodus 13:21-22 (NKJV)** "21 And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night *from* before the people."

**1 Corinthians 10:11 (ESV)** "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

**Myth # 1** – God Always Guides Us in the Most Efficient Way (13:17-18)

**Psalms 103:14 (NKJV)** "For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust."

**Myth # 2** – God Always Guides Us in the Smoothest Way (14:8-12)

A. "Do not be afraid" (14:13a)

**2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)** "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

**Hebrews 13:6b (NKJV)** "*The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*"

B. "Stand still" (14:13b)

**Psalms 46:10 (NKJV)** "Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

C. "See the salvation of the Lord" (14:13c)

**Myth # 3** – God Always Guides Us in Agreement With Human Logic (15:22-25)

**Exodus 16:8b (NKJV)** "Your complaints *are* not against us but against the Lord."

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV)** "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

"I know not the way He leads me, but well do I know my guide."

—Martin Luther

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-2-12 PM  
“MYTHS ABOUT GOD’S GUIDANCE”  
EXODUS 13-15  
Non-Series Message

Most of us who have been in church and have walked with God for a lengthy period of time can remember a sermon or Sunday School lesson that deeply impacted our lives. I heard such a sermon by Dr. Adrian Rogers about 30 or 35 years ago. I still remember the title of the message he preached on how God guides His children. The title was “Detours, Dead Ends, and Dry Holes”. I’m not preaching his message, but I am using the same text and taking some of the life impacting truths that I learned and sharing them with you. There are so many myths that people believe as truth when it comes to God’s guidance. A myth is defined as “a widely held but mistaken belief.” In this message, I want us demythologize God’s guidance. When it comes to God’s guidance, the good news is that God guides His children. **Psalms 48:14 (NKJV)** “For this *is* God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide *even* to death.” The Old and New Testaments are full of promises that God will guide His people. The rest of the story is that we don’t always understand the “hows”, the “whys” and the timing of God’s guidance. By that I mean that we don’t always see or understand why or how or God leads us in the way He leads us. Sometimes to our little brains, God’s ways and the paths on which He leads us do not make sense. The purpose of this message is to help you get rid of unbiblical concepts (myths) about God’s guidance. One of the reasons many Christians don’t understand God’s ways in guiding us is that we assume that if we are following God’s guidance, everything goes smoothly and iron gates open immediately and problems dissolve before us like a snow cone on a hot July day. The flip side of that false concept of God’s guidance is that if the road gets rocky, there are obstacles in the way, and problems seem to be growing instead of melting away, we must have missed God’s leading. Hopefully today that false view of God’s guidance will be laid to rest.

Let me set the context of the verses we are going to look at today. God has brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They have seen miracle after miracle. The last miracle they saw was how the blood of a lamb was put on the door post and the death angel of judgment spared the firstborn of Israel while taking the first born of all the Egyptians. As they left Egypt under Moses’ leadership, God guided them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. **Exodus 13:21-22 (NKJV)** “<sup>21</sup> And the Lord went before them by day in a **pillar of cloud** to lead the way, and by night in a **pillar of fire** to give them light, so as to go by day and night. <sup>22</sup> He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night *from* before the people.” It is essential that you understand this – they were being led by God. We have something (or to be more accurate, someone) better than a cloud and a pillar of fire. We have the very Spirit of God dwelling within us to guide us. As we allow Him to fill us and as we walk in dependence on Him, He intricately guides us on our journey. Let me ask a question and then answer it. What right do we have to use what happened to the Israelites 3,400 years ago and draw principles out to apply to our own lives? Listen to **1 Corinthians 10:11 (ESV)** “Now these things happened to them as **an example**, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” If you look at the context of 1 Corinthians 10:11, you will find that it is talking about the Israelites and specifically the Israelites in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt. These principles certainly apply to us.

#### Myth # 1 – God Always Guides Us in the Most Efficient Way (13:17-18)

If you looked at a map, the most direct route from Egypt to the land of Canaan went right through the land of the Philistines. The shortest path between two points is a straight line, but it is not always the best path. Verse 18 literally says that God led the people in a round about way. Remember that this was before their episode of unbelief in Kadesh-Barnea where they refused to go into the Promised Land and as judgment from God were sent to wander in the desert for 40 years. They were following the cloud and the fire and God led them in a round about way. We have a privilege that these Israelites didn’t have. We are told why God led them in a round about way. It was because the Philistines were a warrior people and the

Israelites, had they gone the most direct route, would have done battle with the Philistines, and they were not ready for that. They were not yet equipped for battle. When it seems like we are going in circles, remember that God knows things you do not know. He is all knowing (omniscient). He knows the future as well as He knows the present and the past. In fact it is all present to Him. Let me tell you something else He knows: He knows you! *Psalms 103:14 (NKJV)* “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” If you sit at a railroad crossing and look at the railroad cars as they pass, you will see written on the side: Load Limit \_\_\_\_\_ pounds or tons. The God who formed us in our mother’s womb knows our load limit. He knows what you are ready for and what you are not ready for. Sometimes He leads us in a round about way because in His omniscience, He knows what lies ahead and He knows we are not ready for it. I’ve seen people who charged ahead and got into situations that they weren’t ready for. I’ve seen Pastors who at a young age were talented and they get themselves into a large church and are asked to preach in the big conferences and get acclaim and it is too much for them. Some fall morally and some are filled with pride and rendered unusable by God. On the other hand I think of Henry Blackaby who labored in anonymity in small churches and denominational positions in Western Canada until he was I suppose in his mid to late fifties. He wrote the discipleship course called “Experiencing God” that was used in tens of thousands of churches across denominational lines. He became one of the most sought after preachers in America and wrote several other excellent books. When he spoke here in February of 2006, I had the privilege of spending a little time with him and found him to be a very humble man who seemed amazed that God had so used him. Some of you in the business world have seen the same thing. Early success sometimes ruins a person. Before God used Moses, he allowed him to stay on the backside of a desert for about 40 years. After Paul was converted to Christ, he was on fire and God led him into the desert of Arabia for three years. God’s timetable is not our timetable. We don’t have to be constantly achieving to please God nor is activity and “success” a sign that we are following God’s guidance. God uses the deserts and the delays to build discipline and confidence in Him into our lives. In my 26 plus years here as Pastor, I have seen this principle at work in our church. If you look at the overall numbers they look good (250-1400 in attendance). However if you look year by year, you would find years of no growth and a few years of decline. God was teaching us to examine ourselves, examine our priorities, examine our motives, examine whether we were following the Scriptures in all that we do, to trust Him and not bow to the idol of pragmatism (whatever produces success – numbers and crowds – is what we need to do). After those dry times we can usually see a great work God has done because we waited on Him. I really believe that is where we are now as a church. Maybe you have been asking God for a certain job or a larger home for your growing family or someone to marry or an opportunity to go back to school. Focus on delighting in the Lord (Psalm 37:4) and don’t think that because it is slow in coming that you have necessarily missed God’s guidance. Sometimes His guidance takes us the long way around and it seems like we are just marking time and even wasting time. God never gets in a hurry!

#### Myth # 2 – God Always Guides Us in the Smoothest Way (14:8-12)

It is one thing to feel that you have been delayed; it is something altogether different to come to a dead end and face what seems like an impossible situation. The Israelites were in an impossible seeming predicament. Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he thought, “I have to have those slaves back – our economy will be ruined without them.” He gathers his army and off he goes after them. The Israelites are camped by the Red Sea. Remember that they were following God’s leading. He had them in this place. Word began to spread that the Egyptians were coming, and they had no place to go. There were mountains on either side, the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh’s army behind them. This was no small dilemma! The Israelites had very short memories. They had forgotten all the miracles God performed to get them out of Egypt and the promise to Abraham that his descendents would inherit the land. They began to turn on Moses their leader and doubt God’s guidance. It may be that you are right now in a dilemma that seems to have no solution. You thought you were following the Lord’s guidance. It may be a health dilemma, a financial dilemma, a vocational dilemma, a family dilemma, or some other personal relationship dilemma. There is no counselor you can go to for a quick fix, no book you can read,

or no expert you can call. Does that mean that you missed God's guidance? Not necessarily. He led Israel into a desperate dilemma. There was nothing smooth about where the Lord had led them. However, none of what the Israelites experienced caught God by surprise. There is never any panic in heaven. Look at **Exodus 14:1-4 (NKJV)** "<sup>1</sup> Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. <sup>3</sup> For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They *are* bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' <sup>4</sup> Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I *am* the Lord.' And they did so." Actually God was setting a trap for the Egyptians to extend His judgment on them. If you are seeking to walk with God and follow His guidance and you find yourself in an rough place that seems to have no good way out, God knows and God has a plan. He is bringing you to a place of desperation to bring you to a place of total dependence. In their dilemma, God gave Israel some specific directions in Exodus 14:13.

A. "Do not be afraid" (14:13a)

When we find ourselves in a difficult place, our immediate temptation is to let a spirit of fear grip our heart. Know that it did not come from God. **2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)** "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." I have never counted but I have read numerous times that 365 times in the Bible we are told to "fear not" or its equivalent. That's one command for every day of the year. **Hebrews 13:6b (NKJV)** "*The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*"

B. "Stand still" (14:13b)

That phrase does not mean to cease all activity; it means to stop fear induced, flesh empowered activity and join in on God's activity when he tells us to. **Psalms 46:10 (NKJV)** "Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" He is telling us to drop our plans and wait on God's plans. When we face a dilemma our tendency is to "do something even if it's wrong". I am reminded of the pilot who came on the intercom and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that our navigation instruments are out and we are completely lost. The good news is that we have a tailwind and we are making excellent time." Stand still! Cease striving and trying to push through flesh initiated plans. Some of us would have sent out teams to find trees to chop down and build rafts. God said "I will be glorified and I don't need you to help Me out."

C. "See the salvation of the Lord" (14:13c)

If we never found ourselves in dilemmas, we would never see the amazing deliverance of the Lord. When you find yourself in a dilemma that is not of your making, refuse to fear or jump ahead of God, and be still and trust Him to work. This is the faith step. God knew how He was going to deliver them, but they didn't know. God says to live in dependence on Him and see His great work. I don't know how God is going to deal with your dilemma, but I know that He knows and that He can be trusted. We know what God did. Until the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the greatest display of God's power and glory that was pointed to was His parting of the Red Sea. God made an 8 lane highway through the water and then caused Pharaoh's army to drown and the end result was that He was glorified. Destroy in your mind the myth that God's guidance takes us in the most efficient way and the myth that God's guidance takes us the smooth way.

Myth # 3 – God Always Guides Us in Agreement with Human Logic (15:22-25)

Keep in mind that they were still being led by God. Their dilemma **was** too much water – the Red Sea, and now there is not enough water. The key phrase is that last line in verse 25, "...and there He tested them." That Hebrew word translated "tested" means to prove. When one of the major car companies introduces a new kind of car, they take it to what is called "a proving ground". There, the car is put through extreme situations so that weaknesses will be revealed and then adjustments can be made. Remember that God did not place these Israelites in this painful circumstance because they refused to

follow his leading or because Moses was a poor leader. It was a test to reveal their weaknesses. This test or proving ground situation certainly revealed some major weaknesses in the Israelites. It revealed their lack of trust in God and it revealed their propensity to sin by murmuring. In verse 24, the word translated “complained” is “murmured” in the KJV. Someone described the situation this way, **“In just three days, Moses had gone from hero to zero, and the people had gone from sweet songs to sour dispositions”**. God’s guidance is not always in line with flawed human logic. Perhaps the most dangerous sin we must avoid when we do not understand God’s leading and we find ourselves in disappointing and painful circumstances is the sin of murmuring or complaining. Murmuring is no minor sin. In 1 Corinthians 10, murmuring or complaining is classified with the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality. Here is why the sin of complaining is so serious. When you complain about your situation, you are complaining against God! *Exodus 16:8b (NKJV)* when the people were complaining about the leader (Moses) that God had given them look at what God revealed through Moses, “...Your complaints *are* not against us but against the Lord.” When they murmured against God’s appointed leader, they were murmuring against God. Sometimes God guides us into disappointing and painful circumstances to reveal our weaknesses and our vulnerability to certain sins. Any Christian can give God thanks when everything is going smooth and our health is great and our family is great and our finances are great, but God wants us to be so surrendered to Him and so trusting of Him that we can give Him thanksgiving by faith even when we come to Marah – the place of bitter waters. *1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV)* says “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” I want you to see what God did in this painful, disappointing, testing place (Exodus 15:25). That tree had been there all the time they were complaining. God already had the provision; He knew exactly what He was going to do. I don’t think it is stretching the text too far to see symbolism here of the cross of Christ. When we are brought to the end of ourselves and then reckon on our death with Christ on that cross, we are free from what binds us and free to let Christ in us live through us. When you come to the place of learning that Jesus is all you have, you will discover that he is all you need. One more thing I want to point out. Look what was waiting for them just over the hill (Exodus 15:27). It was a beautiful oasis in the desert with abundant water.

#### CONCLUSION

Martin Luther said, “I know not the way He leads me, but well do I know my guide”. It is not important that you know all that God knows. We don’t have that capacity. What is important is that we know God. When we know Him, we can trust Him even when He guides us in what seems like inefficient ways, even when He guides us into rough seemingly impossible places, and even when His leading seems illogical to us. God knows what He is doing; trust Him.