

Emblems From Their Pilgrimage

by A.B. Simpson

The pillar of cloud and fire represents the guidance and presence of God in the lives of believers, leading them through the wilderness of life and providing rest and satisfaction.

Scripture: Exodus 13:21

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Divine Guidance"

Description

A.B. Simpson illustrates the pillar of cloud and fire as a divine guide for the Israelites, symbolizing the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives. He emphasizes that just as the pillar provided direction, protection, and comfort, the Holy Spirit leads us through life's trials, often in ways we do not understand. Simpson encourages believers to trust in this divine presence, which not only guides but also defends and empowers us, especially in moments of darkness and uncertainty. He highlights the importance of resting in God's presence and recognizing the Holy Spirit's constant companionship, urging us to seek a deeper, more personal relationship with God. Ultimately, he calls for faith in the unseen guidance of the Holy Spirit, assuring that true fulfillment comes from abiding in His presence.

Transcript

The Pillar of Fire.

We have here a picture of the pillar of cloud and fire, the guide of the Hebrew pilgrims through the wilderness, as it led them through many a changing scene of trial and education. All this is a picture of our life as the Holy Spirit leads us through the wilderness by ways we have not known.

It was customary, as we learn from history, for ancient armies to be preceded by just such a signal as this. Alexander the Great was accustomed to send before his army vessels of fire that sent up pillars of smoke and lurid cloud that the army might see which way they were marching. We know this to be true of many of the ancient Egyptian armies. So it was natural for the Israelites, it was not unnatural or rather it was preternatural, for it was only suggested by men's customs, but was infinitely higher and greater. The whole account of this Divine figure is particularly sublime and instructive.

It is a little difficult for us to take in the picture. When they were on the march it appeared, probably, like an enormous cloud of smoke, visible to all in the pathway, and moving on with majestic form like some heavenly being guiding their path; and when the camp was to halt, the movement would cease; and, instead of becoming a leader in their march it would spread like a curtain, over the camp, becoming a

heavenly pavilion sheltering them from the desert sun, and seeming to spread the wings of God's very motherhood of God about them; making them feel as though they were hidden in the secret of His tent. What a beautiful spectacle it must have been when this began to droop, and then spreading on every side, like a mother bird spreading abroad her brooding wings, shutting out the rays of the sun, and becoming better than the shade of the palm trees, or even their desert tents. They knew they might sit down under its shadow or find the heat of the burning desert became suddenly as cool as a summer day overcast by the grateful clouds of heaven.

And again as the night came on and the march was weary, and protracted day after day, and they feared they might lose their way, it became literally a light around and before them affording the cheer and safety which light always brings. And when they feared that enemies might be around them, or behind them, as indeed they were when the Egyptians pursued them, it went behind and stood like a rampart with artillery and garrisons of heaven, and looking terribly down on their foes with a fiery anger which forbade them to approach God's protected ones.

If you trace this figure through the Scriptures, you will see that all the references we have made are warranted. He spread it above them like a cloudy covering to shade them from the heat of the day, and to lead them in the darkness of the night.

And sometimes from the midst of the pillar would come the voice of God. Often we are told God spoke to Moses and one time God spoke to the children of Israel out of the midst of the fiery cloud. It was the type of God's presence with his ancient people, and, in the New Testament, of his presence through the Holy Spirit, and the Lord Jesus Christ with His Church and in the hearts of His children. Thus this precious third person of the Trinity ever becomes the guide and guardian of our pilgrim life, and our hearts are turned to Him with gratitude and holy confidence. May that Blessed Teacher fold us in the shadow of His presence, that we may know by living experience what all this means, that we shall not have to wonder about, it, but each shall say, "I know it for myself as well as the preacher does." As a dear old lady said last night in one of our meetings: "I can't keep still; He is singing in my heart!" Standing there, apparently a foot higher than her ordinary stature, and her face shining like the glory of the ancient cloud, she said, "You don't need to tell me about that; I know it." It is the voice of the Shepherd; it is the wing of the mother dove; it is the presence of God; it is the Holy Comforter; it is that which has come to you; it is that which is in your heart; it is that of which He said: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; He will joy over thee with singing." Let us draw a few lessons from this figure. It was a preternatural symbol. It did not depend on any of the laws of nature. It was not carved like a pillar of stone. It was not an embroidered banner, such as armies carry at their front. It was something not made by hands; it was a battle-flag presented from the ranks of heaven, and had no touch of earth about it. Indeed, it was contrary to the laws of nature. There it hung in the skies without any pole to support it. It walked in midair independent of the laws of gravitation. It was a supernatural token of the living God, who does not need to go by our rules; does not need to be dependent upon our ideas of things, or our modes of working; but when the Spirit of God goes before you it is not always a presence regulated by natural laws; it is a presence which will sometimes overleap what you thought and intended. It was not an easy way for the children of Israel to go through the land of Arabia; and the way you are led may not be the way you would have gone. But it is not accomplished by your provisions or your precautions, or your reasonings. If our lives are divine, their leadership will be divine, and our pathway divine; and we will frequently go where man would not dare to go alone; and where we would not expect to be sustained, were we judging by the light of our own reason, or the principles of our own sense and judgment. It is a

Divine guidance, a supernatural presence, independent of all but God's own infinite power and will.

Again: We see in this pillar of cloud and fire the mingled elements of light and fire, which have all their natural symbolical significance. First, there was light; the light of truth; the light of personal spiritual vision; the light of His presence; the light that shows us the truth, and then the way that we are to walk. Himself the Light, Christ comes to bring us all our light, and also the sight to see the light.

Again: The cloud as well as the light suggests something about God. Cloud is the opposite of light; the cloud hides the light, and the breaking of a cloud reveals the light. It suggests to us the idea of the shadow that hangs about His Presence -- the mysteries which we cannot always penetrate or perceive, and the fact that the leadings of the Holy Spirit are not always to be perfectly understood!

There is not only light, but there is veiled light; light that comes to you in clouds and thick darkness, light that comes to you with its dark side as well as its bright side. Is it not true that He leads you by a way that you have not known? Is it not true that your life is hid with Christ in God? that you will not always see what He means, and you will not always behold His unclouded face? When you look up for the light, lo it is a cloud. Is there not a dark side to the Holy Spirit? Does he not sometimes hide you in the shadow? Does He not sometimes take you where it seems very dark? You asked God to show you joy; instead of joy, it was deep humiliation and tears; and you did not know until afterwards that was His blessed answer. But when you yielded and followed, the pillar of cloud became a day star of light.

Not only is He represented as the light and the cloud, but the fire. Fire is more than light. The fire has warmth as well as light. Fire is the element of intrinsic purity and mighty power, that gives us a sense of the living forces that are able to consume the evil, destroy the adversary, and endue us with God's own might. God is a consuming fire as well as an illuminating presence. The Holy Ghost baptizes the willing heart with fire; a fire that consumes all that you would gladly lose; and quickens and purifies all the energies of the soul and clothes us with God's infinite power and righteousness.

Again: The pillar of old preceded them as their leader. So the Holy Ghost tells us we shall be guided by His presence. The Christian that does not understand this, is losing much that is most precious in his experience. God has told us He will go before us; that we will not be safe without Him: and that He will make us know His voice. Have you learned this blessed secret?

Again: The pillar of fire not only preceded them, but followed them. It went behind them, and stood as a wall of terror and defiance to their foes. God is not only our guide, but our guardian; and we might rather have the Holy Ghost defend us, than all the pens or bayonets of earth. This is His blessed word, "The Lord shall be thy rearward." In ancient times the shepherds were accustomed to build fires in the desert to keep the wild beasts away: so He says, "I will be a wall of fire round about, and the Glory in the midst:" The fire may burn awhile, but Joseph comes out of prison at last. The tempter may triumph for a while, but David sits for fifty years on his throne, and praises the Lord that has kept him so marvelously. "They that trust him shall never be ashamed." Take the Holy Ghost for your leader and your defender. Leave your trials and your vindication to Him; and He will take care of them, and now if you will, leave them, utterly leave them there, and walk on in helplessness and obedience.

This fire not only went before and behind them, but it went in the midst; for we read that while they were passing through the Red sea, the fire just went through the camp, for a moment enveloping the whole company, and then taking its place behind. This is a beautiful picture of how the Holy Ghost comes through our midst, not only walking before and behind us, but coming into our being, possessing every

faculty of our nature, and becoming the vital impulse of all our power.

It is beautiful to notice the time that He did this. It was not at the beginning; but in the very crisis of their life, when they were going down into the dark floods pursued by foes from behind and about to take the hardest step they had ever taken. But at last a power they had not known came among them. It entered the hearts and bosoms, became one with their inmost lives; they could feel the conscious baptism on their whole being and they were not afraid. What a beautiful picture of the Holy Ghost in our lives. At first He is away ahead. We see Him as a doctrine. O, how that doctrine does shine out when first we learn the truth about the Holy Spirit! When God first showed me this blessed reality of the Third Person of the Trinity, it seemed I could never preach about anything else, or pray about anything else. And I could scarcely feel patience with others because they did not always talk about it.

There was a time when this Blessed One seemed to stand as a great lurid light against your sky. You were looking at Him, and following a little way off, as near perhaps as you dare. But there came a time when it grew so hard and dark: and then a voice said, "Go into this dark and angry flood; step into the Red sea." And as you stepped in you could hear the chariots of Pharaoh behind, and it seemed as though there were but a step between the soul and wreck. Then it was that the doctrine of the Holy Ghost seemed to disappear; and instead of that, in your very heart of hearts, the very depths of the soul His presence came, the cloud moved from before and passed right through your being, and it has seemed to pervade and cover everything from that time; a conscious life that is part of all your existence. Do you remember that scripture in Corinthians where the Apostle says "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bound or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit?" He baptizes you until you are buried as in an ocean, and then you begin to drink of that ocean until you are saturated with it. But it is in the hour of difficulty, when all the resources fail, when even He cannot be an object for you to look at any longer, but must put His arms about you and take you closer. O, dear friends! have you ceased to look at the Holy Ghost, have you ceased to trust the Holy Ghost to do things for you, and even to be your guardian and have you come to take him in his indwelling, all-pervading life? to see him less and have him more and just partake of all the fulness of his life?

Again: This Holy Spirit was not only the Leader and Defender, the Baptizer and the Indweller, but He was also the spirit of rest. Many times he did not march, but stood still; and then He commanded them to stop and took them into the secret of His presence, and bade them wait. And so with you, there will be times when you will not see your pillar. There will be times when Jesus will be in the hinder part of the ship asleep. There will be times when you will be so empty, you will feel as though you never had anything in you, but are an empty shell. There will be times when you will not have any place to go, or any of the restlessness of natural excitement. Ah, that is what tests some Christians so much. They get on well in the cavalry charge, and when there is action, but to make them be still and wait on God, they fail; they break down; they cannot hear the voice which bids them rest. But in the pilgrimage of God's ancient people, we are told that when the pillar of clouds rested, the people rested; at its going they went, and rested at God's bidding. The trouble with some of you is, that you have gone before the pillar. There are a great many times when God wants us to keep still. A great deal of the Christian life consists in the little word of three letters, n-o-t. Read the ten commandments, and almost everything in them is "thou shalt not." Read the story of the Christian life in that marvelous 13th chapter of First Corinthians and you will find it full of the things that love does not do. So the greatest work of the Holy Ghost is to call a halt, and quiet his children, and teach them to be dead to their own activity, and work and plans. We must learn to allow the pillar of cloud and fire to rest; and then get quiet ourselves under His shadow from the heat of the day. So the Lord

shall be thy keeper and thy shade. Now the Lord is never your shade unless you are still. When they were marching the pillar was not a shade. Every little while He saw they needed to be sheltered, and rest a little. So He made them stop. And if you are going to know the Lord as a keeper, you will have to know Him as a shade. Then it goes on to say, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night," and then the next comes, "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in." Ah, now you can march again. This beautiful psalm is the psalm of the pilgrim: the Lord leading you, and the Lord overshadowing you, without slumbering or sleeping; and so keeping you from this time forth, and even forevermore.

And then again, this pillar was most glorious at night. When the darkness fell and the lights of earth were gone, it loomed up there like a celestial palace in the sky, or like the brilliance of the jasper throne. It hung over them in darkness by day, but only by night was it bright. And so you have found His presence brightest when every joy had fled; and how the song has just burst out in the night, into loud hallelujahs. It was when the sun was set and a horror of great darkness fell on Abraham, that a burning lamp passed before him. It was when the disciples had climbed the rocky heights and it was the midnight hour, suddenly there shone a light above the brightness of the sun, and His garments became exceeding white, and a voice said, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." These are the hours of blessing. O, beloved! turn them into Transfiguration mounts with Jesus in the midst.

Again: This ancient pillar sometimes spoke to them. Out of it came the voice of God. So this is not a silent presence. "And the sheep follow Him for they know His voice."

Finally: It was a constant presence. He took it not away all through the wilderness, and even when they turned aside for a little time it was withdrawn, but again he restored it and said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." "He took not away the pillar of cloud by day, or fire by night." "He bore them and carried them all the days of old." "He led them through the waste howling wilderness: he bore them as on eagle's wings." "As a flock goeth down into the valley, so the Spirit of the Lord rested upon them; so He led them by His own right arm, to make for Himself a glorious name." Thus God led them ever; and even when they refused to go into the land of promise, after a little while He forgave them, and went with them through the wilderness, in the way He did not choose. And so this long suffering Holy Ghost for two thousand years, nearly, has been treated by the church of God as disobediently and yet He has not taken away for a day that illuminating presence. Through all church history He is with His people, and will be until Christ comes. He has been with you in your Christian life; even if not fully in you, he has been before and behind you.

This leads us to another thought. If not directly scriptural its lesson is at least most true. The pillar of cloud and fire led the children of Israel only to the Jordan. And when they entered the promised land with Joshua, it accompanied them no farther, but from that time forward, the presence of God was veiled between the cherubim, and behind the curtain of the Holy of Holies. Is there no teaching in that for us? May it not show that during the wilderness life, the presence of the Holy Ghost is perhaps more marvelous, more wonderful, more startling; some might say has more of stupendousness and glory about it, but when we get nearer to God, it is an inner presence, not an outer. It is visible, not to the eye of sense, but in the chambers of the heart even where we enter the holy of holies, and dwell in the secret place of the Most High.

Have we not seen something like this in our own experience? At the beginning God led more by sense. There was more of that which the little child needs, object lessons, and bold pictures and scenes and a great deal of nursing. But when we get into the inner presence of God, when we had consecrated

ourselves, utterly and unreservedly, when we had become His priests and kings, and gone into the tabernacle of Jehovah to dwell in His pavilion; then, the pillar of clouds was not seen in the sky, but His presence was more gloriously within, like the Shekinah presence in the ancient temple.

When you pushed aside the curtain and stood within the holy of holies, then you could see the glorious manifestation, not a cloud reaching up to heaven, but an ever-burning flame between the cherubim, where, until his people deserted him in the days of Ezekiel, He revealed His glory not as the God of heaven riding on the clouds, but as the God who loves to dwell in the very secret chambers of the lowly spirit. Quiet, perhaps, and unknown to the world it may be, but it is a presence that fills the heart with constant rest and satisfaction.

So, beloved, there is something better for you than even the visible presence. There is a place in your heart where He will come if you will take Him. If you will cross the Jordan and get out of the wilderness if you will be willing to die in the floods that separate you from yourself and your past; if with Joshua for your leader you will pass in, and live by faith and not by sight; then you will find that inner place, then you will find the holy of holies in your heart, where God will dwell with His own love and glory, and you shall know the meaning of such verses as this: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

"If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." "I will be to them a little sanctuary." "A man shall be a hiding place for the wind and a covert from the tempest like rivers of water in dry places; and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Have you come into all this?

Come this day into this inner chamber; let the pillar of the cloud and fire come a little nearer; let it descend from the clouds to the heart; let not God be to you somebody away up there, but somebody right here; not somebody you see in the book or the vision, but My presence in your bosom, in your being; the life of life, and love of love. Moses said, "Wherein shall it be known that they are thy people, and wherein shall we be separated from all other people of the earth, except it be in this, that thy presence goeth with us; if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up."

God had said, "I will send an angel; I will give the same power as though I were present." "O, not so, my Lord, if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." And He said, "My presence shall go;" and that was not enough. "Lord if you have heard my prayer in this, if I have found grace in thy sight, Lord, I beseech thee to show me thy glory; not only thy presence, but I want this Shekinah inside, this inner presence." And the Lord said, "Yes, you shall see it; they can see the cloud, but come in, Moses, and I will hide thee in the cleft of the rock, and I will make all my glory to pass before thee." And he came and revealed the name of the Lord, a Lord God merciful and gracious, keeping mercy for thousands; that was the inner revealing of God.

Dear friends, when He thus comes to you, and today I believe he will so come to many of your hearts, it will be through faith. When Joshua passed over the Jordan, his great promise was this: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you." His was to be a life of faith; he believed in the unseen God, and God was revealed. Take Him today by faith, and so He will be revealed in you.

As I passed out of this room on Friday, one came and spoke to me, to whom I had spoken before, when her heart was very heavy and longing for His presence, and I had asked the Lord to show her just what it

meant. She came to me Friday and said, "I have found it; the Lord came to me and said, 'Are you willing to trust Me by simple faith? Are you willing to receive me with a heart that knows no joy, no sensible sign of my presence, and to trust Me without fear? Are you willing to be withered?'" She said, "Yea, Lord." And then she said all the terrors, all the darkness fled; and such tides of gladness just swept into her being. So let us recognize that presence, even if we do not see it in the shining signal above us. It is hidden there. Don't you know that they of old could not always see the Shekinah? but it was always there. So trust Him; and when you go from this place, follow Him. For that is the secret of His eternal leadership whom God hath given to them that obey him. This is the secret, the joy of the Holy Ghost. The Lord help you to yield, believe, obey, and rejoice in all the joy of the Holy Ghost.

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