

Place: Lurgan Baptist 4:8:2013

## MOSES, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

### 9. DOES GOD STILL GUIDE ?

Reading: Exodus 13:17-22

Several years ago in the U.S.A. a Christian lady was pondering on making a trip to Israel. For a very long time it had been her desire to visit the Holy Land. One night before she went to sleep, she gathered all the material, the brochures, the itinerary around her and she read them intently. She knew where her hotels would be, she knew that her itinerary would start in Jerusalem, and then after a few days of exploring the capital, they would make their way down to Jericho and travel from there up the Jordan Valley toward Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee. *It was all so exciting.* There she was she had the pilgrimage sitting before her, she had the money to pay for the trip, she wanted to go. But there was one question that was perturbing her. It was this. Was it God's will for her to go ? Just before she went to sleep she read that she would make the trip from the U.S.A. to Israel on a 747 jumbo jet. With that she committed the whole trip to the Lord and went to sleep. Next morning when she awoke she looked at her digital clock and guess what ? It read 747. She had her answer and off she went.

Some time ago a Christian man was convinced that he had to buy a car, but the exact colour of the car was to be yellow. He looked around for a long, long, time and

eventually he spotted his yellow car. Without much examination he bought the car. And guess what ? It turned out to be a canary. *It was useless.* Let me make a statement about guidance that you may not agree with. ***When it comes to guidance there is sense and nonsense talked about it.*** How many believers have taken a course of action and ended up in a mess and when you have asked them, they have said, “ *But God told me, God led me.* ” The truth of the matter is this, that much of the time it is not God leading us, it is us leading ourselves. Can I say reverently that God would not be fool enough to do some of the things that professing Christians do. Now this is not to diminish the fact that God does lead us. You see, as sinners we need a Saviour, as captives we need a Deliverer, and as pilgrims we need a Guide.

Israel's exodus from Egypt wasn't the end of their experience with God it was the new beginning. “ *It one night to take Israel out of Egypt but forty years to take Egypt out of Israel,* ” said George Morrison. I mean here they were approximately 2 million of them about to start this long awaited journey to Canaan. Now had there been any military strategists in Israel that night, they probably would have disagreed with the evacuation route God selected because it was too long. The Lord seemed to be taking them on a round about way to the Promised Land. Did they think to themselves, “ *What is God doing here ? This is not the nearest way ! This is not the easiest way ! This is not the best way.* ” Is that how you feel this .... ? Do you feel that you are out in the wilderness and all you're doing is going around in circles ? ( Job 36:22,10 ) Well,

sometimes God uses this method to educate us spiritually. Now the simple geographical fact referred to in ( Exodus Ch 13 ) is that when God led Israel out of Egypt He did not lead them directly to the Land of Promise, but led them indirectly. The result, was, of course that the journey took not a few days, as would have been the case had they travelled through the way of the land of the Philistines, but the journey took a long time. Now I want to talk to you this .... on this subject, “ *Does God still guide ?*” I want you to notice,

### **(1) SOME RULES TO THIS GUIDANCE**

Look if you will at ( 13:18 ) In ( 13:17 ) its put another way. The fact of God’s guidance expressed in these verses is later expanded in ( 13:21-22 ) You see, God’s guides His people. ( Ps 25:9 32:8 ) Dr. W. E. Sangster was so sure of this fact that he entitled his book on the subject of guidance, **God does Guide us**. Indeed if you look at this passage you’ll notice the,

#### **(a) THE LAW OF CERTAINTY:**

“ *God led them not through,*” ( 13:17 ) “ *God led the people about,*” ( 13:18 ) God chose the way for His people through the wilderness. George Muller once said, “ *I never remember in all my Christian course that I ever sincerely and patiently sought to know the will of God by the teaching of the Holy Ghost through the instrumentality of the Word of God but I have always been directed.*” Are you wondering about the future ? Are you uncertain as to the course that you should take ? My .... be assured that God’s guidance is always

possible. It is certain, to those who are,

#### **(1) REDEEMED BY HIM:**

For let’s s remember that the Children of Israel had just been redeemed from the bitter bondage of Egypt. They had known the protecting blood and the mighty hand of Jehovah. ( 12:13 13:9 ) Moses put it this way, “ *Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed.*” ( 15:13 ) You see, God is pledged to guide only those who are His people through faith in His Son, the Lamb of God. My .... are you one of His people ? Have you been redeemed by His precious blood ? Have you been brought out that you might be brought in ?

#### **(2) RULED BY HIM:**

God led His people, his people followed. How do we know ? Well, when the Pillar of Cloud lifted they journeyed, when the cloud tarried they stayed. ( Exod 40:36-38 ) The Bible puts it this way, “ *At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched .....*” ( Num 9:18, 20, 23 ) That indicates that the Pillar of Cloud was the supreme authority where Israel was to go. You see, no other authority is equal to or above the Lord’s. In other words God was acknowledged not only as their Redeemer but as their Ruler. Do you want to know God’s guidance in your life ? Then there must be a spirit of willingness to be led. The Lord Jesus stated this principle when He said, “ *If any man will do His will he shall know .....*” ( Jn 7:17 ) The Christian who says, “ *I’m not certain*

*whether I'll do His will when I know what it is, but you reveal You will to me and let me decide,*" is never going to know the will of God. Are you prepared to pray with Horatius Bonar,

*I dare not choose my lot,  
I would not if I might:  
Choose Thou for me, my God:  
So shall I walk aright*

**(3) RESTING IN HIM:**

I mean was this not the problem with the children of Israel, time and again as they made their way to the Promised Land ? They were restless. Guilty of idolatry, of fornication, of murmuring, of limiting God. ( 1 Cor 10:6 ) The Lord loves to have us not only to submit to His authority but to submit restfully, knowing that His will is best. Paul speaks of the will of God as being "*good, and acceptable, and perfect.*" ( Rom 12:2 ) The hymn-writer put it like this,

***Whatever my God ordains is right  
He never will deceive me  
He leads me by the proper path  
I know He will not leave me  
I take content  
What He hath sent  
His hand can turn my griefs away  
And patiently I wait His day***

**(b) THE LAW OF SIMPLICITY:**

*" And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud ....., "* ( 13:21 Num 9:17-18 ) From Rameses, the starting point of the exodus ( 12:37 ) they went to Succoth, about 15 to 20 miles south east, and then from Succoth to Etham and so on. ( 13:20 ) In other words the Lord was leading them a step at a time. ( Num 33:1 ) Is this not exactly how God deals with us ? Sure, God has a definite plan for each of our lives ( Eph 2:10 ) but He usually does not reveal to us more than the next step in it, that we might kept in daily dependence on Him. Do you recall that this is how He led Philip ? Imagine being told to leave a great gospel campaign where souls were being saved and demons were being exorcised. ( Acts 8:12 17 ) And a city turned upside down and inside out for Christ. But the Lord came and said to Philip, "*Arise, and go toward the south ....., "* ( 8:26 ) I mean, he received no further details. He had, as, it were, to go with sealed orders.

Do you know what Philip did ? "*And he arose and went.*" Then he received the next command. "*Go near and join thyself to this chariot.*" ( 8:29 ) The result ? The Ethiopian eunuch was gloriously saved. The Lord leading him, one step at a time. Why ? That he might continually trust in Him. The psalmist says, "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.*" ( Ps 37:23 ) "*And as thou goest step by step the way shall open before thee.*" ( Prov 4:12 ) So when, we thing of the Lord's guidance there is, (a) (b)

**(c) THE LAW OF MYSTERY:**

Here were Israel on the borders of Egypt. Canaan was

their destination, God was their guide but how perplexed they must have been when they discovered the way God was leading them. It certainly was not,

### **1. THE NEAREST WAY:**

Look if you will at ( 13:17 )As the crow flies, the route to Canaan from Egypt was through the land of the Philistines. This way would have been along the north side of the wilderness along the coast of the Mediterranean, through the land of the Philistines entering Canaan on the south west. This would have been the most direct route but it was not God's way. Now had they headed straight for Canaan, they would have arrived there in less than two weeks, rather than the forty years it eventually took them. (1)

### **2. THE EASIEST WAY:**

*“ God led the people about.”* ( 13:18 ) He took them south away from Canaan, into the wilderness. The easiest route seemed to be through the land of the Philistines but God said **“ No.”** ( Num 14:4 ) You see, the Lord knew what He was doing, as He always does. Are you perplexed this ... as to the way God is leading you ? Listen, His thoughts are not our thoughts, His ways are not our ways. And sometimes His leading is to us the source of surprise and perplexity. My ... because of our finite intellect, our faulty insight, and our foolish interpretation of His guidance we are often baffled and beaten as to the reason for His strange leading. It's at such times we must remember that God is still leading us and we must trust Him, for His way is perfect.

Whatever God happens to be doing right now, do you believe that it is all for the best ? Can you say,

*My Fathers way twist and turn,  
My heart may throb and ache,  
But in my soul I'm glad to know  
God maketh no mistake*

Now why did the Lord lead them this way ? (1)

### **(2) SOME REASONS FOR THIS GUIDANCE**

Look if you will at ( 13:17 ) Why did God lead His people in this roundabout way ? What did God have in mind for His people ? What goal or objective was to be achieved by this strange leading ? Two words answer that question. The first word is **Mercy** and the second word is **Maturity**. Do you see,

#### **(a) THE MERCY THAT GOD DISPLAYED:**

Now God knew had he taken them the straight way, they would have gone through Philistia. And if they had gone through Philistia they would have met the war like Philistines. And when they saw the Philistines they would have been frightened. And when they frightened and their hearts were filled with fear they would have turned around. They would have turned their heels and they would have gone back to Egypt. In other words God was saying, *“ If they face war prematurely they might change their minds and return to Egypt.”* You see God's strange but sure guidance was dictated partly because of the frailty and feebleness of His people.

My .... do you not see here a beautiful instance of the knowledge and greatness of God ? “ *He knoweth our frame He remembereth that we are dust.* ” ( Ps 103:14 ) When Paul speaks of Gods dealings with Israel he uses this expression, “ *And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness.* ”

( Acts 13:18) Now here is another rendering, “ *God bore and fed them as a nurse beareth and feedeth her child.* ” My .... God knew the greatness of Israel’s foe and the weakness of Israel’s faith and God dealt gently with them and would not “ *suffer them to be tempted above that they were able.* ” ( 1 Cor 10:13 ) That’s why He adapted the journey to their strength. Do you know something ? I’m so glad that God knows what I am ready for. And the Lord knows what you are ready for. Now the Lord has a land of blessing for you, the Lord has a place of fulfilment for you and He has a job for you to do and God has blessing upon blessing that He wants to give you.

But right now God may have you in the wilderness going round and round in circles. And you may think that you are out of the will of God. But you’re not out of the will of God. God is leading you round about because God knows that you’re not quite ready for some of the things that He has in store for you. You have seen these 90 day wonders haven’t you ? They go up like a rocket and come down like a rock. My .... do you feel that you are presently travelling on a detour ? Do you feel that God is leading you in a roundabout way ? Fret not, fear not, fail not for there is a purpose in “ *the serpentine path, the confused movements, the unaccountable delays.* ”

*Then murmur not at the winding way,  
It is our Father's will  
To lead us home by the zigzag path,  
To bring the force of the hill*

### **(b) THE MATURITY THAT GOD DESIRED:**

You see, God’s purpose is not to make us comfortable but to make us spiritually mature. There was a maturity that God desired,

#### **1. In there Going Out:**

Do you see ( 13:18 ) “ *Harnessed,* ” means in “ *orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.* ” The original King James Version had “ *by five in a rank,* ” in the margin. We are not to picture Israel leaving Egypt in helter skelter fashion. Now that must come as a disappointment to many. Do you know something ? A popular notice today is that God loves chaos and that we are most spiritual when we throw order aside. Think of the chaos and confusion in many local church services where nothing is planned and where everything is irreverent. Yet the Scripture says, “ *Let all things be done decently and in order.* ” ( 1 Cor 14:40 ) 1.

#### **2. In there Going Though:**

“ *But God led the people though the way of the wilderness .....* ” Now what was that like ? It was a place of hardness, it was a place of drought, it was a place of discipline. What was God doing with them out there ? Well God was just simply toughening them up.

It was God's boot camp, it was God's training camp. And God was getting them ready. Sometimes we think we have to be achieving, that we have to go in straight lines or we are out of the will of God. Not so. My .... God leads you though the wilderness and the detours because He is preparing something wonderful thing for you, something better. I heard about an evangelist whose wife died, leaving him with two little boys to rear. He hired a lady to stay with them while he was on his crusades. When he travelled, he would nearly always return with presents for the little boys. One time, however he forgot to buy their gifts. " *Daddy, Daddy,*" they shouted as they met him at the airport. Of course they asked about the presents.

He said, " *Boys, what we're going to do is let get you anything you want.*" So they stopped at a large store. First they went by the sweet counter. They wanted sweets but their Daddy suggested they keep looking. They came to two cowboy suits and they wanted to settle on those. Daddy asked them to look further. They moved into the sporting department and picked up basketballs and began to dribble, " *Daddy, Daddy, we want these basketballs.*" They were excited. Finally, they went to the very back of the store, and against the wall were two beautiful bicycles. The boys left with far more than they bargained for. They started with sweets and ended up with expensive bikes that Daddy wanted to buy all the time. My .... do you realise that God is not leading you around in circles for no reason ? He takes you on detour because He is preparing something wonderful for you, something better. So there are (1) (2)

### (3) SOME RESOURCES IN THIS GUIDANCE

You see, the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night was a token of,

#### (a) ***GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE:***

Can you see Israel standing on the very boundaries of the wilderness ? Ahead is the unknown. What did she have going for her ? Well, the nation had a vivid memory of what God had done in Egypt. What else had they going for them ? Well, they had a reminder of God's promises in the bones of Joseph. What else ? Well, " *the Lord went before them by day ....,*" ( 13:21 ) Now this pillar was the visible sign of the Lord's presence with His people, its upper portion rising up to heaven in the form of a column, its lower portion being spread out cloud-wise over the Tabernacle. God with His people. So it is today. " *And they shall call his name Emmanuel which being interpreted is God with us.*" ( Matt 1:23 ) With me at the kitchen sink. With me driving through rush hour traffic to face an impossible boss. With me in my loneliness and weakness, with me in all the ups and downs of life. (a)

#### (b) ***GOD'S PROVISION TO HIS PEOPLE:***

Think of it. Two million odd people in a waste howling wilderness with no guide book to direct them, or track to follow. Yet they were assured of infallible guidance. Do you see ( 13:21 ) You see, the Pillar, was given primarily to guide Israel through their wilderness journey. ( 13:21 ) It meant that they were never left to

their own devices. All that was required of them was a simple and candid obedience. My .... we too need an unerring guide for our path is no more certain than theirs. And God has given to us the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures and these are to be our pillar of cloud and fire until the journey is over. Do you recall what the Lord Jesus said about the Holy Spirit ? “ *He will guide you.* ” ( Jn 16:13 ) It was while the leaders of the fellowship at Antioch were fasting that the Holy Ghost said, “ *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.* ” ( Acts 13:2 ) Sometimes the Holy Spirit **restrains** ( 16:6-7 ) other times the Holy Spirit **constrains** ( 16:10 )

My .... do we know what it is to be led by the Spirit of God ? ( Rom 8:14 ) Are we learning to listen for His voice ? ( 1 Kings 19:12 ) Are we sensitive to His promptings and leadings ? Of course, the Spirit of God leads us by the Word of God and this is typified in the Pillar when the Psalmist says, “ *He ( God ) spake unto them in the cloudy pillar.* ” ( Ps 99:7 ) My .... the Holy Spirit will never lead you in contradiction to the Scriptures. Of the Holy Scriptures it is written, “ *Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* ” ( Ps 119:105 ) The Scriptures show me the steps I should take. Now where there is a clear statement in Scripture concerning the matter on which guidance is desired, no further guidance need be sought. The Lord has already revealed His will and any seeming guidance which is contrary to Scripture is both spurious and false. Young folk, you don't need guidance about dating for God has already stated “ *Be ye not unequally yoked together.* ” ( 2 Cor 6:14 ) You don't guidance about

believers baptism for God has said, “ *Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.* ” ( Matt 28:19 ) You don't need guidance about the Lord's Table for the Saviour says, “ *this do in remembrance of me.* ” ( Lk 22:19 ) You don't need guidance about church membership for Luke says of the early believers “ *And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.* ” ( Acts 2:41 ) Ladies you don't guidance about head-covering whether to wear it or not, in this church or any church, on holiday or at home for Paul says “ *For this cause ought the woman to have power ( a sign of submission ) on her head because of the angels.* ” ( 1 Cor 11:10 ) You don't guidance about giving for Paul says “ *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him .....* ” ( 1 Cor 16:2 )

Now have you grasp this ? *Nothing forbidden in the Word of God can be the will of God. The will of God is the Word of God, and the Word of God is the will of God.* Therefore if we want to know God's guidance, the most important thing is to get to know God's Word. Do you know why so many of us are ignorant of God's will ? It's because we don't God's Word. ( Acts 17:11 ) God's gift to Israel to guide them was the pillar of Cloud. My .... God's gift to us is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures. Are you sensitive to the Spirit of God ? Are you subject to the Word of God ? ***If you are, you will know God's guidance !***