

## **Exod 03-08-03b**

We're ready now to resume our study this morning in Exodus chapter 14. We detoured for our first session into James chapter 5. But this provides, I think, a good setting for us as we resume now. Because we saw at the end of chapter 13 the presence of God manifest in Israel.

When they were slaves in bondage in Egypt, God had His eye on them. But He did not have a manifest symbol of His presence. When was the first time in hundreds of years that the physical, if you will, manifestation of God's presence came into being? We saw God appear to Abraham, the smoking pot, smoking torch that went between the pieces.

We saw Him appear in the form of a man in the episode of deliverance of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah. In the time of Jacob and Joseph, Jacob has the vision of the angels ascending and descending. He doesn't see God per se, but he sees the things of God at Bethel.

And then from that time, you get down through the story of Joseph. And Joseph has dreams and so on, but you don't have a physical manifestation of the presence of God in that. They go down to Egypt, and for the next 215 years, God is not in evidence.

It's a long time. 215 years. Which, by the way, we'll talk about it.

I know it says 430. I have promised I will unravel that. But suddenly, God reappears after that time.

How does He appear? What is the first physical manifestation of the presence of God? Remember back in Exodus 3? Moses is out there chasing goats with a stick in his hand. Moses, put off by shoes from off by feet. What's he looking at? A bush that burns with fire and is not consumed.

And the fire is a physical manifestation, physical symbol of the presence of God. It is that same glory that will eventually descend on Mount Sinai. I find it interesting to compare those two, because it's the same God.

For Moses, He appears in the bush on Mount Sinai. For the nation, He comes down in a great cloud, thundering and lightning, and the entire mountain shakes. So much so that secular scholars, looking at this, think it's a tradition of a volcano or something.

Although, the Sinai range of mountains is not volcanic, so that's a little tough. But, much bigger. It's the same God, it's the same fire, but larger audience, larger manifestation.

With Moses, it starts out small. And I see here a little bit of a comparison in our study in Acts. Because the Lord Jesus Christ, after His work on the cross, He appears to His disciples.

He's in the upper room, and it's a small manifestation. He appears inside a locked room. He demonstrates that He is alive.

He breathes on them in John 20, verse 19 and following. He breathes on them and says, Receive the Holy Spirit. But there's no fireworks, there's no great miraculous manifestations, other than the fact that He's there in His resurrected form.

Yet, out in the day of Pentecost, seven weeks later, there is a larger manifestation of that same Spirit that Jesus breathed on His disciples. He gave them sort of a temporary presence to tide them through the seven weeks. And then, on the day of Pentecost, here is the full-orbed manifestation.

And in the same way, you have God appearing to Moses in the bush. When they return to Sinai, here is God in the great thundering, quaking, pillar-type manifestation of cloud and fire. Well, in Exodus chapter 13, verse 17, I wanted to point something out to you.

You remember, early on, when Moses was at the bush, God answers a question that Moses asks. Moses says, When they ask me who has sent me, what shall I tell them? What's your name? is what He's basically asking. All this time, they have known Him by His sort of formal name, or His official name, His title as the God of the universe, which is Elohim.

And He says, Tell them I AM has sent you. And this is where His personal name, Yahweh, comes into play. Well, look at Exodus 13, verse 17.

It came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines. When you see God in your New King James, capital G, small o, small d, that represents Elohim in the Hebrew. This is God's name of office, almost His title, if you will.

His title is God. God, Elohim, and this generally is God with emphasis on God the Father. Not to the exclusion of the other members of the Trinity, but when you see God in the Bible, it generally is looking at God the Father.

Paul is famous for saying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always for you, and upon every remembrance of you, making mention of you in my prayers. And when Paul uses the word God, theos, unless he is specifically referring to the deity of Christ, he's generally talking about the Father.

And that is the case here. God the Father, what is His role, His self-assigned function in the Trinity? He develops the plan. He orchestrates the forward progress of history, of events in both the angelic and human realms.

So who made the decision about the direction and the course that the nation of Israel would follow when they left the land of Egypt? Well, who makes the plans when you look at the Trinity? It's God the Father. God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, lest perhaps the people will change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.

So God led the people around by the way of the wilderness of the Yom Suf, the Midbar Yom Suf.

I don't know why they choose to translate this as they do in some cases. If you have a New American Standard, verse 18 says, Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea.

Now there's a big difference in going through the wilderness to the Red Sea and in going to the wilderness of the Red Sea. This is a string of genitives and it is the Midbar Yom Suf. It is the wilderness of the Sea of Reeds.

That's how it ought to be translated. So your New American Standard has gotten a little too interpretive there. God led the people around or into the wilderness of the Yom Suf.

And with all apologies to Red Sea and everything else, Yom Suf. Suf means reeds. Yom means sea.

Sea of reeds, that's what it's called. That doesn't mean that it was only two inches deep and that they sort of splashed across on semi-dry ground. Or that there was not a great miracle.

But the name of the body of water is Yom Suf. Sea of reeds, that's what it means. Children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

Moses took the bones of Joseph, etc. You go down in verse 21. And the LORD, capital L, small caps O-R-D, whenever you see that in your New King James, that is representing the Hebrew Yahweh.

The Germans pronounced it Jehovah. Anytime in your Old Testament Scriptures you see capital L, small caps O-R-D, that represents Yahweh in the Hebrew. This is the personal name of God.

This is God in His personal revelation to His people. It emphasizes presence. It emphasizes relationship.

It emphasizes fellowship. So notice, the plan for the route that they will follow comes from the unseen, unfelt member of the Trinity, God the Father. But who is it that in verse 21 goes before them by day in the pillar of cloud to lead the way, and who goes before them by night in the pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and by night? Is it Elohim or Yahweh? It is Yahweh, the Lord.

This would be ultimately expressed in the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the observed member. He is the imminent and present member of the Trinity to us.

He is seen and He is felt. His presence is apparent. So Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way.

Now a lot of people say, well now, is this actually pre-incarnate Christ? Is the angel of the Lord actually Christ before He came in earthly form? The principle of God with us is represented by Yahweh. The principle of God with us is represented by the angel of the Lord. Is the angel of the Lord, or is the presence of Yahweh in the Old Testament actually the Lord Jesus Christ? No.

How do I know that? Because Jesus Christ, as Jesus Christ, does not exist until He is begotten. And that does not take place until God speaks the word. Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee.

Now the second person of the Trinity exists, always has, took part in creation, and is that member of the Trinity that enters into humanity and takes on the form of a servant and is the Lord Jesus Christ. But the name Jesus, the name Yeshua, and the name Christ does not pertain to the second member of the Trinity until He assumes human form. It does not mean that He is not Himself, but He is not Jesus Christ until He is born as the Son of David.

Yeshua, thou shalt call His name Jesus. Why? He will save His people from their sins. Thou shalt call His name Jesus.

Before He is born, He is not called Jesus. And before He is born, He is not Mashiach. He is not Christ, the Anointed One.

He becomes Jesus Christ at the point that He is born. Now people will throw all kinds of theological tomahawks at me for saying this, but this is what the Bible teaches. You go to the Psalms, the Psalms of David, He says, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee.

How many times does the Bible call Him the only begotten of the Father? Begotten means born to. So before Jesus is born in the flesh, He is not the only begotten Son, because He hasn't been begotten. And it doesn't take rocket science to understand.

He is not begotten until He is begotten. Right? God the Son, the second member of the Trinity, exists. That is Yahweh.

He is the eminent, and He performs the same function in the Old Testament that He will embody literally in the New. But He is not yet embodied. So, I don't mean to muddy the water here, but just when someone says, well, is the Lord, or the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, is that Christ? Well, no.

Is it the second person of the Trinity? Or a manifestation of God? And who is the manifest member of the Trinity? It is God the Son. It is the second person. So it is an expression of God the Son when you see the Lord, or when you see the angel of the Lord, who is actually not Jesus Christ, because He did not take on embodied form until He was begotten, but angels would speak in the first person for God.

There are those who speak with the words of God, even though they are an instrument. The prophets themselves, thus saith the Lord, and then they would use the first person pronoun. Am I not the God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt? Well, no, Isaiah, you are actually not.

You are a raggedy looking prophet there with a long beard. But He would speak in the first person on behalf of God. This is what the angel of the Lord did.

The angel of the Lord is not Jesus Christ. He is not the second person of the Trinity. He is an emissary.

He is a malak. He is an ambassador. He is a representative.

And He is so closely identified with the one that He represents that He speaks in the first person for God on many occasions. Other occasions He does not. We don't have time to go into all of that, but say all of that to say this.

It is the Lord who went before them. And what is the point here? God sent a presence that could be observed, that could be felt, that could be seen, that was manifest. When God manifests Himself to human eyes and humankind as the Lord, this foreshadows what Jesus Christ is going to actually do.

The Old Testament is the book of shadows. It is the book of prophetic symbolism. And you wish Abraham could get a visit from God every day at the door of his tent.

You wish Joshua could see the captain of the hosts of the armies of the Lord every day instead of just on these rare occasions. And you say, Oh, why is there years and decades and centuries between these manifestations of God's presence? Because they are temporary. They are foreshadowings of what we experience every single day.

Because now Emmanuel has come. God is with us. You and I enjoy the personal, imminent and transcendent presence of God every single day.

We have God the Holy Spirit constantly with us. He is the seal of our salvation. The only way you could not have the Holy Spirit is if you are not saved.

Once you are saved, you are always saved. The Bible says, He is the seal until the day of redemption. Not only that, but if we have God's Word and if we keep it, Jesus says, I and my Father will come to that man and make our home with him.

And so now you have the presence of God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in our soul. I would not trade places with any angel in the heavenly legions because they do not have what you and I have. They do not have the chance to learn.

You think about the unfallen angels. Gabriel, Michael, all of these others that are up there. The angels who hold back the four winds.

The angels who do various things in the book of Revelation. National angels who implement God's policy throughout human history. They have never been estranged from God.

They have never been an enemy of God. They have never been distant and away from Him. They appreciate God.

They love God. They serve Him with their whole heart. They are wonderful.

They are high and lifted up. But they, it is just like the song that we sing. Angels have never felt the joy that our salvation brings.

We were born in sin. We were conceived in iniquity. We were estranged and separated from God by an irretrievably fixed gulf and distance.

And God, in His divine power and in His love, bridged that gulf through the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have been delivered. And we have an appreciation and will always have an appreciation throughout eternity that an angel will never understand.

They have not suffered as we have suffered. They have not been lost and cut off from God as we have. And because of that knowledge and because of the opportunity we have to grow, God raises us up with Christ higher than the angels.

We were made a little lower than the angels. We had this terrible problem, but God is lifting us up and we will ultimately be higher. That comes at the price of suffering.

And it requires our patient endurance through this time of tribulation where we continue to battle our fallen nature and the flesh, the world and the devil. So God foreshadows that with Yahweh's presence in the cloud. He is personally present.

He says, I'm not just going to promise you that I'll be with you. I'm going to manifest myself to you. And so He sends this pillar of cloud.

That cloud, by the way, at night was dark to the Egyptians but light to the people of God. In chapter 14 and verse 20, when He moves between the army of Egypt and the Israelites pinned against the shore of the sea, the Egyptians look at the very same cloud and see only darkness and obscurity, an impenetrable thick curtain through which they cannot pass. But to the Israelites, it is light.

It is illuminating. It is comforting. It is protective.

It had the appearance of fire by night, but it was not fire. We talk about the pillar of fire, but if you go to Numbers 9, verse 15, we find that there is a difference in the pillar and in the fire. Numbers 9, verse 15, talking about the tabernacle after they got it all built.

On the day the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud, this is the pillar of cloud, covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, from evening until morning. It was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. Now, if it was actual fire, they would have wasted their time building the tabernacle because it would have been burned down.

It glowed. It had the appearance of fire. If you've ever seen a forest fire at night or any other large bonfire, if you've ever burned tires at night, the flames illuminate the clouds and it looks like a tower of fire when it is, in fact, a tower of shining smoke that is illuminated by the fire within, the fire which is its source.

That's what's going on here, so we know that from Numbers. It settled on the tabernacle on the day that it was dedicated, as we saw in Numbers, and any time that the Israelites stopped their journey and pitched their tents and set up the tabernacle, the pillar of cloud would go and settle over the tabernacle. We find this out from Exodus chapter 40, verse 34 and following.

Exodus 40, 34, The cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting because the cloud rested above it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys.

But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day and fire was over it by night in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeyings. And this has application for us as well, because they stayed put until the cloud said it was time to move and they kept moving until the cloud stopped and settled over the tabernacle.

So, we've often asked ourselves the question, well, should I stay put or should I make a change? Should I continue my march or should I stop? Should I stay here or should I make a move? And all the children of Israel had to do was stick their head out the tent flap and say, well, the cloud is not moving so I guess we're here for another day. Oh look, the cloud is picking itself up and moving from over the tabernacle. I see the Levites packing up the tent, collapsing the curtain over the Ark of the Covenant.

Let's gather our gear and get ready to move out. Well, is there an analog? Is there a similar case for us? There is. In fact, believe it or not, our system of guidance is superior to that of the Israelites, because the presence of God could answer one question for them.

Do I geographically move or do I geographically stay put? But if Eleazar is talking to Ithamar and deciding whether or not to buy six bulls, he can't stick his head out and look at the cloud and say, well, should I buy these bulls or not? The cloud is not going to give him any guidance on anything except going or staying. We, on the other hand, have the presence of God's Spirit that guides us in all manner of areas, all manner of decisions. Do you want the glory cloud or do you want the indwelling presence of the Spirit? I would take the indwelling Spirit any day, any time, any moment, as we all should.

So, this is what we know about the cloud. God would appear in the cloud. God is not the pillar and God is not the fire.

He appears within it. We know this from Exodus chapter 16 and verse 10, where we will be in the relatively near future. Aaron is giving a big speech to the children of Israel.

They're all complaining, and so God speaks to Moses, Moses speaks to Aaron. Say to the congregation of the children of Israel, come near before the Lord, for He has heard your complaints. They were saying, you know, this man is kind of sickening, we want some meat.

It came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. So, the cloud had been there. Remember, by day, it didn't glow.

It was just cloud. At night, it glowed. Well, here in the daytime, the cloud glows.

The glory of the Lord appeared. It is as though God's personal presence has now arrived in the cloud. That cloud is for their protection.

If they were to look on God, they would die. But His glory can be seen emanating from inside the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, I've heard the complaints of the children of Israel.

Speak to them, saying, at twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God. Well, this sounds great, but as we will see when we study this, you don't always want God making a special appearance because you're complaining. We'll get to that later on.

The cloud, the fire, was a symbol of the zeal of the Lord. It provided protection from heat, protection from pestilence. If you look in Isaiah 4, verses 5 and 6, there is a reminiscence of this, talking about Jerusalem, when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion and above her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.

For over all the glory there will be a covering, and there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge and for a shelter from storm and rain. He says there is a day coming where it's not just the tabernacle of meeting, every dwelling, there will be a personal pillar of cloud, pillar of fire, the shining of a flaming fire over every dwelling in Mount Zion. It will be a shade in the daytime from the heat and a place of refuge.

And this is what we enjoy. We have a foretaste of this prophecy that will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when the Holy Spirit will be given to the Israelites the way it is given to us. And there will, in effect, be this comforting shade by day, a place of refuge, guidance, presence of God, fellowship, holiness.

All of those ideas are wrapped up in Isaiah 4, verses 5 and 6. You also see a note to this effect in Isaiah 49, verse 10, where, talking about the fulfillment of promise to Israel, they shall feed along the roads, their pastors shall be on all the desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them, for he who has mercy on them will lead them. Even by springs of water he will guide them.

And this harks back to the days when God led Israel in the wilderness, in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Psalm 91, you remember we made an attempt to memorize this. You get to verses 5 and 6 in that psalm.

You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. Why? Because you are in the shadow of the Almighty, the secret place of the Most High. His presence, pictured as that pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, is a source of protection.

And then finally you can put in this regard Psalm 121, verse 6. The promise of God, once again, is the Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil.

He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore. This is the blessing and the benefit and the value of God's immediate presence, the Yahweh presence of the Lord, which we enjoy through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, that same presence also can be a source of judgment. We saw in James chapter 5 that there is a judge standing at the door and we can be judged for grumbling against one another. We can be judged for our attitudes and for what we say.

And in the same way, the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire could also be the source of sudden destruction in Israel. You look, for example, at Numbers chapter 17 and verse 10 when there was this dispute over leadership and over the priesthood and they took all of the rods that belonged to the leaders of the tribes and put them in the tabernacle overnight. Aaron's rod buds and puts forth shoots and has mature almonds on it and so on.

The Lord said, Bring Aaron's rod back before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels that you may put their complaints away from me, lest they die. Thus did Moses, just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did. So the children of Israel spoke to Moses saying, Surely we will die, we will perish, we will all perish.

Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die? They were in fear of their lives because God made it clear that they were in the wrong to question His choice of the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron to be the priests in Israel. And they came under fear of death.

And of course, in this regard, you can't ignore Leviticus chapter 10 and verse 2 where you have Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who decide that they're just as good as the other priests and so they take a censer, they take a little torch and they put fire on it, they put incense on it. They say, Here's my sweet smelling savor, I'm going to act just like these priests that God has authorized and commissioned. And they offered this strange fire, profane fire, before the Lord which He had not commanded them.

This in the modern day would be the equivalent of a woman taking on ordination and deciding that she will preach and be the senior authority in a church. This would be the same as any other topsy-turvy mode of operation within the divine establishment of God. They decided, you

know, you have homosexuals, now they had the Episcopalians or somebody just ordained a homosexual priest and they're getting to where they want to legalize and start performing homosexual marriages in some churches.

And this is the offering of strange fire which the Lord has not commanded. What is God's attitude toward that? Verse 2, Fire went out from the Lord and devoured them and they died before the Lord. How does the fire go out from before the Lord? What were they approaching? They got their Sunday or their Saturday meeting clothes on, they got their nice clean robes, they got their little torch, they struck a match, they got a piece of fire out of a campfire somewhere, lit it up, put some incense on it, said we look just like a real priest now and they went marching toward the tabernacle.

What's at the tabernacle? Well, they're parked, they're camped, so the pillar of cloud is there and they go marching up and saying we can be a priest just like these other priests. Fire came out from the Lord, it came out of the pillar, out of the midst, kind of like that appearance of the glory of the Lord right before the quail incident we just read about, and consumed them, devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Moses said to Aaron, this is what the Lord spoke, saying, By those who come near me, I must be regarded as holy.

And before all the people, I must be glorified. If God, in grace, puts His presence among us, it creates responsibility. What is our motivation for patience? What is our motivation for endurance? It is twofold.

First of all, that is the place of blessing, to trust that God knows what He's doing, that it is, in fact, an expression of His compassion and His mercy to allow our suffering. God came down and hardened the heart of Pharaoh and hardened the hearts of the Egyptians to make them chase Israel, to scare them, to terrorize them as they're backed up against the Yam Suph. God did that.

And God makes no bones about it. It says about three times, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, God hardened the heart of the Egyptians, God caused the Egyptians to say, Why did we let them go? Let's go get them back. God did that.

And it scared the living fire out of the Israelites. Now, why would God do that? To manifest His deliverance, to manifest His power, to give them something to look back on and remember. Forever after, God is going to say, I am the God who brought you forth from the land of Egypt with a mighty hand.

If God never let them get traumatized, if God never let them get fearful, if God never let them suffer any adversity, if they never ran out of water, never ran out of food, what would be their opinion of God? Take it for granted. How many times have you thought about the water system when you go to the faucet and turn on the spigot? How many times do you picture in your mind the reservoirs and the water treatment plants and the miles and miles and miles of piping and the great tanks that stand in our city parks and provide the water pressure? We don't give it a

second thought, do we? We go and we turn the handle, we flush the toilet, we push the glass against the dispenser in the refrigerator door, out comes water. We totally take it for granted unless we consciously pause and think.

Then we say, boy, isn't that a wonderful thing? Then we go right on. But day after day, we're turning faucets and flushing handles and we don't give it a thought. It's always there.

When do you really start getting up in arms? What's going on over in Iraq? We have no water. We have no electricity. We're about ready to shoot your people and rebel because we don't have electricity and we don't have running water.

When you don't have it, you begin to place a big high priority on it. People who lived through the Depression in this country in the late 20s and through the decade of the 30s were thrifty all the rest of their life, weren't they? I remember my grandparents saving string, saving rubber bands, hoarding, being sparing in the use of things, never taking things for granted because they knew what it was like to do without. That's what God is doing with us.

That's what God is doing with the nation of Israel and He will bring about a time of need. He will consciously, with malice aforethought, create pressure situations for us. Why? Not because He enjoys pulling the wings off of flies and watching us suffer and being afflicted.

It's for our benefit. He will teach us things that will be valuable all the rest of our life. But for it to be valuable and for it to be effective, we have to trust Him.

We have to believe that this is His compassion and His mercy at work. Think about the Israelite like Caleb or Joshua who believes in God, who loves the Lord, who has utmost confidence in Him and sees the Egyptians coming. He's going to smile and poke his neighbor in the ribs.

I can see young Caleb and young Joshua over there poking each other in the ribs saying, Watch this. I can't wait to see what God's going to do now. Stand by.

We're about to see a divine manifestation because we sure have no way out of this and yet we're going to survive at God's promise. So, stand by and watch the deliverance of the Lord. They're probably the only two in Israel.

Even Moses gets a little rattled and God says, What are you crying to me for? You know better than this. Stretch out your hand. Stretch forth your rod.

By the way, we have a great doctrine study coming up next week. I'm going to call it the Doctrine of the High Hand. We're going to find out what the high hand means in the Old Testament.

It can mean a couple of different things. I've got a whole set of points on the Doctrine of the High Hand but we don't have time for this morning. But there's one thing we should remember.

We all face adversity. We all face difficulty. And yet we all belong to God.

Why is that? It's the compassion of God. It's the mercy of God. God is teaching us patience.

He is cultivating a people that are higher than the angels. That's what He's doing. Are we up to the challenge? Are we ready for that? Can we be a Caleb? Can we be a Joshua? Or are we going to murmur and complain and have that pillar of cloud, that presence of God, be there for judgment rather than for blessing? The pillar could work both ways.

It was a judgment on the Egyptians. It was a judgment on Nadab and Abihu. It was a blessing to those who followed its lead, who appreciated God's presence and who responded to it.

That's the choice that we face every single day. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the clear way that You've illustrated the truth of Your plan and Your purpose for us.

We thank You for Your compassion. We know that we do not earn or deserve Your mercy. We are not worthy objects of Your grace, but the Lord Jesus is.

And because of His willingness to come and partake of our flesh and dwell among us and sacrifice Himself on our behalf, we have been elevated to a position even above the angels. We thank You for the opportunity that that creates for us. We thank You for the gift of Your Word and Your Spirit.

We pray that we can avail ourselves of Your grace and Your mercy to reflect Your glory both now and in the age to come. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.