

# Shekinah

by David Roper

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*The Shekinah glory is a symbol of God's presence and leadership, and following it requires a willingness to obey and trust in His guidance.*

**Duration:** 26:44

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1, Exodus 40:36-38, Psalm 32:8, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 30:21, Matthew 4:19

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Following God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of the Israelites being led by a cloud in the wilderness. He emphasizes that following God's will requires a willingness to go wherever He leads. The cloud symbolizes the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the Israelites were explicitly following its movements. The speaker also highlights that following God's will may result in being misunderstood or scoffed at by others.

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## Transcript

As I'm sure you're aware, the nation of Israel is a unique nation, always has been, always will be. In the ninth chapter of Romans, Paul enumerates some of the things that set the nation of Israel apart from the other nations of the earth. One of them is the law, the giving of the law.

Only Israel had a law given by God through Moses. And the worship, the priesthood, the covenants, the promises, the sonship, that is the special election by God of Israel, all of these things are unique to Israel. And finally, Messiah himself came through the line of the Jews.

But in that list of distinctives, Paul also lists another thing that's often overlooked. He says that to Israel was the glory. Now, he's not referring there to the fact that Israel had special honor, although that was true.

It's specifically the glory. It's some specific thing that Paul had in mind. The glory that he's referring to is the Shekinah glory, the pillar of cloud by day and the fire by night that rested over the nation of Israel, the symbol of God's presence among them, the visible representation of God dwelling among his people.

No other nation has had the glory. The term Shekinah is not a biblical term. It doesn't occur anywhere in the Old Testament.

It's a word that the rabbis used after the Old Testament period to refer to the glory. But the word is based on a term that does occur in the Old Testament because it means basically a dwelling, God dwelling with

his people. That's the Shekinah glory.

For a thousand years, Israel enjoyed the presence of God as illustrated by the Shekinah. That cloud appeared when Israel was in Egypt. The passage that Bing read earlier is a reference to the initial appearance of the cloud to Israel.

As they were camped on the shore of the Red Sea ready to leave Egypt and go out into the wilderness, the glory appeared. That was the glory that protected them from the Egyptian army. It was the glory that led them through the desert down to Mount Sinai.

It was from the cloud as it appeared on Mount Sinai that the law was revealed. After the tabernacle was erected, the glory appeared over the tabernacle and filled the tabernacle, God dwelling between the cherubim on the mercy seat. Then it was that same cloud that led them from Sinai up to Kadesh Barnea and remained there at Kadesh while the nation wandered for thirty-eight years.

Then, as they gathered again, led them on into the Promised Land. Evidently, while the ark rested at Shiloh, the Shekinah dwelt there. In one of the Psalms, Psalm 99, David refers to the fact that Aaron and Moses and Samuel saw the glory of God revealed in the cloud.

So the cloud must have remained over the ark all the time that the ark was present there at Shiloh. Then later David brought the ark back to Jerusalem and when Solomon built the temple, again the cloud filled the temple and again was the visible representation of God dwelling among his people. It must have been an awesome thing in those days to approach the city of Jerusalem and see this great cloud resting on the temple, a great pillar of fire by night.

No other nation had the glory. It was there throughout the period of Israel's apostasy and rejection of the truth up to the time of the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel seems to indicate that at that time, just prior to the Babylonian captivity, the cloud departed.

He saw it remain for a moment over the walls of Jerusalem and then vanish. In the words of the Old Testament, the temple was Ichabod, the glory had departed. Throughout the long period of the exile, there was no glory.

One of the exilic Psalms is basically a prayer that the glory might return to Israel, but it never returned. In Isaiah, the fourth chapter, there is a prophetic reference to the cloud. You don't need to turn there because we're not going to spend a great deal of time in this passage, but I wanted to read it because it shows God's ultimate purpose again for the cloud.

When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night, for overall the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain. The cloud was many things to Israel.

It was a source of protection. It was a source of leadership or direction, guidance. It gave light at night, warmth when they were in the wilderness in the chilly evenings.

It provided shelter from the sun, direct rays of the sun, and it was a picture of all that God is to his people at any time. Now, there are many facets of this history of the cloud that we could refer to, but there's one

that's particularly pertinent to our situation today, and it's found in Numbers, the ninth chapter. I'd like to have you turn there, if you will.

Numbers, chapter nine. If you're new to the scriptures, that's the fourth book in the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers.

Numbers nine. The book of Numbers is an account of the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Our title, Numbers, is taken from the two different censuses that were taken.

The Hebrew title is In the Wilderness, and that seems to me to be a much more appropriate title, because Numbers is essentially an account of the events that transpired within the nation of Israel when they wandered in the wilderness, the two approaches to the Promised Land, the first to Kadesh where they turned away in unbelief, and the second forty years later when they went into the land. The first nine chapters are a description of the preparation that the nation of Israel made to enter the land, and these are given in detail. You have to put yourself in Moses' shoes to see the enormity of his responsibility.

Israel numbered about a million and a half to two million people at this time. We know from the first census that there were six hundred and three thousand fighting men, so there must have been at least a million and a half people if we consider women and children. Moses had to lead this group of people approximately three hundred miles through a trackless wilderness.

He had never been there before. None of the people had been there before. He had been to Sinai, but he had never been through the portion of the wilderness leading up to the Promised Land.

It would be somewhat as if God would ask you to lead the entire population of San Francisco to Los Angeles through the Mojave Desert when you had never been there before, and you had to take all of them--women and children, aged and firm, dogs, cats, parakeets, their grand piano, and everything else, all of their baggage and gear--had to be taken along through a region of the world that you had never seen before. That was Moses' responsibility. How could he carry out a responsibility like this? God promised that he would provide leadership through the cloud, and that was God's way.

We stand very much where Moses stood today. We're on the verge of a new year, and we don't know what lies ahead. Many uncertainties.

That's a trackless wilderness ahead of us. We've never been there before. Most of us have twenty-twenty hindsight, but our foresight is very poor.

We really don't know what to expect. And we, as Israel, have a cloud to lead us. I want us to look at Numbers 9 in order to make some observations there and apply that to our situation today.

On the day that the tabernacle was erected, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle until morning. So it was continuously. The cloud would cover it by day and the appearance of fire by night.

And whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would set out. The word means to break up. They would break camp.

And in the place where the clouds settle down, that's the Hebrew word shakhan, that the word shekinah comes from, when it dwells, when it rested, when it settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. At

the command of the Lord, and if you have an American Standard version in the margin, it says at the mouth of the Lord, that is, God is speaking through the cloud. At the mouth of the Lord, the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the Lord they would camp.

As long as the clouds settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the Lord's charge and not set out. The word that's here translated lingered is a word that means to draw on or to drag on.

When it was worrisome for them to remain, and the cloud lingered on, in fact, the Hebrew word for patience comes from this verb. When it lingered on, the sons of Israel would keep the Lord's charge and not set out. If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle according to the command of the Lord, they remained camped.

Then according to the command of the Lord, they set out. If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out. Or in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out.

That is, if the cloud lifted in the evening, they would break up camp and set out. If it lifted up in the daylight, they would break up camp and set out. Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out.

But when it was lifted, they did set out. At the command of the Lord, they camped and at the command of the Lord, they set out. They kept the Lord's charge according to the command of the Lord through Moses.

This repetition and elaboration of a theme is so characteristic of Jewish writings throughout the Scripture. You find the same thing. When they want to underscore something, they say it again and again, like driving a nail in and then turning it on the other side and bending it over.

There's no doubt about what he's saying. They explicitly followed the cloud. Do you see that? There are many observations we can make from this passage.

I would like to ask you to spend a great deal of time on it in the next few weeks, doing your own study, but there are some things that I would like to suggest in an initiatory way. Number one, it seems to be very obvious that the cloud could provide no leadership unless the nation of Israel was willing to be led. You'll note that the passage does not say that the cloud drove them, it led them.

And likewise, we are not driven by the Spirit, we are led by the Spirit. The foundation for all leadership from God is a willingness on our part to go wherever the Lord wants us to go. To go wherever and whenever and however.

That's foundation. God cannot provide leadership unless we're willing to give ourselves unreservedly to him. No secret reservations, no small print, but a yielded heart.

Now that's basic. You could understand that if Moses or one of the people looked out of his tent in the morning and the cloud was raised and he sensed that this was the day to move on and he suddenly decided that he didn't want to move on, that that was a lovely place to stay and he just stayed there, then the cloud could provide no leadership. Now I'm sure, knowing what we know of God's gracious nature, the cloud would not have moved on without the nation, but there would have been no progress.

You see, that basic to following the Lord is a willingness to go wherever he wants us to go. A number of years ago, I think I shared this story with my adult Sunday school class, but a number of years ago when my children were younger, I took one of my boys to pick up the babysitter and as we walked up on the porch a big dog lunged at us. I didn't even see him coming and my boy had on short pants and that dog lunged for his legs and my boy just jumped right across the porch, right into my arms and shinnied up my side and he had me around the head and the dog started gnawing on my leg and I was helpless.

I was dancing around trying to kick the dog. Finally the owner came out and grabbed the dog and dragged him off of me and a few minutes later as I was limping out to the car, my little boy said, Daddy, I'll go anywhere with you. His confidence was misplaced, I have no doubt about that, but so many times I've thought about that, that that really is the attitude that enables us to receive the Lord's leadership.

Father, I'll go anywhere. I'll go anywhere. As I was driving down to church this morning, I stopped to get a cup of coffee and on the table in the restaurant was a little sign that said we're available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and that's exactly what we have to say.

Lord, I'm available. I'll go anywhere. I'll do anything.

I'll go to Texas if you want me to. I'll go to Hong Kong. Because the minute we say I'll go anywhere but, see then we really frustrate God.

We tie His hands because He can't provide leadership as long as there's some attachment that we place on our own lives. Now that's the first thing. Before we can ascertain the Lord's will for our lives, there must be a willingness to follow Him wherever He leads us.

And the second thing that I see, and this was so encouraging to me, was to observe that the cloud was conspicuous. Everyone could see it. They could see it from miles away.

I think it must have been much like the Permanente plant used to be a few years ago when you see that big plume of smoke rising over the plant. You could see it from all over the peninsula. It wasn't some wispy, vaporous little thing that could vanish in a puff of wind or might be confused with some passing cloud or smog or fog or whatever they had in the wilderness.

It was a conspicuous, obvious thing. It could not be missed. There was no way that the nation of Israel could miss the will of God.

Now you see what this tells me is that God is not playing games with us. His will is not written on some flash card that He flashes and if we blink we miss it. He wants us to know His will.

He wants us to know it more than we want to know it. And if we want to know His will, we cannot miss it. Do you believe that? The only people that miss God's will are people that don't want it.

Now that ought to set us free to live with abandonment. You can rise in the morning and say, Lord, whatever, and know that through the day God is going to lead us and His leadership will be very clear and precise and we cannot miss it. We cannot miss it.

God's not going to lead us down some blind alley and then say, Aha, I caught you. You missed it, after all. He's not that kind of Lord.

His will is obvious and conspicuous. That's the second thing that I see. The third thing that I observe in this passage is that there's something very distinctive about following a cloud.

People follow their investment counselors or their psychiatrists or their horoscope, but the idea of following a cloud is not too appealing. As a matter of fact, they will scoff. Following the will of God is something that people cannot understand outside of Christ.

It seems the most impractical way to live. They will ridicule you. They will misunderstand you.

They'll think you're terribly impractical. See, there's something very unusual about following a cloud. A student friend of mine, Pete LaPrade, and I a couple of years ago had lunch with a professor at Stanford and he was telling us about his spiritual background.

He was not a Christian. He told us that when he was in the Marines, he had a platoon sergeant who often shared the gospel with him and he couldn't respond to it. He felt that he couldn't because it was so specific, he said.

This man had told him that after he got out of the Marine Corps, he was going back to the Midwest to live because he was convinced that that's where God wanted him to live. He scoffed at the idea that God could provide that kind of leadership, but he does. And if you follow the cloud, you'll be misunderstood.

You'll be scoffed at. People will not understand. Some of you, I know, have parents who do not understand choices that you've made because they've been choices that are based upon the will of God for your life.

And your parents or your wife's parents or your husband's parents do not understand. Expect it. Don't be surprised.

It's a foolish thing to the world to follow a cloud. There's a fourth principle that I see in the passage, and I've already alluded to it, that they followed the cloud explicitly. When the cloud lingered for a day, they dwelt there for a day.

If it rose in the middle of the night, they rose in the middle of the night, packed their goods and left. If it remained for a year, they remained for a year. If it lingered on in circumstances that were less than desirable, they remained there.

Now, that will be your experience this coming year. God will lead you into things that are not necessarily of your choosing. Your circumstances may not be the best possible circumstances.

There may be hardship and pressure and distress, and God's will may be for you to linger there because He's lingering there. And we have to accept that. That's all a part of the process, that God is working out in our life.

Perhaps you've had a very active ministry this past year, and this coming year God seems to set you aside and you have less ministry and less contact with people, but that's God's will for you. And He may linger there for a while because there are some lessons that you and I need to learn in that spot, and they can only be learned there, and so we must linger there. Or perhaps you're a mother who's been actively engaged in some service or some project, and now an infant's come into your home and you're tied to that home and you're not free to go, and you have to linger there.

That's God's will. That's God's will. You see, that's why Paul says, in everything give thanks, for that's the will of God for you.

That situation you find yourself in is the place where God wants you to remain, and it may not be what you would choose, but it's what God has chosen for you. And then I see a fifth thing here, and the fourth and fifth tie together. God had a goal in mind when He led them by the cloud.

The goal was the promised land, the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, others. God was committed to leading the people from Sinai into the land of Canaan. That was His promise to them.

That was the goal. And that's why sometimes the cloud lingered in spots that were less than desirable, because that was part of the process of getting from Sinai to Canaan. That was the only way to get there.

There was no other route. And that explains why God may take us through circumstances that are extremely difficult, because they're all part of the goal that God is working out in our life, which is not to make us comfortable, but to make us Christ-like. You see, it's God's desire that we manifest the character of Jesus Christ, that our lives manifest love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control.

Those are attributes of Christ's life, and that's God's goal for your life and mine. And therefore, in order to accomplish that end, He may have to lead us through some things that are somewhat distressing, arduous, difficult, hazardous. You see, He has a goal.

He's not wandering. The people wandered, but if you read the book of Numbers carefully, you'll discover that the cloud did not wander when the people wandered. The cloud remained at Kadesh.

The people broke up into little bands and wandered throughout the wilderness. And when the thirty-eight years had ended, they came back to Kadesh, and the cloud was still there, hadn't departed, ready to take them right into the land. God doesn't wander, doesn't veer from the path.

He has a goal in mind for your life and mine, and He's going to take us there, though the process itself may be difficult. That's why Paul says, all things work together for the good of those who are called according to His purpose. And the good, in that context, is conformity to the character of Christ.

It's glorification. And that's why he can say that everything works to accomplish that goal. So wherever God takes you this year through the trackless wasteland of 1974, and no matter what pressures you experience, know that the Lord has in mind a goal.

He's leading you toward the promise, which is the working out in your life of all of God's desire for you, conformity to His Son. Now that's the way God led Israel, through a cloud. And He's leading us today, not through a cloud, because the glory, the visible representation of the glory in the cloud and the fire at that time is reproduced in our lives in the person of Jesus Christ who indwells us.

He is the glory. We are the sanctuary. He indwells us.

The Shekinah is here. And He's promised to provide for us the same kind of leadership that He provided for His people those thousand years. Proverbs says, trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. That's a promise. He'll direct your paths in 1974 if, number one, are you willing to go wherever He leads you this year? Are you willing to go? That's where it begins.

If you're willing, you cannot miss it. And number two, know that perhaps 95% of His will is already revealed in terms of this book. So give yourself this year to reading it and studying it, giving heed to it.

Let the Word address itself to the decisions and the problems that you have to face this year. Because almost all of God's will is revealed for us here. And in those areas, the 1% or 5% or whatever it may be where the Word of God has not given a specific decision, know that the Spirit of God who indwells you will call the decisions.

He will give you that deep down sense of the rightness of an action, that peace that passes understanding. And that will be the basis of decisions that you'll have to make. Knowing, you see, that you cannot miss God's will.

You can rise in the morning and say, Lord, whatever today, and begin to act out your life in whatever capacity the Lord places you. And know that God is going to lead you. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths. We're like Israel, standing on the verge of the wilderness this year, 1974.

And in the words of that chorus, My Lord knows the way through the wilderness. All we have to do is follow. Let's stand together, shall we? Thank you, Father, that you're the wonderful counselor.

You're the one who directs us with your eye upon us. You're the one who knows where we are and what we're doing and what our situation is and what our problems are and how we feel about things. You understand us, Father.

And you've promised to give us wisdom from your word and by the peace of your Spirit. Teach us, Lord, not to second-guess ourselves when we make decisions. Teach us to know that we have wisdom from above and act upon it with confidence and rest upon it no matter what may happen after the decision.

And teach us, Father, to follow you wherever you lead us this year. Thank you that you know the way through the wilderness. You've been there before, and therefore nothing is hidden from you.

And we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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