

## “THE CLOUDY PILLAR”

(Discourse by Oscar Magnuson, 1916 Convention Report, starting page 108.)

Of all the manifestations of God’s gracious presence vouchsafed to His people, the cloudy pillar was the most striking and glorious. *There was only* one cloudy pillar the same that was a pillar of cloud by day, being a pillar of fire by night. In this respect resembling the smoke which, ascending the air from furnaces, has the appearance of cloud, by day and of fire by night.

A still better illustration, perhaps, is the contrivance adopted by some generals, and amongst them by *Alexander the Great*, of causing a lofty pole to be set up, and on its summit to be placed a brazier filled with combustible materials, kept ever burning over the general’s tent when encamped, and in the forefront of the moving host when on the march “*a cloudy banner by day, a flaming beacon by night.*”

Besides being designated the *cloudy pillar*, it was occasionally called by the following names:

1. The angel of God.—It was so-called as other inanimate objects serving God’s purposes are sometimes designated in the Bible, Exodus 14:19: “And 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.”
2. The Lord.—The pillar served the purpose of enveloping or enshrining the Shekinah, a bright refulgent flame, the symbol of God’s presence with his people. The symbol as it stood for God is occasionally regarded as God and called by His name. Exodus 13:21: “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.”
3. God’s Throne.—The cloudy pillar was God’s movable throne while the Israelites were on the march. His stationary throne while they were encamped, resting on the top of the sacred tent, right above the Ark. A portion of the inner bright flame, the Shekinah, penetrating down through the roof of the Tabernacle, filled the space between the mercy-seat and the over-arching wings of the cherubim that stood one on each end of the golden throne. Psalm 80:1: “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, that thou leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest *between* the cherubim, shine forth.”

God, as represented by the Shekinah, was thus enthroned in the cloudy pillar without the Tabernacle, and on the Ark of the Covenant within the sacred dwelling. When the Tabernacle had to be taken down, that portion of the mystic flame resting on the Ark of the Covenant ascended into the cloudy pillar, which now enshrined the entire Shekinah.

As soon as the Levites bearing the Ark had taken their place in the forefront of the host, the cloudy pillar took up its position in the air right above this the most sacred of all the objects pertaining to the Tabernacle, the cloud and the Ark being inseparable associated, accounts for the people being represented as following sometimes the one and sometimes the other. *The cloudy pillar* served many useful purposes. First, it was a Guide, to lead was its main mission. “*The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, to go by day and by night.*” Exodus 13:21).

When it moved forward, they followed, and when it stood still they halted, and encamped beneath its sheltering wings. *It ever guided in the right way* however much it seemed sometimes to be otherwise. *Illustration.*—*Israel before the Red Sea, mountains on either side and Pharaoh's army behind.* Psalm 107:7: “And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.” Psalm 88: “And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.” The *pillar* was a *striking illustration* of the *LONG SUFFERING KINDNESS* of our Heavenly Father. *Neither murmuring, nor rebellion nor idolatry nor ingratitude,* ever drove away “the angel of his presence.” (Exodus 13:22.) His guidance vouchsafed was of the most gracious kind. *It was like a shepherd.* Psalm 78:52: “But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.”

Nor like the guidance of a *shepherd* only, but of a loving affectionate parent. (Deut. 1:31): “And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.”

The pillar led all the way from Egypt, and only disappeared when it had accomplished its mission by bringing the pilgrims safely and triumphantly to the end of their journey.

## **SECOND, IT WAS A SIGHT.**

Had the pillar not changed its aspect when the sable curtains of *evening* gather around the Israelites, it would have become *invisible*. As soon, however, as day departed and *night set in*, it became a bright, shining and resplendent column, a fiery pillar, visible to every eye; serving now not only to guide, but also to illumine, and whether the army *camped* or *marched*, ever gave a *cheery light*. The *hours* of night in the *terrible* wilderness would have been very *dismal* save for the friendly light shed around the chosen people by the fiery pillar. (Neh. 9:12): “Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.”

## **THIRD, IT WAS A SHADE.**

“He spread, a cloud for a covering.” (Psalm 105:39) Only those who have wandered in deserts, exposed to scorching sun of the East, can form an adequate idea of the comfort afforded by this grateful *awning*. The head of the pillar spread out to such a wide extent as to overshadow the Israelites when they were encamped as well as when they were on the march, so that *the sun did* “not smite them by day, nor the moon by night.” (Psalm 121:6.)

#### **FOURTH, IT WAS A SHIELD.**

In Deut. 1:30, we read: “The Lord your God, which goeth before you, He shall fight for you.” The most signal instance of its acting as a *shield* occurred *at the Red Sea*.

Their extremity was God’s opportunity, for at this awful and critical moment, enthroned in the cloudy pillar, He moved quietly, swiftly, and majestically from before them and went behind them, and there stood an impenetrable shield between them and the Egyptians. The side of the pillar toward the *Egyptians* was so *black*, as to plunge them into *total* darkness, but the side towards the *Israelites*, so bright as to flood them with glorious light and to shed its golden sheen across the rippling wavelets.

The cloud was thus both a sun and a shield to the people of God.

The Egyptians could not reach the chosen people because of the pillar cloud.

Though thus protected by this almighty shield, they could not continue where they were; they must proceed on their journey

#### **FIFTH, IT WAS AN ORACLE.**

The cloudy pillar talked with Moses. Exodus 33:9, 11: “And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and *the Lord talked* with Moses.” “And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar.” (Psalm 99:7)

From this oracle sounded forth words necessary for the direction and instruction of the congregation. He who opened His mouth in the burning bush at Horeb opened His mouth in the cloudy pillar, and spake to Israel’s leader for Israel’s welfare.

#### **SIXTH, IT WAS AN AVENGER.**

*When the Lord* wished to make known His displeasure, the *cloudy pillar assumed* a very *wrathful appearance*. Exod. 14:24: “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.”

What an awful aspect it must have worn when flashes of fire went forth from it and devoured Nadab and Abihu, and the 250 men. Lev. 10:1, 2: “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” Num. 16:35: “And there came out a fire from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.” If the aspect of the pillar was thus at times such as to trouble those with whom God was angry, it wore a very pleasing aspect toward His obedient people. As they looked up to the pillar they beheld the shining face of their divine Leader, cheering and encouraging them to go forward in their journey as He directed. He is called by this very name, “face” presence (Heb. face). Exodus 33:15: “And he said unto him, If thy presence go not *with me*, carry us not up hence.”

Such then were some of the ends served by the fiery, cloudy pillar.

It was a guide, a light, a shade, a shield, an oracle, an avenger. It led, it illumined, it shaded, it shielded, it frowned. It showed the way, and beacons to the thousands of Israel to follow. It turned darkness into light. It *warded off* the *dearth* of the noonday sun. It was a bulwark of defense between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. It fought for the chosen people. When pleased it rewarded and when provoked it punished. It continued its friendly guidance, its light, its protection, its counsel and its encouragement, until it conducted the many thousands of Israel safely across Jordan and into that good land and large, the promised land of Canaan.

Of all the *objects* ever *seen* by the Hebrew pilgrims, this was the *grandest*, the most imposing, and the most *resplendent*. *Greatly privileged* were the people to whom it was vouchsafed to them, and to them only, pertained the “glory.”

### **TYPICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE.**

The Christian pilgrim is favored with no such visible manifestation of the Lord as he travels through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Jerusalem. Are the privileges, then as children of God, less under the Gospel dispensation than were those Hebrews under the Mosaic one? *By no means*. In reference to this very cloudy pillar, there are glorious predictions respecting *New Testament Israelites*. Isa. 4:5, 6: “And the Lord will create 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: for upon all the glory *shall be* a defense.

“And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”

The fiery cloudy pillar was the dispenser mainly of temporal blessings, and was itself temporary in its nature, and so passed away. But the *blessings promised* in the above text are *spiritual* and *everlasting*. *Although* the people of God in our day do not see *Christ their Shekinah Pillar Cloud* with the bodily eye, they see Him with the *eye of faith*. Though now unseen by outward sense, Faith sees Him ever. And He is even more graciously present now, than He was to Israelites in the cloudy pillar, for the dimness of types and shadows has forever passed away and the true light now shineth. The Moon of the Old Testament is succeeded by the glorious Sun of the New.

### **CHRIST AND THE CLOUDY PILLAR.**

Christ is to the Christian what the cloudy pillar was to the Israelites. Like the Cloudy Pillar, Christ is a Guide.

**First**, He Guides by His Example. He says, “I am the way.” As long as we walk in the path made by His own blessed footsteps we shall not lose the road to glory. *Christ like the pillar*, goes before his people, and says to them, “Follow Me.” Marching after Him, every step will bring us nearer the better country. When assailed by temptation like Him, let us place the tempter behind our back. *When badly used*, let us like Him *not revile again*. Like Him, let us go about continually doing good. Christ prayed often. Before break of day, He climbed the solitary mountain to communion with His Father.

Let us early in the morning follow His steps up the mount of devotion, and we shall be refreshed as He was with gracious blessings renewed in strength for the work of the day, and resolving so to engage in its duties. Spending the day thus, we shall at its close, “pitch our tents a day’s march nearer home.”

**Second**, Christ Guides by His Word. Psalm 119:105; Prov. 6:22, 23: *The Bible, like the Angel Pillar*, is an ever present and *seen guide*. We can see it with our bodily eyes, and even feel it with our hands, and open it where we may discern it ever pointing onwards, and upwards. If we follow its guidance we will not miss the way, nor fail to reach at last the blessed goal at the end of our wilderness journey.

**Third**, Christ guides by the Holy Spirit. John 16:13: by the *Holy Spirit* and other agencies, even when like the cloud he may seem to be acting otherwise. *Into whatever circumstances of difficulty, suffering, or danger* He may bring His people, they need not

have the *slightest fears*, for He is a *Divine* and *unerring Leader*. Be strong in faith ye whose eyes are fixed on Jesus, our Pillar Cloud; though the road looks like the wrong way, it is the right one after all, and say with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” (Job 13:15).

Like the Cloudy Pillar, Christ is a Light. “I am the Light of the World.” Till illumined by Him none can see. It is the same great light that chases away our darkness and enables us to see the first step of our spiritual pilgrimage that brightens our path during all the succeeding steps of our journey to the New Jerusalem.

We can miss the way or stumble on the road only if we willfully shut our eyes, and refuse to admit His glorious rays.

“The way is dark, the storm is loud,  
The path no human strength can tread;  
Jesus, be thou the pillar cloud,  
Heaven’s light upon our path to shed.”

John the Baptist, as well as all other burning and shining lights, *only* reflected the beams of the “Sun of Righteousness” of which, if faithful we will be a part. Christ will be the light of the heavenly city. Rev. 21:23: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

**Fourth**, like the Pillar Cloud, Christ is a Shade.—To pilgrims traveling heavenwards, He is “the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” (Isa. 32:2) for while he screens from the burning sun of this busy harvest time which is burning all the tares and exposing the errors of the past in the light of God’s “Divine Plan of the Ages” he is our shade. Were this blessed shelter provided by our Heavenly Father who trust in him, withdrawn, how soon would all that is lovely and pure and God-like be burned out? While within the shadow cast by a present and gracious Saviour they are safe; it is only when wandering beyond into forbidden paths that their souls are in danger.

“But *present* still though now *unseen*,  
When brightly shines the prosperous day,  
Be thoughts of *Thee*, a cloudy screen,  
The tempter the deceitful ray.”

**Fifth**, like the Pillar, Christ is a Shield.—He said to St. Paul, and still says to every one of His disciples: “My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9) Defended by his grace, where are the enemies who can overcome the righteous. If Christ come between them and the legion of foes ever seeking

the destruction of our souls we are as safe from assault as were the Hebrews from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, when the cloudy pillar stood between the pursuing and the pursued.

The Christian's strength lies in the *knowledge* of his own weakness which prompts him to lay hold of an almighty shield able to defend in every emergency. However many strong enemies may be that are bent on the ruin of his soul, he has but to look away from himself, and up to Him in Whom all fullness dwells and as he looks, trustingly to explain, "My sufficiency is of thee," in order to be effectually guarded, and to experience that when he is exposed to the darts of the enemy only when he neglects to interpose between it and them this almighty armour.

Guarded by it, he may sing, "The Lord is my buckler." (Psalm 18:2.) "My refuge and my fortress my God; in Him will I trust." (Psalm 91:2.)

**Sixth**, like the Pillar, Christ is an Oracle.—"He is the Word," the grand medium of communication between God and man. No man hath seen God at any time, "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." (Job 1:18.)

Let us lend our ears to this great Oracle, our Saviour Christ, and listen and give due heed to His commandments and we shall become wise unto salvation and receive all necessary directions to the Heavenly Jerusalem.

**Seventh**, like the Pillar, Christ is an Avenger.—Christ, like the wondrous cloud, looks with a smiling face on His people; like it, however, He also looks with an angry countenance on His and their enemies. And while He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent, believe and be saved, He it is that shall pass the awful sentence of condemnation on the finally impenitent. Matt. 25:41: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand *Depart from me, ye cursed*, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Christ is thus as the fiery cloudy pillar that went before the Hebrews a *Guide*, a *Light*, a *Shade*, a *Shield*, an *Oracle*, an *Avenger*, a fast *Friend*, and a constant *Attendant*.

Like it *He leads*, *He enlightens*, *He screens*, *He shields*, *He defends*, *He instructs*, and *He commands*.

The Israelites on the march to the land of promise are a type of the Christian on his journey through this world to heaven.

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I'll not want.  
He maketh me down to lie,

In Pastures green. He leadeth me,  
The quiet waters by.”

At Jordan the cloud took its departure. It did not accompany the Israelites into Canaan; but Christ will never leave those whom He has guided through the wilderness of this world to the land of bliss.

“My Father’s house on high,  
Home of my soul, how near,  
At times to faith’s fore-seeing eye,  
The golden gates appear.”

Not all who marched after the fiery cloudy pillar were privileged to enter the land of Canaan; many perished by the way on account of their sins; which is a warning to us: “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” (Heb. 4:1, 11.)

\*\*\*\*\*

Question 14—When several Truth people are taking a meal at a restaurant and all seat themselves together, would it be a duty or privilege to return thanks as in our own home?

Answer—There is nothing in the Bible that tells us specifically. We can only use our judgment. It would be very nice if you were around a table or with others to give thanks if circumstances made it appropriate, if otherwise, to do so in silence. If it would in any sense of the word be seemingly hypocritical to those about us, it would not be appropriate. You remember the Pharisees who said their prayers on street corners. (1909 Convention Report, page 27.)

Question 31—On the chart the Great Company is represented above Plane M of spirit begetting, yet we are told in the finished picture in the Tabernacle type they will be in the court condition below the spirit begetting. Please harmonize this.

Answer—The chart is a picture of the progress of the Church upward to the attainment of the High Calling, and then in the large pyramid at the end of the chart the different relationships of these the one to the other is pictured. We cannot say that we can harmonize it to everybody's mind. Take as much of it as you can and leave the rest. Some can get more nutriment out of a slice of bread than another can, so we cannot hinder the one that gets only a little nutriment from eating the bread, and, if he need it, eats more.

(Convention report, 1913, page 138.)