

Anthology | Learning to Love the Stories of God

Week 4: Pillar of Cloud and Pillar of Fire (Exodus 13:17-14:31)

Leader Notes: We know this is a good sized chunk of Scripture to cover. Right up front we wanted you to know that there are essentially three acts in this passage and three big points:

- 1.) God's presence provides us with guidance (as the pillars of cloud and fire lead God's people through the wilderness. Exodus 13:17-22)
- 2.) God's presence provides us with protection from our enemies and our own sinful desires. (as the the pillars move between the Egyptians and the Israelites to protect God's people from their enemies but also to protect God's people from running back to Egypt out of fear. Exodus 14:1-20)
- 3.) And God's presence provides us with salvation we don't deserve. (as Moses lifts the staff and to part the seas, and the pillars of cloud and fire slow the Egyptians from pursuing the Israelites essentially giving God's people salvation despite their own sinfulness.)

Don't feel any pressure for yourself or your group to get through all of this. If you think one section would be more helpful to focus on for your group, great. Focus on that. When anyone in your group connects any of these amazing details in the story, celebrate it. If you think it would be helpful to further explain the other points afterwards to them, feel free to do so, but there is no pressure for everyone to catch everything.

Read the story:

When?

This occurs in the era of Redeemed to Worship. It's right after the Israelites leave Egypt and as they are on the way to the promised land, but before God gives them the law at Mt. Sinai.

Who?

Moses, the Israelites, Pharaoh, the Egyptians, Pharaoh's servants, Pharaoh's armies, the angel of God and the Lord Himself (who often appears in or with the pillar of cloud and fire)

Where?

Between Migdol and the Red Sea.

Summarize the story:

As the Israelites leave Egypt, God leads them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He leads them through the wilderness until they are encamped in front of the Red sea. Once the Israelites are encamped there, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart towards the Israelites. Pharaoh and the Egyptian army then pursue the Israelites until they are very close to them.

Upon seeing the approach of the Egyptians, the Israelites cry out to Moses in fear and complain against Moses (and therefore God) and wish to be back in Egypt as slaves. Moses reassures the people of God's faithfulness, but they continue to doubt. Then the pillar of cloud and fire moved between the Egyptians and Israelites during the night, preventing either side from advancing to the other.

The next day, God tells Moses to raise his staff and part the sea so that the Israelites may escape from Pharaoh through it and see the power of God. Moses stretches out his hand over the water and the sea separates, allowing the Israelites to pass through it. The Egyptians begin to pursue them, and the Lord confused them and leads them into a panic. Then Moses stretched his hand back over the water and the sea crushes the Egyptians. The people of Israel saw the power of the Lord and worshipped and feared him.

Analyze the story:

Attributes of God displayed:

- God's power (He parts seas, leads His people and protects them in supernatural ways.)
- God's faithfulness (He won't let His people be led by their sinfulness back to slavery. He goes to great lengths to protect His people and lead them out of slavery.)
- God's pursuit of his people, even when they are unfaithful (This theme will repeat a lot throughout the Exodus... and the whole Bible.)
- God's foreknowledge of our desires (God intimately knows what His people will be tempted toward and protects them both from their enemies and from their own sinfulness.)
- God's guidance of his people
- God's protection of his people

Who is who in the story?: (Who is like us? Who is like Christ?)

- We are like the Israelites because we doubt and we question if God is really faithful in times where we do not think He will be.
- We are like the Israelites in that we are powerless to accomplish our own salvation.
- Outside of Jesus, we are even like the Egyptians and Pharaoh in that we are enemies of God and His plans.
- We are like Pharaoh in that sin hardens our hearts.
- We are like Pharaoh in that we want control and godlike status in our lives.

- "The Angel of God" often refers to the literal presence of Jesus in the Old Testament.
- The pillar of cloud and fire both provides guidance to the Israelites and protects them, just as Christ gives us guidance and protects us from our enemies as well as our own sinfulness.
- Moses is God's messenger to his chosen people, just as Christ is God's messenger to the Church.

Connect the story:

Parallel Statements:

- Because of Jesus, we are treated like the Israelites despite acting like the Egyptians and Pharaoh.
- Christ steps into the sea in our place and absorbs the wrath despite our hardened hearts.
- God comes to our rescue and fights for us out of His gracious love despite our complaining self-centered sinfulness.
- God accomplishes what we simply cannot do to save ourselves.
- God has wrath and grace and if we're attached to the wrong master we get wrath instead of His grace.
- God is both just and justifier - He wipes out sin and stands between us and our sinful desires.

Apply the story:

- Because of God's incredible provision and salvation we REJOICE.
- Because God saved us despite our sinfulness and we could have been the Egyptians who died under His wrath, we REJOICE.
- Remember to humble ourselves, know who we are and the limits of our power.
- Invite others into God's salvation so they won't be crushed.
- Show grace because God has shown grace to us.
- Trust in God's sovereignty and salvation, because we know that he is faithful and will accomplish it.
- We know that God's salvation cannot be taken away from us by anyone, because God saves us by his power, and his power alone.
- Put your self-righteousness to death because God saved you apart from your works and despite your sin.

Who needs the story?:

- Prideful people who think they can earn their salvation.
- People who think God can't possibly save them because the obstacles in their life seem too great.
- People who doubt God's power or His love for them.
- People who doubt God will provide whatever they need.
- People who are tempted back to their old life of sin and their fleshly desires.
- People who have enemies and feel attacked and overwhelmed.