

**Exodus 13:21-22 (NIV)**

<sup>21</sup>By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

<sup>22</sup>Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

**Numbers 9:15-23 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup>On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire.

<sup>16</sup>That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire.

<sup>17</sup>Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped.

<sup>18</sup>At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp.

<sup>19</sup>When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out.

<sup>20</sup>Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out.

<sup>21</sup>Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out.

<sup>22</sup>Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out.

<sup>23</sup>At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

**02-13-01-The Pillar of Cloud and Fire**

memo: totally rewritten

godly fear, guidance, presence, protection, mystery

Exodus 13:21-22

A God of mystery enlightens the mysterious path of His people.

**INTRODUCTION: (Num 9:15-23 read as the Scripture Reading)**

–Because “God is love,” and *Love communicates*, God *reveals Himself*.

But He has to do it on our level, *using what He has created* in order to communicate. He has to use symbols within creation to reveal His *truth*, His *will*, but especially His *presence*. He did this for Israel, when He manifested Himself to them in **the pillar of cloud and fire** during their 40-year journey through the wilderness.

–Symbols, whether used *physically* or *verbally*, can express thoughts but they never fully disclose the thinker. All communication involves an element of mystery (even among ourselves, but especially between God and us). Someday, “we shall know as we are known,” but in this life, we exchange ideas without fully knowing the minds communicating them. This makes life an *interesting learning adventure*. And although we're promised guidance on the journey, it's remains a fact that **HOM.idea**.

–God's revelation coupled with mystery is exemplified in Exod 13:21-22, *By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. This fiery but cloudy pillar teaches us about...*

**I. God's Manner in Guiding Us– “the Lord went ahead of them...”**

A. God's guidance is practical. (*His presence was constantly visible*.)

1. He adapted its manifestation to fit human need [“by day or night”].
2. God's guidance is still 24/7, and although not always so *visible*, *it fits human need* even better, because He indwells the believer.

B. God's guidance is protective– Exod 14:19-20, 24-25 [Pharaoh's pursuit], ...the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. // During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so

that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.” (Here, the cloudy pillar was associated with angelic protection, which continues today, when angels sometimes serve as our protectors.)

- C. God’s guidance was personal. just as it was in the past with *Adam*, *Noah*, and *Abraham*. (But beyond *mysteriously embodying God’s presence*, the *fiery cloud foreshadowed a future, ultimate mystery: Christ’s personal incarnation in the fleshly clay of humanity*.)

**TRANS:** [When Israel refused to enter Canaan, and God told Moses He’d destroy them and start over with him, Moses argued that Egypt would find out— Num 14:14. And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.] I believe Moses’ arguments (based on God’s caring, protecting, personal guidance in the past) were exactly what God hoped to hear: “*Moses, you really do understand Me!*” I say this, because, despite Israel’s repeated episodes of disobedience, **a God of mystery continued to enlighten the mysterious path of His people**. This hits close to home! The *fiery but cloudy pillar persisted despite...*

**II. Human Failure in Following Him**— “to guide them on *their way...*” (We get sidetracked by focusing on *our will, our wants, our way*:

- A. When obsessed with *present hardships*, we can fail to recall God’s past interventions. (Israel forgot the miracles they’d already seen and failed to trust God for more, just as we, by not counting our blessings, can fail to entrust our “wilderness” journey to Christ.)
- B. Conversely, spiritual complacency sets in, if we fail to maintain a daily sense of devotional awe. [40 years of closing sleepy eyes on the *fiery pillar* and opening them at dawn to the *cloudy column* became a routine for Israel rather than a celebration of *God’s abiding presence*.] (This happens to us by treating *church, the Bible, prayer, or Christ’s indwelling presence*, as routine givens rather than as awesome gifts.)
- C. Or we can fail to reason properly, and end up following our own way instead of *God’s way*. (God gave us *human reason* to help us both to distinguish truth from falsehood and to determine the best choice when we have before us a variety of good decisions.)
1. Which is more logical? To follow omniscient wisdom and

*perfect love*, OR to follow our own *limited human knowledge and imperfect love?* (The logical reply is a no-brainer!)

2. Yet in broad daylight, when the *familiar sunshine seems to make our way clear*, that ‘*divine-guidance*’ thing... can look cloudy!

**TRANS:** [The slogan “*Question Authority!*” was once very popular. But God is the *true Author*, and humans are *faulty and fallible questioners!* The slogan should be: “*Question Autonomy!*”] *Finite humanity falls light-years short of infinite Deity*. We barely understand our own tiny world! But **a God of mystery does**, and He **enlightens the mysterious path of His people**. Perhaps He gave a *fiery but cloudy pillar* also to teach us about...

**III. The Mystery of the Journey**— “*they could travel by day or night*”

- A. God had Israel “travel” in uncomfortable situations [Driving at night is on most people’s ‘*unwanted list*.’] (Beyond that, the Num 9 passage says “*the pillar*” had them *set up* and *break camp* at erratic intervals. If they were like us, *unscheduled stays or moves were a pain!*)
- B. God also had Israel “travel” into the unknown. [With us, that *produces a standard dialogue* of *our questions* and *His answers*: Who? You. When? Now. What? Follow. Where? Wherever. Why? Trust Me. How? By faith.] (Part of God’s reason for mystery might just be to get us to talk with Him—we don’t pray as much, when we feel sure about everything.)
- C. Finally, God had Israel “travel” with unfulfilled promises, which explains much of the mystery in life’s journey. (Being called “to walk by faith not by sight” means that the only place where faith can grow strong is in the time-gap between God’s promises and His fulfillment of them—which makes mystery a kind of *holy trainer*.)

**CONCLUSION:**

—**A God of mystery enlightens the mysterious path of His people**. As the *cloudy, fiery pillar* vanished when Israel reached Canaan, so we will no longer “see through a glass darkly” when we finally behold our beloved, indwelling Saviour “face to face” in Heaven. But remember, *Jesus is not done yet*, because we are still in the midst of a “wilderness” sojourn. Take a look around: this sure isn’t Heaven yet! So, until we reach “the promised land,” trust the mystery of *our guiding God* and **enjoy the adventure** of *our mysterious earthly journey!*