

# Israel's Cloud and Fiery Pillar



**“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light...”**

**(Exodus 13:21)**

## ISRAEL'S CLOUD AND FIERY PILLAR

God's providence on behalf of the children of Israel in their Wilderness wanderings through the Sinai desert and the lands of Moab and Ammon was manifested by a *miraculous* cloud formation, which became to them a visible token of His constant care and of His presence in their midst. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night" (Exod. 13:21; Psa. 78:14). The cloud and fire pillar were associated with the Tabernacle of Moses in the sense that a branch or foot came down from the main cloud and attached itself to the structure. When the foot lifted up into the main body cloud above, the Israelites knew that the time had come for them to travel. The whole nation—all two million Israelites—followed the providential leading of this cloud. When the cloud stayed, they rested and constructed the camp, and a columnar connection or pillar-cloud foot established itself as before. "And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up,

then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up” (Exod. 40:36,37; Num. 9:17).

The thick main body cloud was not confined merely to the air space above the Tabernacle structure itself. Rather, it spread as a canopy or awning over the entire nation of journeying Israelites. When they were at rest in their tents, it also served as a protective covering by providing shade from the scorching rays of the noon desert sun, ameliorating the intense heat of the day lest the multitude perish in the way. In addition, the cloud cover had a calming influence upon the wind and the blistering sandstorms that suddenly arose at times, posing a menace to the security and the very survival of the host. Although the annual average rate of rainfall in the Wilderness area is pitifully small compared to that of other regions, both distant and near, a third danger to a wandering desert nomad people is the very rare but, nonetheless, dangerous flash flood produced by a sudden torrential cloudburst. In some places, such waters flow down dry gulches or wadis with the speed of an express train, figuratively speaking. Flash floods constitute an inherent peril to those not alert to, or unfamiliar with, the necessity of a hasty departure from dry riverbeds, which are frequently used in desert travel as natural

highways. The covering cloud over the camp of Israel minimized the potential hazard accompanying such storms.

Apparently, many who scoff at such statements in the Biblical narrative of God's dealings with His people of old are unappreciative of the numerous miracles performed by nature in everyday life. Routine miracles are soon forgotten because of their multiplicity and common occurrence. However, the miraculous events recorded in Scripture are attested to by the authority of God through the writings of holy men of the past. It is interesting that recent archaeology, by reason of uncovered evidence, has been instrumental in leading several nonreligious men from skepticism to an increased respect for the accuracy and reliability of Biblical descriptions of the ancient past—a testimony they were formerly unwilling to recognize. Recent discoveries have put to foolishness the prior scorn of some higher critics and their learned(?) arguments.

To refresh or impress upon the memory, we will cite select passages of Scripture. Although the first citation applies to our day, to the near future, the details help us to understand the literal cloud in Moses' day. "And the LORD will create

[again—not in a literal manner, as previously, but in a figurative sense] upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night [a spectacular luminous cloud awning or glowing fire-like canopy]: for upon all [that is, upon the entire nation] the glory [of the cloud formation] shall be a defence [a protective covering]. And there shall be a [similar though symbolic] tabernacle [replacing the literal temporary cloud cover accompanying the Israelites during their Wilderness wanderings] for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from [wind and sand]storm and from [overflowing] rain” (Isa. 4:5,6; 25:4). “He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night” (Psa. 105:39). It did not take the people long to discern the hand of the Lord in their affairs. At times, this overhead, open-air cloud tent, without any visible cords, remained stationary for a long period of time before gliding on and directing the Israelites to a new location deemed suitable by Divine Providence.

Some practical observations are to be noted. In one sense, the physical or material building below the cloud—composed of various curtains and skins, supported by boards overlaid with

gold, and having the *shekinah* glory light within—was a similar, though smaller, representation and visible token of God’s presence in the Israelites’ midst. The cloud above reminded them of God’s care and providence in the *external* affairs of the nation, whereas the Tabernacle building beneath called attention to the Lord’s interest in their *spiritual welfare* by directing their paths in moral instruction and enlightenment and by providing for their typical cleansing from sin through sacrificial services.

The pillar connection between the cloud above and the building below filled such a vital role in the affairs of the Israelites that it was soon recognized and likened to the “angel of God.” Not only did it protect and guide them in their way, but also an intelligence seemed to emanate from within its enshrouded core. “The LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam” (Num. 12:5). “For they [the Egyptians] have heard ... that thy cloud standeth over them [the Israelites], and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night” (Num. 14:14). “Clouds and darkness are round about him” (Psa. 97:2). “He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar” (Psa. 99:7). At the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus,

“the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the [pursuing] Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it [the pillar] was a cloud and darkness to them [a visually impenetrable barrier to the Egyptians], but [on the front side] it gave light by night to these [the Israelites]: so that the one came not near the other all the night.... And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians” (Exod. 14:19,20,24). The pillar of the cloud removed from before the fleeing Israelites and stood between them and the pursuing host.

In recognizing the importance of God’s past dealings with the Israelites and the institution of the Tabernacle arrangement with its services and remarkable cloud feature, the Apostle Paul called attention to forceful lessons. He said, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that *all our fathers* were under the cloud, and *all* [the whole nation] passed through the [Red] sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in [underneath] the [covenant] cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1,2). The Israelites

traveled dry-shod across the Red Sea as through a tunnel, with the cloud proper as their roof and the waters heaped up to the left and to the right. Yea, even as Moses exultantly sang, “And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea” (Exod. 15:8; compare Psa. 33:7 and 78:13).

However, we are investigating this subject not merely to gain a knowledge of Jewish history—its forms, ceremonies, and worship—but also to be edified by understanding the antitype from an examination of the type, as designed by God. He providentially overruled with respect to the detailed recording of certain events in the lives of prominent individuals and some of the historical experiences of the nation of Israel for the purpose of setting forth higher spiritual lessons and future realities based upon the former literal and, in a sense, typical incidents of the past. “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [examples]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [age, Greek *aion*] are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

Among other things, the cloudy pillar, styled “the angel of the LORD,” pictures in power, demonstration, and judgment the future work of Messiah on behalf of restored Israel in leading that



race and all others of the willing and obedient of mankind to the promised rest of eternal security and overflowing happiness, that is, to “the desire of all nations [which] shall come” (Hag. 2:7). The cloud column acted like a cloak or garment, concealing the glory of God lest it overpower the people. Thus the cloud figuratively concealed from view His awesome presence, which, nonetheless, sometimes broke out into a fiercesome display of light or fire, as in the incident of the devouring of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1,2). Also, on occasion, the simulated sound of the voice of *Almighty God*, as when He speaketh, came forth from the midst of the cloud pillar.

We are not to understand that the pillar literally encased the person of the Divine Majesty but that it *representatively* did so. For this reason, the pillar was called “the angel of the LORD” (Exod. 3:2; Acts 7:30,31). As the veiled angel’s presence was manifested in this cloudy pillar, so Moses, the servant of God, similarly communicated special divine oracles to the nation of Israel with his face veiled (Exod. 34:33-35). In a measure, then, these two methods of instructing the Israelites prefigured the work of Messiah, “the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in” (Mal. 3:1). Moses spoke thus of Messiah: “The LORD thy God will

raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren [nationality], like unto me” (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22). Furthermore, the large cloud layer above, which spread over the nation, pictures *their being shielded* from the burning sun of God’s righteousness and the *Father-like leading* of a wayward people to their Promised Land.

God said to Israel, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa. 44:22). It is in this light, that is, in the story of the cloud, that a familiar and forceful prophecy of Isaiah concerning Israel should be understood: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people [in the ‘time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation ... no, nor ever (again) shall be’ —Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21]: but the LORD shall arise upon thee [Israel], and his [future] glory [cloud] shall be seen upon [above] thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light” (Isa. 60:1-3).

God said further, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you

unto myself” (Exod. 19:4). The eagle, in teaching its young how to fly, carries them to a great height, separates from them, descends with a swoop, and then catches them far below. God’s manner of teaching the children of Israel in their Wilderness journeying was of a similar nature. His words to the nation, through Moses, were as follows:

**“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:**

**“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.**

**“And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.**

**“And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.**

**“And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.**

**“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes,**

**“And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.” (Exod. 19:5-11)**

Imagine the whole nation sanctifying themselves *for three days*—washing their clothes in order to meet their holy God!

**“And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death:**

**“There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.” (Exod. 19:12,13)**

The Israelites were not allowed to touch the mountain, but they were to draw near when they heard a long sounding of the trumpet.

**“And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.**

**“And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at your wives.**

**“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.**

**“And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.**

**“And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.**

**“And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.**

**“And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.”  
(Exod. 19:14-20)**

We have been personally to the traditional Mount Sinai near St. Catherine’s monastery, which is the correct location of the Mount Sinai spoken of in Scripture. To stand in front of this mount is an awesome experience. Not only is it a natural

amphitheater, but also a chasm or valley is located to the rear as the mount is approached, so that the visual representation of God's glory in coming down upon Mount Sinai must have been most impressive to the nation of Israel. The voice of God would have ricocheted or reverberated against the granite canyon walls for a considerable distance. Also, on top of the forepart of Mount Sinai, as seen on a climb some years ago and documented with photographs, are evidences that at one time, this particular mount was on fire all about, that is, during the earthquake (Exod. 19:18).

Thus Israel had the strongest possible physical evidences before them of God's care on their behalf. One begins to wonder how a nation that was so forcibly led of the Lord could ever go astray. But, dear brethren, even in our own personal lives, when we have come to know the Lord and He has dealt with us in a very personal manner, we have this treasure in an earthen vessel, and we must, with a measure of fear and reverence and with obedience to God, be humble and stay close to Him and His Word lest we, too, forget what He has done for us (2 Cor. 4:7; Phil. 2:12). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul speaks along the same line and analogy, as follows:

**“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,**

**“And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:**

**“(For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:**

**“And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)**

**“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,**

**“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,**

**“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.**

**“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:**

**“Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake [figuratively] not the earth only, but also heaven.**

**“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.**

**“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”  
(Heb. 12:18-28)**

As the Israelites, after two days, were to behold the glory of the Lord on the succeeding or third day, so we now, at the expiration of two thousand years in the Christian dispensation, are on the threshold of the dawning of the third day. In that third day, the Lord’s glory will be manifested to the world, the promised Kingdom of Christ will be seen by all, and the Lord’s Prayer will become a reality: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

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**For more information, see the appendix entitled “The Exodus” in the book *The Keys of Revelation*, pages 677-694.**



# The Keys of Revelation



**END TIME  
PROPHECIES  
REVEALED**

The curious symbols and visions of the Book of Revelation mystify scholar and layman alike. *The Keys of Revelation* unlocks the secret code

language by presenting a solid flow of interpretation never before captured in any written treatise on the Book of Revelation. Every verse is explained without compromise to politics or organized religion, differentiating between “churchianity” and Christianity.

This 723-page book contains knowledge that will astound the honest reader and cause the humble Christian, seeking after righteousness and truth, to bow down before the Great Creator in thanksgiving . . . for “the time is at hand” to unseal “the sayings of the prophecy” of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 22:10).

