

GUIDANCE

Jesus is the 'Way'

There was one cloud, appearing as a cloud by day (sheltering from heat as a canopy), and fire by night, to give light for a night march.

His word is a light to our feet, a lantern to our paths. Listen to that voice which cries, I am the Light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life, **John 8:12**. Jesus Christ alone, as shown in the Bible, and as the Holy Spirit, in answer to prayer, recommends him to the soul, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, - **John 14:6**.

Romans 8:14 - "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

His presence was always visible to Israel.

Exodus 13:21-22 - "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: the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."

The cloud is depicted as being "a cloud and darkness" only to the Egyptians while at the same time giving light to Israel:

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 cloud went from 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 these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."

Exodus 14:24 - "And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians"

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire Rested on The Tabernacle

Exodus 40:33-38 -

"And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up.

For the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”

When it was “taken up” Israel journeyed

Numbers 9:22 - “Or whether it were two days, or a 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.”

Numbers 10:34 - “The cloud of the Lord was above them by day, when they traveled from the camp.”

Rashi - Seven clouds are recorded in the account of their travels: four from the four sides, one above, one below, and one in front of them which would flatten the high land, raise the hollows and destroy snakes and scorpions - [from Sifrei].

Rashi’s comment on **Leviticus 23:42** - “Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:” - [These were] the clouds of glory [with which God enveloped the Jewish people in the desert, forming a protective shelter for them against wild beasts and enemies.] [See Num. 10:34 and Rashi on that verse.]- [Sukkah 11b]

Once the Temple was dedicated, the cloud - referred to by the rabbis as the Shekinah glory, indicating the presence of God - rested in the Holy of Holies and filled the building, so that the priests could not even minister:

1 Kings 8:10-11 - “And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.”

God promises a similar blessing in the days of Messiah for believers:

Isaiah 4:4-6 -

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.

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 defense” (i.e. a wedding canopy - *chuppah* - will accompany the Lord’s presence). And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.

The pillar of cloud and fire was both a comfort to Israel and a sign to the other nations that God was with Israel, i.e that God “went before them” to lead them.

The pillar of cloud and fire appears to be a type of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer, promised by Jesus:

John 14:16-17 - “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

Numbers 12:5 - “And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.”

Numbers 14:14 - “And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.”

Deuteronomy 1:33 - “Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.”

Psalms 105:39 - “He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night.”

Nehemiah 9:12 - “Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.”

Psalms 32:8-9 - “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.”

(NET transl. says: “I will instruct and teach you about how you should live. I will advise you as I look you in the eye. Do not be like an unintelligent horse or mule, which will not obey you unless they are controlled by a bridle and bit.”)

In this psalm, we are reprimanded for not “discerning, understanding, considering diligently” - (Hebrew is *biyn* - a word that can also include prudence or cunning) Compare with Jesus’ exhortation to live like the sparrow or the lilly, without self-consciousness, and yet be wise as serpents but harmless as doves. Apparently these are not incompatible.

Psalms 78:14 - “He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night.”

Psalms 99:7 - “His voice came to them from the pillar of cloud; so it was they heard the decrees, the command he gave them.”

Proverbs 3:6 - "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

1 Corinthians 10:1-3 - "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;"

Matthew 4:1 - "Then was Jesus led up of (by) the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

Luke 4:1 - "And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,"

Mark 1:12 - "And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness."

driveth = *ekballo*, compelled with sternness and haste, "to cause a thing to move straight toward its intended goal"

Romans 8:14 - "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

Galatians 5:18 - "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."

Galatians 5:25 - "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

And yet.... there are examples of the Spirit specifically permitting and forbidding certain actions.

Acts 16:6-7 - "They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;"

To sum up, guidance comes by our being sensitive to the Holy Spirit, as we look to God in prayer and in the scriptures. Jesus himself is the Way, and as we keep our eye on him, the Word becomes a lamp unto our feet for guidance.

Matthew Henry's Commentary on Numbers 9:15-23:

"At the commandment of the Lord, our hearts should always move and rest, saying, Father, thy will be done; dispose of me and mine as thou pleasest. What thou wilt, and where thou wilt; only let me be thine, and always in the way of my duty.

"In applying general precepts to particular circumstances, there should be good counsel and fervent prayer. When any undertaking is evidently wrong, or doubtfully right, and yet the mind leans that way, in such a case the moving of the cloud, as men sometimes

miscall it, is generally no more than a temptation Satan is permitted to propose; and men fancy they are following the Lord, when they are following their own wayward inclinations.

“The record of his mercy will conduct us with unerring truth, through Christ, to everlasting peace. Follow the pillar of the cloud and of fire. Lay the BIBLE to heart, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

Action Options

Doing nothing can mean either we're waiting on God or it can mean we've chosen an option, i.e. to do nothing, like the wicked and lazy servant in the parable of the talents who buried his shekels (**Matthew 25:14-30**)

How can you tell the difference?

Jesus said to “Follow me,” i.e. just like Israel followed the pillar of cloud and fire.

Like a trusted servant with his master, we must continually be watching, listening and returning to Him for guidance. Sometimes he will give us broad instructions and leave the working out of it to us, as in the parable of the unjust steward (**Luke 16:1-13**) who was commended for his ingenuity.

An open door doesn't necessarily mean we should walk through it, nor do three open doors mean we must choose the option of doing nothing until two of the doors close. We keep going to God in prayer. and trust that the Holy Spirit will work through our understanding to make the right decision at the right time. We know that the Holy Spirit can check us one way or another (as in the story of Paul being forbidden to preach in Asia).

The problem with decisions is the anxiety that comes from fear of being wrong when we leave the rest and the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit. The decision itself is neutral.

We can never know the outcome of any decision beforehand, because we don't know the future.

Resist the “tyranny of the urgent,” but also be alert to when and where the Holy Spirit is moving.

Romans 14:23 - “What is not of faith is sin”

John Chrysostom (347–407)

“Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

Chrysostom cautions, though: “Now all these things have been spoken by Paul of the subject in hand, not of everything.”

Augustine disagreed. In his ‘Lectures on the Gospel according to St. John’ cites Romans 14:23 as a universal statement covering all human conditions: “Not that you may say, ‘Before I believed I was already doing good works, and therefore was I chosen.’ For what good work can be prior to faith, when the apostle says, ‘Whatsoever is not of faith is sin’?” (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 8, 353).

Augustine’s point was that even the virtues and “right” decisions of unbelievers are sin because “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (**Hebrews 11:6**)

But does “faith” refer to faith in Christ in general, or to “faith” as lack of doubt, i.e. the confidence/conviction that your decision is the right one?

In the context of the letter, Paul (**Romans 14:23**) is trying to get “strong” believers not to pressure “weak” believers into actions that they aren’t yet ready to take, because any action that does not conform to one’s own convictions about what one’s Christian faith allows or prohibits is sinful, whether or not it’s “right” or “wrong.” That’s love.

An artificial situation is described, of people facing a decision not springing from within but encouraged from the outside by respected brothers.

Martin Luther said, “To act against conscience is neither right nor safe.”

(But legalists are often masters of guilt manipulation, while antinomians master the art of quiet denial.)

By doing everything “as unto the Lord,” as described in that chapter of Romans, anxiety vanishes.

Also consider: **James 4:17** -Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.