

Title: **CHRIST THE PILLAR
OF
CLOUD AND FIRE**

Text: Exodus 13:20-22

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Tape: Exodus #63

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Introduction:

Turn with me to Exodus 13:20. My subject is **CHRIST THE PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE**.

(Exodus 13:20-22) “And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. (21) And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: (22) He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, *from* before the people.”

When the Lord God brought Israel out of Egypt, “*He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night*” (Psalms 105:39); and that Pillar of Cloud and Fire was Christ the Savior, the Lord Jehovah, who went before them. The Lord Jesus went before his people as their perpetual Guide and Protector by day and by night, until they were brought, at last, into Canaan, the land of their rest. And that which God did for his people of old he has promised to do for us throughout the days of our pilgrimage through this world (Isaiah 4:2-6).

(Isaiah 4:2-6) “In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. (3) And it shall come to pass, *that he that is* left in Zion, and *he that* remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, *even* every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: (4) When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. (5) And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory *shall be* a defence. (6) And there shall be a tabernacle

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for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”

ONE PILLAR

The first thing that needs to be observed about this pillar of cloud and fire is that it was one pillar, not two. It is needful for us ever to remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is one glorious Savior. He is made many things to us, but he is one.

The pillar that followed Israel was something totally beyond the scope of human understanding, a miraculous thing that no man could explain or explain away! It was both a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire! So our Lord Jesus Christ is both God and man. Yet he is one Person, the God-man, our Mediator. This God-man Mediator, our blessed Savior, is “*the Man whose name is the BRANCH*” (Zechariah 6:12); and this “*Man who is the Branch*” is “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*” (Jeremiah 23:6). And he is made of God unto us “*wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

ISRAEL’S PILLAR

Second, I call your attention to the fact that this pillar of cloud and fire was Israel’s pillar, Israel’s guide, Israel’s protection. It belonged to and was for Israel alone. It gave light to none but Israel. It gave protection to none but Israel. None but the people of God whom he brought out of the land of Egypt, none but the people of his choice and his covenant received any benefit from the pillar of his grace.

The pillar of fire was darkness to the Egyptians, though it was light to Israel. So Christ is the salvation, joy and comfort of his people, and a stumbling-stone and rock of offense to those who believe not. Christ is given as a Pillar to the Israel of God and only to the Israel of God. — He is the Pillar “*over every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies.*” **Look at Exodus 14:19-20, and rejoice in God’s distinguishing grace!**

(Exodus 14:19-20) “And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the

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cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: (20) And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness *to them*, but it gave light by night *to these*: so that the one came not near the other all the night.”

There is nothing common or universal about the work of Christ. What he does he does for his elect alone, and he does effectually.

- Universal love is useless love.
- Universal grace is useless grace.
- Universal redemption is no redemption.

OUR GUIDE AND PROTECTOR

Third, as the pillar went before Israel to guide and protect them throughout their wilderness journey, going before them, so the Lord Jesus Christ is our Guide and Protector through this world, ever going before us! He guides us by his Word, by his Spirit and by the hand of his grace. He has guided us all our days. He is guiding us now. And he will guide us until he brings us, at last, into the land of immortality in heavenly glory (Numbers 9:15-23).

(Numbers 9:15-23) “And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, *namely*, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. (16) So it was alway: the cloud covered it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night. (17) And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. (18) At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. (19) And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. (20) And *so* it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed. (21) And *so* it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and *that* the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether *it was* by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. (22) Or *whether it were* two days, or a

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month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. (23) At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.”

Christ is our Guide (Luke 1:79; Matthew 4:16; Isaiah 48:17; Psalm 23).

(Luke 1:79) “To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

(Matthew 4:16) “The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

(Isaiah 48:17) “Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I *am* the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way *that* thou shouldest go.”

(Psalms 23) “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

PILLAR OF CLOUD

By day, the pillar was a cloud over the camp of Israel, both to guide them through the wilderness and to cover and protect them from the scorching sun. By night it was a pillar of fire to give them light (Psalm 105:39).

(Psalms 105:39) “He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night.”

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That is what Christ is to us. The Lord's our Rock of defense and our Cloud of covering. He is...

“Our shade by day defense by night,
A Shelter in the time of storm!
Secure whatever foes afright,
A Shelter in the time of storm!

(Psalms 91:1-13) “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. (2) I will say of the LORD, *He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.* (3) Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *and from the noisome pestilence.* (4) He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy shield and buckler.* (5) Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor for the arrow that flieth by day; (6) Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.* (7) A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but it shall not come nigh thee.* (8) Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. (9) Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; (10) There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. (11) For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. (12) They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (13) Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.”*

How we ought to thank God for the Covering that is over us! God give us grace to trust him!

PILLAR OF FIRE

The Lord Jesus is our Pillar of Cloud to cover us and guide us by day; and, blessed be his name forever, he is our Pillar of Fire to Guide us by night! Fire suggests many things: — Light — Heat — Protection — and Burning.

- Christ is a Pillar of Fire to our souls **to guide** us through the night of our mortality, lest we lose our way.

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- The Lord Jesus is a Pillar of Fire **to protect** and guide our souls in the dark night of trouble and temptation, piercing through our spiritual darkness. He is a Pillar of Fire round about us to protect us from every evil (Psalm 34:7; 50:3; 97:3; 125:2; Zechariah 2:5).

(Psalms 34:7) “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

(Psalms 50:3) “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.”

(Psalms 97:3) “A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.”

(Psalms 125:2) “As the mountains *are* round about Jerusalem, so the LORD *is* round about his people from henceforth even for ever.”

(Zechariah 2:5) “For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.”

- The Lord Jesus is a Pillar of Fire to our souls, not only to give us light, but also **to give us heat and warmth** in the bitter cold of night. By his Word and by his Spirit (both of which are compared to fire) he keeps us from the natural coldness of our own sinful hearts, ever reviving us with the fire of his love, mercy and grace.

EVER PRESENT

Fourth, this pillar of cloud and fire was always with the children of Israel, from the moment they left Egypt until they entered into and took possession of Canaan. The pillar never left them. It went before them, guided them and protected them, until they no longer needed guidance and protection, until they no longer walked through the dark wilderness, until their enemies were all subdued (Nehemiah 9:19).

(Nehemiah 9:19) “Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.”

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So it is with Christ our Savior, our Pillar of Cloud and Fire. He has sworn, “*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*” That is the sweet promise of God to every believer. — “*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*” Read it as it is given repeatedly in his Word and rejoice (Hebrews 13:5-6; Psalm 27:10; 73:25-26; Isaiah 43:1-7). — “*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!*”

(Hebrews 13:5-6) “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (6) So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*”

(Psalms 27:10) “*When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.*”

(Psalms 73:25-26) “*Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. (26) My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*”

(Isaiah 43:1-7) “*But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. (5) Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; (6) I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; (7) Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.*”

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We have entirely too many fears for a people to whom the Lord Jesus Christ is an ever-abiding Pillar of Cloud and Fire, to whom the Lord has said, — *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”* (Isaiah 41:10). Why can’t we believe God? Has he not proven himself faithful to us? **David heard God’s promise and believed him.** His faith in Christ quitted his fears. He said, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”*

Illustration: Rupert Rivenbark at his daughter’s funeral — “We are here to kiss the hand of God’s providence.

We have far too many doubts and fears concerning God’s mercy, love and grace to whom the Lord Jesus Christ is an ever-abiding Pillar of Cloud and Fire, for a people to whom the Lord has said, *“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37). *“I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish”* (John 10:28). I know that some of you have trouble in this area. And I acknowledge my own shameful, baseless, sinful doubts. But I will not excuse them! **On what grounds dare we call into question the mercy, love and grace of our God?** We have absolutely no reason to entertain the slightest shade of doubt! Did he not promise? Will he not perform it? — *“God is not a man that he should lie”* (Numbers 23:19).

Mr. Spurgeon reasoned like this – “The Scripture says, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life! I believe the Son of God. I have life!” **Why should we ever question that?** Paul didn’t! (2 Timothy 1:12; 4:6-8).

- *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”*
- *“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”*
- *“Who is he that condemneth?”*
- *“Who shall separate us from the love of God?”*

I refuse to doubt God’s love because of something I have thought, or said, or done. His love is free and unconditional! **I refuse to question his grace** because of my sin. While I acknowledge the abundance of my sin, I will rejoice in the superabundance of God’s free grace in Christ. **I am not going to be suspicious of his mercy** because I do not deserve his mercy. Mercy is for the undeserving!

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We spend entirely too much time grumbling and complaining about our trials and troubles to whom the Lord Jesus Christ is an ever-abiding Pillar of Cloud and Fire, for a people to whom the Lord has said, *“In the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). We should not be surprised when troubles come. We ought to expect them. Every ounce of gold that has been perfected and made valuable has been refined by fire. Every diamond that sparkles with beauty has been broken out of the earth, cut by sharp blows, and polished by rough rubbing. God has chosen us in the furnace of affliction. (Isaiah 48:10). He will break, and cut, and polish his jewels. *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”* (1 Peter 4:12). Trouble is not strange. For the believer, the absence of trouble is strange!

No matter the trial, no matter the foe, no matter the heat we must endure, no matter the darkness through which we must pass, as the Lord God *“took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people”* of old, the Lord will never cease to be to our souls the Pillar of Cloud and Fire, until he has brought us into the land of our rest, in which we shall have neither enemy nor darkness!

Amen.