

"FOLLOWING THE CLOUD"

Exodus 13:21-22

INTRODUCTION:

Dr. J. M. Gray gave five rules for Bible reading. (1) Read the book. (2) Read the book continuously. (3) Read the book repeatedly. (4) Read the book independently. (5) Read the book prayerfully.

I think all of these are excellent rules.

When we come to think about the book of Exodus, we can see so many types. It is like looking back to your roots. And determining what you are, where you originated. It is like a young boy who wanted to stay out all night. And his Daddy said to him, "No, you can't do that." You are from different roots. You have a different base.

When you come to the book of Exodus, Dr. Riley says it is doubtful if there is any book in the Bible which comes so nearly containing an outline, at least, of all Revelation. He says there is scarcely a doctrine in the New Testament, or truth in the Old Testament, that you cannot trace to these 40 chapters. God, sin, salvation, judgement - these are all in Exodus.

We find here the literary background and the historical background, for the entire Bible. And for God's leadership in our lives. In the book of Exodus,

we find bits and pieces put together. I was amused to read about five blind men in India, who were taken and admitted to examine an elephant. They were to give their concept. One blind man felt of the tail and said "He is like a rope." Another felt of his leg and said "He is like a tree." A third, felt of his tusk, and said "He is like a lance." Another felt of his side and said, "No, he is like a wall." The fifth one felt of his trunk, and said "He is like a fire hose." That is bits and pieces. But when we come to the book of Exodus, we find a lot of bits and pieces put together. About the natural history of the nation. And I think that it has something to say to each of us this morning. We can understand God's people - Moses being the key. And he is ready to be the leader. And they are going to be led. It is the whole story of salvation for Israel.

Think about the people at the time when God brought them out of Egypt. The men numbered 600,000. The women and children were not numbered - but it is easy to estimate between 2 million and 3 million people in all. They had suffered so much under the King who knew not Joseph. Taskmasters had afflicted them with burdens. The oppression was very heavy, and their affliction was great and terrible.

And now think as the history unravels. God is getting ready to deliver them. The preparation that God made to bring them out, was most unusual. His people were slaves - being in a nation that was unfriendly. But his purpose was redemption.

The ten plagues were prepared for Exodus out of Egypt. First, all the waters would turn to blood. Ex. 7:20. For hundreds of years the Nile River had been an object of worship. But they no longer wanted to worship there when the Nile was polluted. And there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt - in the vessels.

Wood, and of stone. And the fish in the river died.

For seven days this went on. V. 25. Let my people go. That was the first plague.

Second, there was the plague of frogs. They worshipped the frog as a symbol. As a God. By the Commandment of God, the Lord spake to Moses, and to Aaron - stretch out your hand in Chapter 8:5-6. From every stream, every river, every pond. Frogs came upon Egypt. And Moses cried unto the Lord, because of the frogs that he had brought against Pharaoh. So, the first plague, was the awful odor of fish. And the second plague, was the odor of dead frogs. And God was saying - let my people go.

The third plague - lice. Upon men, women, children, and beasts of the field. And all the dust of the land became lice. 8:17. The magicians said to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. V. 19. This was the third plague - God saying, let my people go.

Fourth, the swarm of flies filled the houses of the Egyptians. Where there were no flies in the Israelites homes in the land of Goshen, to the end - V. 22 - that they might know that there was a difference. And God was saying - let my people go.

Fifth, God struck the animal worship with murrain fever. Chapter 9:3-6.

This plague was a death blow of superstition - and God was saying - Let my people go.

Sixth, there was the plague of ulcers and corruption of skin on the flesh. V. 9-10. And God was saying, let my people go.

Seventh, there was the rain and hail. V. 18-24. And he stretched his rod out and the hail fell upon the land, mingled with fire, like the nation had never seen before. Mighty thunderings. There was one exemption. The land of Goshen, where the children of Israel lived. No hail there. God was saying, let my people go.

Eighth the plague of locust. In which the wind brought in over the land of Egypt the whole face of the earth seemed to be darkened, covered with trees, and vegetation. Chapter 10:14-15. God was saying, let my people go.

Ninth, darkness. This was even the sun was the object of idolatry. So God placed a veil of dense darkness over the false God. And led them in darkness. Chapter 10:22-23. Let my people go.

Tenth, the death of the first born. Chapter 12:29-30. This was when the home that had no blood on the door post -- death was issued. And God was saying, let my people go. God said to Pharaoh - let go. God said to the people - let God work in your behalf.

The purpose of the plagues was to make Pharaoh willing to let the people go. To make the people willing to go - and to teach them the nature and the power of their God.

Now this continued for ten months in order to give Pharaoh the opportunity to respond. And to give Israel a chance to learn a lesson - and also to be obedient.

Then there was this Passover - the greatest of all feasts. The memorial of Israel's flight from Egypt. A flight being a symbol of God's salvation for His own. And illustration of the blood of the lamb of God. It had meaning - to pass over or to spare. The destroying angel would pass over a home wherever the blood of the lamb - and not destroy the first born there.

Take every man a lamb, take a male of the first year, a lamb without blemish from the sheep or the goats. Kill the lamb of the evening. Chapter 12:7. And strike the two sides of the post and the upper door post of the house.

Now, they shall eat the feast in the night - roast it in the fire. Eat none of it raw. But roast it with fire. It is thus representative of the sufferings

of the Israelites in Egypt. And it is also a type of the sufferings of the redeemer.

The bitter erbs spoke of the bitterness of life. Experienced by Egypt.

In many places there was the fire in which the lamb was roasted. And what was left over, was burned in the fire.

I Cor. 5:7 - Paul said, Christ is our Passover. Our Passover.

Now in the history of the deliverance, and the story of Salvation comes - this remarkable cloud - it is called a pillar of cloud, and a pillar of fire. Chapter 14:19-20. The angel of God went before the camp of Israel, removed, and went behind them the pillar of the cloud - went before their face - and stood behind them. 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 the thieves so that the ones came not near the other all the night.

That pillar was first seen, that pillar of cloud by day, and the fire by night, when they started out of Egypt. On that night of the Passover. The night the first born was slain. There appeared this great column. It took its position just over Moses. The place it occupied until the tabernacle was built. When the tabernacle was built - the natural position of the cloud by day, and the fire by night - was the tabernacle. When they were moving, when that cloud stopped - everyone stopped. The next day, if the cloud started - the people got ready and

followed after it. Num. 9:18-22. We find great information about this journey in the cloud.

In the night time, the cloud was a great column of brilliant light. More brilliant than an electric light that we see in any great city. And all night long the radiance from the cloud illuminated the entire camp. So that there was no night that ever touched them in 40 years.

As soon as day came - and the sun rose, then the fire became a cloud. And it spread over them and it kept between them and the sun. Giving them shade. The scorching sun never touched them in all of that time.

If an enemy was pursuing them - that cloud moved around and got in the rear, and turned a hot, fiery face. Very horrible. If it was night, so - if it turned a dark face in all of its blackness. The children of Israel were kept in brightness. The same face shining on God's people was a frown on his enemies.

This was both a pillar of a cloud and a pillar of fire to lead. The one appearance was for the day. The other appearance was for the night. Fire, by day would have added too much to the burning sky. The pillar therefore, was a cloud in the day. Like a huge umbrella protecting them. And was a cloud by night - to give them warmth, the dampness, and chilling atmosphere.

The plagues meant punishment to the enemy. The pillar of cloud meant protection from the enemy. From the forces of nature to God's people.

Now this, in substance, is what I want us to think about today. Simply about following the cloud. I think there is much to be learned in the battles of life today.

First, God wants us to believe Him and leave the old life. He wanted Israel to come out of Egypt. He wanted them to be rid of their bondage, their burdens, their bitterness. To leave that suffering behind.

I think God today wants men to leave the old Egypt of drunkenness, worldliness, doubt, unbelief, of evil companionship, of disobedience. And to begin a new life.

Second, God chooses the paths for our feet. V. 21. The Lord went before them. To lead them - the way by night. And to give them light to go by day. I think God instructs and teaches us and in Psalm 32:8 - (I will instruct thee and teach thee the way that I shall go. I will guide Thee with mine eyes.)

Third, God places himself between you and me, and our enemies. God placed himself between Israel and her enemies. The result was wonderful. It was light to Israel and darkness to their enemies. V. 19-20.

In Zambawie, Africa, a war was in progress. I heard a missionary tell that a little girl was met at the door by three soldiers. Her mother was gone. At the time. The little girl said to the soldiers, you are not going to hurt us. Mama said, God will protect us. The soldiers left. Some weeks later, the soldiers again came to the same village. And came to the same house. And the little girl repeated the same saying. You are not going to hurt us. Mama said, God will protect us. No, said, one of the soldiers. I have come today to ask your family to come to my baptizing. Because what you said some weeks ago, set me to thinking. And I have found God. God places himself between you and the enemy.

Fourthly, the cloud was an evidence of a personal God, present with them. It was visible evidence. And I think that is very comforting. Isaiah 41:10-13 says, fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee. Yea, I will help thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold all they that have in sensed against thee, shall be ashamed and confounded. They shall be as nothing. They that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shall seek them and shalt not find them - even them that contended with you. They that war against thee, shall be as nothing, and as a thing of naught. For, I, the Lord thy God, will hold thy right hand - saying, fear not, I will help Thee.

What evidence of a personal God.

Fifth, the cloud meant protection. At the Red Sea, that pillar of shadow and light came between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Delivering one people and destroying another. How significant, we read the words. Ex. 14:24.

It came to pass that in the morning watch, the Lord looked under the hosts of Egyptians - through the pillar of fire, and of the cloud. And troubled the hosts of the Egyptians. And took of their chariot wheels, they drove them heavily. And the Egyptians said, let us flee from the face of Israel. The Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

What a marvelous protection to have God's presence with the cloud.

Christ on the cross, was the coming of the pillar between us and our great enemy sin.

A remarkable story was told. In Open Windows - of a missionary to China. It related the protection of God, he had been captured by the Red Army soldiers. He had marched up the high mountain pass. At the top, he suddenly sat down upon a big rock. And refused to move - and said, I am tired. The Captain of the Military Patrol, leveled his rifle at the missionary's head and said, I'll shoot you. The missionary smiled, good, then I'll go straight to Heaven to be with God. It's what I want. The soldier slowly lowered his rifle. The last time or thing that he wanted to do was to satisfy anybody that he captured. He finally told the missionary to rest - but he and his men said they would go on down the trail and be in easily rifle shot. The missionary had already noticed that a large cloud was already creeping up the trail, they had just left. In a moment, he was enveloped and covered by the cloud. His captors realized that he had run back into the cloud and disappeared. The missionary concluded the story, then I knew how Moses and the children of Israel felt at the Red Sea - when God hid them in the cloud.

So the pillar meant protection for them.

Sixth, the cloud meant their source of light. It was fire by night--they had no light of their own apart from the cloud. And they had no light to penetrate the darkness.

We pause to say, John 1:4 says, in him was life, and the life was the light of men.

8:12 - I am the light of the world, ye that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness. But shall have the light of life.

The light of the cloud was the life in the cloud. While it sheltered them from the heat of the sun, it was a cloud by day, and a light by night. And the Israelites had their faces set towards the promised land.

Now in conclusion - let us remember. First, that those who follow the cloud will experience three or four things.

First, they will be where God wants them to be. That cloud led them and will lead you.

Second, you will be making just the progress God wants you to make.

When that cloud moved - Israel moved. Not on their own.

3 Third, they were always able to hold together in fellowship and unity, around that cloud. You see people that lived under that cloud, will be in fellowship and unity with him.

4 Fourthly, they were always assured of God's presence, following the cloud.

5 - They were heading to the Promised Land.

Dr. Ford tells of a young Englishman from a fine family, who was blinded by an accident when he was 10 years of age. Despite his handicap - he won honors in school. Also, he won the hand of a lovely girl, although he could not see her face. A few weeks before his wedding, a famous surgeon performed an operation on the boy's eyes. The day set to remove the bandages, turned out to be the day of the wedding. The young man came into the church with his father and stood there waiting for the bride. Soon the bride stood before him, the surgeon slipped up from behind the boy, and began to remove the bandages. It was a tense moment. But in a few minutes the last bandage was removed. The young man was able to see. And the first face that he saw was the young girl that loved him, when he was blind. He gazed at her a long time, and then he took her in his arms and said -- at last, at last.

Some day life's battles will be over for us. The blindness of earth will be

of earth will be

removed. At last, at last, we will be at home. In that home, we will see Jesus and the ones that we have loved and lost. Then we will know that it was worth all of the struggle of life, for God will be paying us off throughout all of eternity. In that wonderful city - whose maker and builder is God.

Let us remember with joy and gratitude that Christ is our guiding light. He is even the pillar of fire by night. It guided Israel on to the Promised Land. Following Him, we have not only his leadership - but we have his companionship. That will bring us to Heaven - a city never built with hands. But a city where there will be no hearses to creep slowly to the tomb, a city without grief, without graves. A city without birth or burials. A city without cradles or coffins. A city - with which has the glories of having Jesus for its King. Angels for its guards. Saints for its citizens. A city whose walls are salvation. And whose gates are praise. Where there is perfect security. A city where there are no sobs, no crying, ever heard.

Thinking of Heaven, we rejoice in what the poet has said.

Somewhere beyond all mountains, vales are greening
Somewhere beyond all sunsets, dawns are bright
Somewhere beyond all winters, life is springing
Somewhere beyond all striving, there is peace.

We need to pray, lead kindly light
Amid the encircling gloom.

Do you need guide for your life. He is our guide throughout the wilderness pilgrimage, of this godless world. It is God's presence in the midst of his people. Dear troubled Christian, let God's answer to Moses' prayer encourage your heart. For God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And he has so promised.

Remember the cloud is a guide. For 40 years that pillar led them through the burning deserts.

Remember, it was a shield from the sun. Protected them. And the Lord is a shield for you from the fire darts of the wicked. From the first night they left. The cruel Pharaoh and the hosts had pursued God's people. And the enemy that was behind - Israel was afraid if God said "fear not". The cloud will move with you and redeem you.

Another wonderful truth we have not time to develop is -- the cloud meant rest. What unspeakable comfort this would mean through that journey. Num. 10:33. Tells about the movement of the children, and they searched out a resting place for them. It is unspeakable comfort to know that Jesus knows that sin weary people - 2,000 years ago, and we today - need to hear his voice. Come unto me, ye that labor and are heavily laden - and I will give you rest. And of course, finally, the cloud will mean glory for us. As Israel was led for 40 years - finally from Egypt to Canaan. It is a vision and the glory of God, by faith - one day we shall enter that glorious city.

And Christians shall see the tears and heartaches with no more sin. They should

be like him. Behold the tabernacle of God is with men. And will dwell with them. Until then, may we let the God of glory be our guide, even unto death. Or til he comes.