

Exod 03-07-27b

We're ready now to resume our study in Exodus, where we find ourselves closing in on the end of chapter 13. God is leading the people with a pillar of cloud and with a pillar of fire. And I have often asked myself, well, what exactly is the significance of the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire? Why did he choose that as opposed to flying saucer, angel in the sky, any one of a number of other things that he could have done? And the Bible itself tells us that it was primarily for visibility.

It says that God made himself visible or his presence visible in verse 21, going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light. So they did not travel by night. They would be encamped, resting.

And what you need at night is light. If you've ever been up in an airplane at night and looked down on this metroplex or any other, or fly across the desert that you think is waste and uninhabited and you see these little pinpoints of light, you find out that we're very dependent now on electricity for light. But they had two different kinds of need.

In the day when they're traveling, they needed guidance. And at night when they were stopped, they needed perception. They needed to be able to see what they were doing.

And so they had this presence of God providing both of those. And it says that they might travel by day and by night. They were not restricted to traveling only in the daylight hours, but could make use of the early morning hours and the late evening hours when it was cooler to traverse a lot of the wilderness area.

It says in verse 22, He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people. And you have this situation continuing all the way to Mount Sinai and the time of the episode of the golden calf and the giving of the law on the mountain. And from that point, the pillar of cloud and fire is resting on Mount Sinai itself.

You have the glory cloud descending on Mount Sinai and signaling God's presence there when Moses goes up. But this struck me as having a strange sort of parallel over in the book of Revelation. Chapter 10 of Revelation is a short chapter, but if you look at it and let's turn there, keep your finger in Exodus 13 and go to Revelation chapter 10.

In the midst, we don't have time to set the whole stage here in Revelation. You're welcome to come back to this and look at the surrounding context. John says, I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven clothed with a cloud.

The rainbow was upon his head and his face was like the sun and his feet like pillars of fire. So you have fire at the base and you have this pillar of cloud. If you've ever seen a forest fire at night, you know that the fire beneath illuminates the pillar of cloud and the pillar of cloud reflects the light from the fire in such a way that you could well imagine that this might have

been God's mechanism for the pillar of fire by night.

It would have still been the pillar of cloud, but there's fire within the cloud illuminating it and this disperses it and makes it give the kind of glow that they would need for light by night. And that's what you have pictured here. He had in his hand a little book which was open.

He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land. And of course, no sooner do we have the appearance of the pillar in Israel's presence than we have the issue of the sea and the land which is going to be the parting of the Red Sea coming up. He cries out with a loud voice, verse 3 of Revelation 10, as when a lion roars, when he cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.

When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write and I heard a voice from heaven saying, seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them. Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished as he preached to his servants, the prophets.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven I heard again speaking with me saying, go take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land. I went to the angel telling him to give me the little book. I would like to have seen that.

John is going to walk up to this flaming angel, standing, you know, can I have your book? I just, I would like to see that. So I went to the angel, he said to me, take it and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.

It's going to taste good on the way in, but it's going to sit not so well when it gets to your stomach. I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey. When I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

They said to me, you must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings. Well, there's a lot going on here, but our interest is in the parallel with what we have in Exodus. And the idea is that this book that John takes from the angel and partakes of, that tastes good to him but makes his stomach bitter, his intake of it, it tastes fine.

But he is going to prophesy concerning peoples, nations, tongues and kings. And the content of that prophecy is going to have a lot of bitterness. He's going to have to prophesy the destruction of many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.

So when he understands it, when he digests it, he realizes that the portent is not good. But it is the Word of God. It is the truth of coming things from God.

It is guidance from God about what is going to take place. In the same way, this is what you

have in the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, which appears and it's going to stand between the Israelites, as we're about to see, as they are on the border of the land and the sea. And there is a mixture of sweetness and bitterness.

We've already seen this in the Passover meal. And we're going to see it again in this deliverance that takes place. Prophetically, the deliverance is sweet, but something bitter is going to follow it.

And all of this together is a reminder that God is present. God is in control. God knows what's going to happen.

And it is a presence that cannot be ignored. No one could step outside their tent in Israel and not see the pillar by day or by night. And to ignore it, to go off in some other direction, and to depart from the light at night, or to depart from His guidance by day, would have been suicide.

Well, there's an obvious application there for us as well. But we return now back to Exodus chapter 13, where as this pillar has appeared and is providing guidance for the Israelites, it's not taken away by day or by night. Now, you could look away from it, or you could ignore it, but God did not go away.

And that is, as well, a principle that we need to remember. It's not as though God is far away because He left us. Now, chapter 14, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel that they turn and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal-zipphon.

You shall camp before it by the sea. Well, we don't know where any of these places are in the modern day. And yet, Exodus is very specific that God gave them concrete directions on where to go.

One thing we do know is the direction where these towns and cities are located. They began going north toward the way of the Philistines, and then they turned around and they backtracked, and they went back to these other areas, Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, Baal-zipphon. And he says, Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are bewildered by the land.

As Israel leaves Egypt, you would think the best course of action would be, make a beeline for the land of Canaan. The shortest distance between any two points is a straight line. Put as much distance as you can between yourself and Pharaoh.

Instead, when they initially leave, Moses detours to pick up some people in another part of the land, and then he goes back and picks up the bones of Joseph, and then he starts out up toward the way of the Philistines, and then it is as though he changes his mind and backtracks, and goes back down, heading south, to where he's going to be pinned against this sea. Well, this does two things. One, it gives the appearance that they're bewildered, and they don't know where they're going.

To the outside eye, they appear to be wandering about in sort of a dazed fashion. What are the Egyptians going to say about this? Well, slaves, what do you expect? They don't know anything about traveling. They haven't left the land in 215 years.

They're not equipped for this journey. They're sitting ducks. It also gives the Egyptians time to recover from the devastation of the plague of the firstborn, along with the others, for Pharaoh to assemble his chariots and his army, and to pull himself together and offer pursuit.

God says ahead of time, Pharaoh is going to say they're bewildered by the land. The wilderness has closed them in. Then he says in verse 4, God says, I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them.

I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, so that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so. So, their path, after their deliverance, makes no sense to an outside observer.

And yet, it is within the plan of God. Many times, people are going to look at us and say, your path makes no sense. You're wandering.

You're going in circles. You're not following a course toward your goal. And yet, this is the direction that God has led.

Some of us have experienced this in our own history, where you think everything points to going somewhere. You go there, and then no sooner do you get there, everything points to leaving and going back. And you turn around and come back.

And you think, well, what was that all about? Well, if we are following... God led them every single place. And it was a part of God's plan for them to go. It was a part of His plan for them to come back.

So, it was told the king of Egypt, in verse 5, that people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people. Remember all of the positive feelings that they had, where they gave them the gold and they gave them the treasures of their house, and they left with great plunder? Remember that? Because God turned their hearts toward the people? Well, now their hearts are turned against the people. And they say, those crummy Israelites that ran off with my candlesticks and my amulets, and my firstborn is dead because of them.

And suddenly, this initial wave of enthusiasm has become a wave of revulsion. And so, the Egyptians are up in arms, literally. And they turn against the people.

Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? They look around the land and say, all the slaves are gone. How are we going to finish our projects? So, all of the Egyptians suddenly wake up and say, we've got to go get them. Pharaoh makes ready his chariot, took his people with him, took 600 choice chariots, all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them.

The archaeologists have tried to say that there were no chariots at this time, and this prevailed for hundreds of years. Archaeologists said, well, this is anachronistic. This story could not have taken place.

The chariot did not exist in 1440 to 1450 BC. However, since then, in fairly recent times, they have discovered that chariots do exist. It's an interesting thing.

There are tomb paintings in Egypt at a certain point in the succession of dynasties where a pharaoh will be sitting on his throne, and either on his hands you'll see a pair of gloves, or there will be a pair of gloves under his chair. And we ask ourselves, what is the deal with the gloves? Well, gloves came into use when men began to drive chariots. That was their first use, was to hold the reins of chariot horses.

You didn't need them when you were riding a horse, but when you were driving a chariot, to keep the reins from slipping from your hands, they developed these gloves. And they became a symbol of office, so that if you were a general and you were the head of the charioteers, this was your badge. Instead of having an artillery crossed cannons or infantry crossed rifles, you had this pair of gloves that were your symbol.

And this begins to show up in Egyptian history at the point that they began to manufacture and employ chariots. And when you go back and trace out all of the dynasties, and find out the pharaoh of the Exodus, you find out that he is one of the first pharaohs to have these gloves associated with him on his tomb paintings. And he was one of the first to have this big chariot army.

So he's got this newfangled technology, so to speak, that he's going to implement to get the slaves back. He made ready his chariot and took his people with him. He took 600 choice chariots and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them.

But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel. And the children of Israel went out with boldness. The Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them, camping by the sea, beside Pi-Hahiroth, before Baal-Zipphon.

This, by the way, is the area that is now occupied by the Suez Canal. Wherever the point of the actual crossing was, is in the area of the Suez Canal, which if you go up the Red Sea, they cut through from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean Sea there. And that is what used to be a marshy, swampy, sometimes it was deep, sometimes it was shallow area.

The Yam-Suth, the Sea of Reeds. So when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

Now, you can imagine people freshly delivered from slavery. I mean, think about this. Moses is in charge, they've marched out, they've got their unleavened bread and the bulls on their

shoulders, and they marched north, and then they turned around and marched south.

They had a chance to get on the way of the Philistines, but they didn't take it. They had other chances to get across, and they haven't, and now they're pinned against the sea. What do you think the louder voices in Israel are saying about Moses' leadership? Who is this guy? I don't know about this pillar of cloud thing, but look at our tactical position here.

We've goofed around and wandered around. The Egyptians have marshaled their forces. Our scouts, our perimeter security, is reporting now that the Egyptians, there's a huge cloud of dust from their chariots as they're coming to pursue us.

Who is this Moses, and what kind of a general is he to let us get trapped this way? All of the conventional wisdom says you shouldn't have wandered around, you shouldn't have wasted time, you shouldn't have let yourself get pinned against the sea. You're sunk. It's over.

Your history, this whole enterprise, you should have never left Egypt. It's all a big mistake. And yet, this is exactly the precise plan of God.

God led them every step of the way. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God told Pharaoh to pursue them, basically.

So, what is the issue here? God is not concerned at all about their physical deliverance, is He? He knows that not a hair of their head is going to be harmed. Why is He putting them through this? It's a teaching experience, isn't it? Why does He not just take them straight to Canaan? Why did He not take them by the way to the Philistines and just let them see what a great God He is because the Philistines just melt before them and they go right into the land? He says they're not ready for it. I'm going to take them a different way.

Why? It is what they will learn in the journey that counts. Turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 8. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Chapter 8. Deuteronomy, the name itself comes from Latin.

Deutero means second. The onomy part there is from *nomos*, which means law. Deutero, *nomos*, second law.

This is the second affirmation or the second statement, second giving of the law. Chapter 8. Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe so that you may live, so that you may multiply, so that you may go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers. You shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness.

This is at the end of the journey rather than the beginning here. Why did He do it? To humble you, to test you, to know what was in your heart whether you would keep His commandments or not. Why are we here? Why does God put the tests and the challenges of our life before us? We saw in our scripture reading from Psalm 139 that He knows us.

He's known us from before we were born. He wrote the course of our life in His book. Why did He put all of these obstacles and tests and challenges in our path? Why didn't He map me out to be Donald Trump? Why didn't He map me out to have a wonderfully prosperous bed of roses life from beginning to end? He led us 40 years in the wilderness to humble us, to test us, to know what's in our hearts whether we will keep His commandments or not.

So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know. In fact, that's what the word manna means. Manna literally in Hebrew means, what is it? The name itself is a question.

What is it? Fed you with manna which you did not know that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you nor did your foot swell these 40 years. You should know in your hearts that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.

Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs that flow out of valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you." There is nothing to give us capacity to appreciate something like not having it, like having gone through hardship before we obtained it, like having to wait for its fulfillment.

Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments and His statutes, which I command you today, lest when you have eaten and are full and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply and your silver and gold are multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, when your heart is lifted up, you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who led you through that great and terrible wilderness in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water, who brought water for you out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know. That He might humble you, that He might test you to do you good in the end. And that you say in your heart, My power and the might of My hand have gained me this wealth.

And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant, which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. It goes on to give a testimony of what will happen if they do forget. If you by any means forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and serve and worship them, I testify against you this day that you will surely perish.

As the nations which the Lord God destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God. It's really a very simple equation, isn't it? We

can either remember the One who delivered us by sacrifice. We can remember the One with whom we have fellowship through that partaking of the lamb seasoned with bitter herbs.

We can remember the covenant of God which is represented by circumcision, separation out from the world, out from the nations. Or we can forget. It's really that simple.

It's our choice. Back to Exodus chapter 14. This is why God has arranged, has orchestrated the attack of Pharaoh.

Why scare the people half to death right after they've gotten out of the land? He's already said they're not ready for battle, but He knows they're not going to have to fight a battle here. So as the chariots approached, verse 10, when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid and they cried out to the Lord.

Then they said to Moses, were there no graves in Egypt so that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Couldn't we have just died and been buried there? Why go to the trouble to come out here to be killed? Why have you so dealt with us to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? The first great I told you so. I told you when you had this harebrained scheme for getting us out of the land, it wasn't going to work. It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.

This is the first of many times that this refrain will be repeated in the next 40 years. Moses said to the people, calm down, do not be afraid. Remember this, Charlton Heston, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.

We need that picture of Moses talking to us, don't we? Sometimes when we panic, when we say, why did I make that choice? Look at the disaster that is about to befall me. You need to just conjure up the image. Stand still.

Watch the deliverance of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you will see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you and you shall hold your peace.

This song you're singing to me about I told you so, it's going to die on your lips today. Of course, Moses gives this brave speech and then he goes around behind the curtain and he says, Lord, an awful lot of Egyptians out there. So verse 15, the Lord said to Moses, why do you cry to me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.

Well, what lies forward? A big impassable body of water. But lift up your rod, stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. Oh, well of course, why didn't I think of that? Sure.

This is how we usually cross seas. We stick our rod out. They part.

We walk across. It's never happened in the history of mankind. Lift up your rod, stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it.

The children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots and his horsemen.

By the way, when we face difficulties and we allow God to deliver us by faith, it still means that we have to take some action, don't we? God says, you need to go take some action. You get the rod. You stand up there.

Moses is putting himself on the line, isn't he? If he stands up and stretches out the rod and nothing happens, he's probably going to be stoned. They'll say, well, we may be dead in a minute, but you're dead now. And down he's going to go in a hail of boulders.

Moses has to step out in faith and stretch out the rod. The people are going to see this divided water and they have got to step out in faith and cross. Now this is one of the things.

When God provides a way of escape and God provides a means of deliverance and it is from the Lord and we're able to recognize that it is from the Lord, we have got to grab it. We have got to seize it. Don't be the drowning man who lets the motor boats go by.

If there is a means, we take it. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I have gained honor for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. God is glorifying himself in our deliverance.

We sometimes like to view God as our genie who pops out of the bottle and grants our wishes when we need help or we have a desire. But you go back to the principle of prayer. How do we see the Bible teaching us to pray? What does it say? Pray in Jesus' name.

So we close our prayers. We say in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Why do we say that? To pray in someone's name, to make a request in someone else's name or in their behalf means I am speaking on behalf of their interests. Our ambassador goes to a country and speaks in the name of the United States. The Secretary of State will go and speak on behalf of the President.

When we pray to God the Father in Jesus' name, we're representing the interests of Jesus Christ. We're saying I'm bringing this prayer because this will further the cause of Christ. Well, that puts a different spin on our selfish prayers, doesn't it? I've got to find a reason why God should answer this prayer that is a part of glorifying Christ.

God delivers because it's a part of his self-revelation. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. Then the outsiders will know that I am the Lord.

God focuses his plan on glorifying his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are beneficiaries of

deliverance, but the purpose of the deliverance is to manifest who God is. Verse 19, the angel of God who went before the camp of Israel moved and went behind them.

The pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. Note the angel of God is not the pillar. The angel of God moved and went behind them.

Then the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So there was some visible manifestation of the angel of God, the messenger of God, who was before the camp of Israel who went and stood behind him. The pillar went and stood.

It came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one and it gave light by night to the other so that one did not come near the other all that night. So it became an obscuring smoke, impenetrable visibility for the Egyptians and it was only light on one side.

There are people who try to explain the pillar of cloud as this volcano that erupted over in the area of Vesuvius and in that chain and that this was incorporated in the mythology of Israel and its precipitation and its disruption of the environment in that whole area of the earth is what caused the plagues and so on. Trying to find a naturalistic explanation but you can't get the smoke of a volcano to move between you and the Egyptians and keep them from coming at you all night and that's what the Bible says happened. And you also can't get it to only be light on one side and dark on the other.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night and made the sea into dry land and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea all Pharaoh's horses his chariots and his horsemen. Came to pass in the morning watch the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and he troubled the army of the Egyptians. He took off their chariots and their chariot wheels so that they drove them with difficulty.

I would guess so chariots only got two wheels if you take one off that's going to be a difficulty. The Egyptians said let us flee from the face of Israel for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians. Then the Lord said to Moses stretch out your hand over the sea that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians on their chariots and on their horsemen.

Notice that the sea does not part until Moses stretches out his hand with a rod. The sea does not come back together until Moses stretches out his hand with his rod. Why? Why doesn't God just do this at his timing? It is a reminder that we have to act in faith.

Each of these deliverances each of these resolutions of problem are accomplished as the result of obedience to God's word. It is a picture. How is our soul cleansed? How are we renewed?

How are we given power to live the life that God has called us to? It is by knowing God's word by heeding God's word by living in the light of God's word.

And God didn't need Moses to stand up there and raise his arm with a stick but he has him do it to teach us something to teach the Israelites something. It is through obedience to the word of God that's what we're here to learn in our 40 year sojourn as it were in our lives. The reason we face challenges is to learn to be obedient to learn to believe what God says about how he will sustain us in this life.

Well this is a good place for us to stop. We'll pick up with the Israelites coming out of the sea and the Egyptians trying to get out of the sea. We'll leave them there for a week and resume here next time.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father we thank you that you have given us such vivid pictures of your