

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

by

Charles E. Fuller

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire

PLEASE PICTURE WITH ME A NATION OF PEOPLE, ONE million five hundred thousand strong-men, women and children, with their personal belongings and cattle leaving Egypt where they had been dwelling for some 400 years. GOD had appointed Moses to lead this vast throng as they headed toward the Promised Land of Canaan.

And remember, my friend, they were going by paths which to them were absolutely unknown!

How would they be guided? How would they be protected? How would they be sheltered from the cruel and devastating desert sandstorms and heat? What provision would there be for light during the long, dark desert night?

Ah, GOD who is ever faithful, provided for His children the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

And best of all He went before - He led them! [91]

Read Exodus 13:21,22: "**And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them in the way; . . . by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people:**"

Truly GOD is faithful!

Four hundred years before this exodus from Egypt, Israel had left their homeland on account of a severe famine.

They had traveled south and west, going some 300 miles to the land of Goshen, to the rich and fertile delta regions of the River Nile.

There they had suffered long years of slavery under cruel task masters. And now, after four hundred years, Israel was leaving, traveling eastward toward the Red Sea.

Look at your map in the back of your Bible, and follow the journey of the children of Israel.

GOD'S PROVISION FOR GUIDANCE

Notice Exodus 13:17: "**And it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, [that land lying on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea between Egypt and Canaan] although that was near; for God said, lest peradventure the people repent when they see war and they return to Egypt. But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea . . .**" [92]

Please underline those words "**But God**" and wherever you find those two words linked together in the Bible just pause and consider them, for the HOLY SPIRIT will enlighten you, and you will see new truth.

Now GOD provided that pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, but what was its origin? That remains a mystery. We are not told how it came into being - only when it came.

Please note that it was a pillar, not just a hovering cloud, but a pillar of cloud, and a pillar indicates strength.

That great company of people fleeing from Egypt had great need of strength - GOD's strength - on that dark night, for they were being pursued by the Egyptians with great numbers of chariots, horses, and horsemen.

They were in a dangerous spot: they were fleeing through a gap between two mountains with the Red Sea in front of them and this hostile army led by Pharaoh behind them.

He doubtless thought that Israel was an easy prey, entangled in the land.

From outward appearance it looked as though GOD were leading Israel to her doom.

But wait! GOD was leading Israel to a place of blessing, and He was leading Pharaoh and the Egyptians to a place of destruction in the Red Sea. [93]

What happened? It was here that the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night appeared - GOD's loving provision for the protection of His children.

Read with me Exodus 14:19, 20: "**And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them: and the pillar of . . . cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these so that the one came not near the other all night.**"

Oh, Israel was fearful and complaining, wishing they had remained in bondage in Egypt. But Moses said to the people, "**Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord which he shall work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still.**"

Then GOD spoke to Moses and said, "**Lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it that the children of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea.**"

Then a strong east wind blew all night long and divided the waters so there was a wall of water on each side as the children of Israel passed through on a dry path.

Then the pillar of cloud and fire which had gone behind the children of Israel (a light to them, but darkness to the Egyptians) went before to lead them.

GOD provided this cloud for a protection, a guide and a light. Oh, I am so glad, that personally speaking, I have the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, the Lord JESUS to stand between me and the god of this age, Satan, who hates the righteous. [94]

THE NECESSITY OF OBEYING GOD

As the cloud moved on, Israel was led to the beautiful shade of the seventy palm trees and the wonderful water from the twelve wells of Elim. No doubt they wanted to remain at Elim, but no, GOD led His dear children along with the pillar of cloud to guide them, GOD working out His perfect will for His Own as they followed in submission.

He leads those who are obedient, those who are willing to follow.

Remember this when you sing, "*Where He Leads Me I Will Follow*," and associate it with the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud.

Now the pillar of fire by night gave light.

Note, please, that Israel was in the Wilderness.

This great caravan included one million five-hundred thousand people on that arduous journey, yet this pillar of fire stood at the Red Sea and flood-lighted the path that GOD made through the Sea, with walls of water on each side, but it darkened the way of the Egyptians.

It is nighttime now.

Paul speaks of the night being far spent. Satan, the god of this age, and his army of wicked hosts, are hot on our trail. We need light. But GOD's Word is a pillar of light in the night season to us, "**a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path . . . The entrance of God's Word gives light.**"

Do you need light on your perplexing problems, my brother?

Go to the Word and GOD will give you the answer.

He never fails. [95]

Not only was that pillar of fire a light, but it was a pillar of cloud by day, a great umbrella over the entire camp of Israel, protecting them from the burning heat of the desert sun.

Then, when the night shadows began to fall, GOD's children could see that pillar of cloud gradually transformed, transfused, changed into a pillar of fire.

I wish I could have seen it!

What an awesome sight it must have been, and yet how glorious!

I wish I could have stood there in the great desert wastes to watch that great umbrella over those hosts of people gradually change.

How it must have comforted and cheered those weary travelers to be constantly reminded of GOD's protection and love as they beheld that cloud.

The Psalmist speaks of this in Psalm 105:39:

"He [the Lord] spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night."

So, **"The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night."**

Again, in Psalm 91: **"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."**

Oh friend of mine, outside of CHRIST, do you need a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day to guide and protect you until you finish this pilgrim journey?

While our heads are bowed, will you make the great decision today, will you?

Entrust yourself to CHRIST so He may become your constant guide throughout this life on earth.
[96]

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