

The Glory Of God (Part 1): The Shekinah

The Fiery Pillar of Cloud

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From the internal evidence that we can see, today memorializes God bringing Israel completely out of Egypt, when they crossed of the Red Sea.

Israel had spent the last seven days walking. They had gathered in Rameses, trekked south and then a little bit east across the wilderness of Egypt. They finally came to the northern tip of what we call now the Gulf of Suez, which was the Red Sea.

It took them the whole seven days to come completely out of Egypt, and now, here they were on this last of the seven days trapped between the water that was before them, and Pharaoh's army which was behind them. God had boxed them in! And here, God did something wondrous. Absolutely wondrous!

Now certainly the parting of the Red Sea, and the Israelites walking across on dry ground, would be pretty high up on anybody's list of miracles. It was a spectacular thing that occurred, something that has never, as far as we know, been repeated. The crossing of the Jordan was a smaller miracle of that kind, but here was this vast arm of the ocean that God pushed back by a wind, and allowed the Israelites to go through on dry ground.

However, God did do something else that day that, though part of the continuation of an ongoing miracle (that had occurred over the last seven days), was uniquely spectacular on that particular night.

We will read Exodus 13, verse 20 through the end of the chapter, and see the beginning of this stupendous miracle.

Exodus 13:20-22 So they took their journey [that is the children of Israel] from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. [And here is where the miracle begins.] And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

It was something that was always there, this pillar of cloud, and this pillar of fire.

Let's go to the next chapter—this is the nighttime hours of this day when they were trapped in front of the sea.

Exodus 14:19-20 And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; [You see, normally He was out front leading them, but this time He went behind them.] and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

So, what we have is this huge thundercloud rising up into the sky into a huge anvil like thunderclouds do. We see them a lot in the South because we get thunderstorms in the afternoons frequently, from February all the way into November. We can see these huge thunderclouds come across the sky. And sometimes when they are backlit by the sun, this dense mass of cloud is dark, but brilliant behind it is the sun. Maybe this is what the pillar of cloud was like.

But, on this occasion the pillar of fire and cloud went from before them, and moved of its own volition, because God was guiding it back behind them—to make a barrier between Israel and Egypt.

And then it did something that is very unusual, even for this cloud. It appeared dark on the Egyptian side, so that it was menacing, and frightful to the Egyptians. And on the other side, it was brilliant, fiery, light, giving comfort to the Israelites all that night, and illuminating what they were doing. They were preparing to cross the Red Sea.

And so, God, in this pillar of fire and cloud provided what Israel needed that night—protection, illumination and comfort to the fearful Israelites.

Exodus 14:24 Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud,...

You almost get the idea of God sitting on top of this pillar of fire, and cloud, and He's looking down through it at the Egyptians. Let's go on here.

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Exodus 14:24 ...and He troubled the army of the Egyptians.

It says here that He took off their chariot wheels, and made them drive very recklessly, and probably bogged them down so that they could not pursue after the Israelites who were fleeing across the ocean bed to the other side. God was doing this all from His "perch" there in or on the cloud.

It occurred to me, as I was studying and preparing this message, that we do not connect this pillar of cloud and fire with the Days of Unleavened Bread. Yet, it is very much a part of the symbolism of these seven Days of Unleavened Bread. It is a necessary and important part to have in our minds as we think about these Days of Unleavened Bread.

This pillar of fire, and cloud symbolizes God's presence with His people as they come out of sin, and as they trek toward the Promised Land. Without this pillar to guide, to protect, to comfort, to chase enemies, and to instruct us, we would all die in the wilderness. We say that Moses was leading Israel out of Egypt, but that's not true. Moses himself was following the pillar of cloud and fire. That's how important this pillar of fire and cloud is.

So, today we are going to look at the glorious presence of God called by the Jews, the Shekinah. It sounds a lot like "shock, and awe" that I gave just a few weeks back. That's where I got the idea for this sermon because I was thinking of shock and awe, and immediately it popped into my head that it sounded like "Shekinah." It is spelled, s-h-e-k-i-n-a-h. You may also find it spelled, s-h-e-c-h-i-n-a-h. It doesn't matter, in Hebrew the "ch" sounds like a "k."

We're going to look at this Shekinah, which is the glorious presence of God, and it's significance to us in these seven days of the feast, and really throughout our Christian lives, because the pillar didn't leave Israel after these seven days.

Now, Shekinah—(actually I should pronounce it correctly at least once)—it is, "She-KEE-nah." The emphasis is on the second syllable, with the long "EE" sound.

When we were in Worldwide together in the Escondido area, there was a lady there whose name was Shekinah. I often wondered (I never asked) if her parents had named her after this term. It wouldn't be a bad name. It means the presence, or the dwelling of God.

Anyway, Shekinah is a word *not* found in the Bible. It literally means in Hebrew,

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"residence," or "dwelling." It is from a Hebrew root that *is* in the Bible, often translated as "to dwell." For example, "God dwells among His people." If you were to look that Hebrew term up, you would see the similarity to the word Shekinah.

It came to mean, over time, instead of literally "residence," or "dwelling,"—"God's visible presence." That word "visible" is very important—God's visible presence. Or, as I saw in one place, "The visible Majesty of the Divine Presence."

All descriptions of the Shekinah say that it was a most brilliant and glorious light enveloped in a cloud. So, when the Bible describes it as a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire it is splitting into two what was actually one. It was always a pillar of fire and it was always a pillar of cloud.

But, in the night, God emphasized for the Israelites the light and fire. And during the day, God emphasized the mass of cloud. So that, during the day, with the brilliant sunshine that was probably pretty common over the wilderness of Sinai, you saw the cloud. But, in the night when it was dark (and when you don't have city lights and other types of lights out there it gets pretty dark) what came through was this fiery pillar.

And so during the night it was light, and during the day, it was solid and substantial; you will find if you go through this that they often call it a dark cloud. The Lord rides on a dark cloud. "Dark clouds surround Him, and fire burns his foes..." is the image that we have here. When God is around, there is usually a cloud. And there is usually a brightness coming out of the cloud.

Now, I've mentioned before, that it is especially the visible presence of God, and it came to be over time that visible presence that hovered over the tabernacle. Or, that filled Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

Nothing is said of this presence of God—the Shekinah—in regard to the Second Temple. If you go to Ezra 6:13 and on to the end of the chapter, you will find that when they dedicated the second temple there is no mention of God's presence. There might be a couple of reasons for this. They probably did not have the ark. They may not have. I don't know. The location of the ark is one of those questions and mysteries of history.

Did Jeremiah carry it to Egypt? We don't know. Did Nebuchadnezzar carry it back to Babylon? We don't know. Was it destroyed? We don't know. Did God take it up to heaven, for safe keeping? There is a scripture in Revelation that says at a certain point you look up and there is the ark of the testimony coming down out of heaven.

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So, what happened to the ark? I don't know. But, because the ark wasn't there it is very probable that the Shekinah wasn't present either (in the second temple); at least nobody has written about it at all, in terms of the second temple.

Now, we'll look at God's presence—Shekinah—in the tabernacle. The following takes place when the tabernacle was finally completed:

Exodus 40:1-2 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.

This is the end of what Moses did in response to God's instruction:

Exodus 40:33 And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work.

He's done. OK. What happens next?

Exodus 40:34 Then the cloud... [Remember it was always above the children of Israel.] ...covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

This is a "Hebraism". I just want to give you this clue right now, early on in this sermon. These are two parallel clauses right here. They mean exactly the same thing. The cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Do you see what matches what?

What Moses is saying here is that the cloud is the glory of the Lord. Now, this is not exact. But, the cloud certainly represents the glory of the Lord. Just wanted to let you know that, because this is going to become important.

Exodus 40:35-38 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. [It is repeated. I guess somebody wants us to get that understanding.] Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was

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taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

Do you understand what that means? There was an ongoing miracle of the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire for 40 years! That's why I said that normally the Red Sea crossing is pretty high on our list, but there was another miracle that may be even more stupendous!

The crossing of the Red Sea happened in one day, but the pillar of fire and cloud was there for 40 years—a visible presence of God for 40 years!

So, all the people had to do, if they felt that somehow God had abandoned them, was look in the direction of the tabernacle and they could see—day or night—this tremendous thundercloud, glorious with fire, and know that God was there.

The cloud of fire was the visible representation of God's presence with the children of Israel. If you would like, you could say that in an Old Testament circumstance, the cloud was "Emanuel"—God with us.

He was there. That's why I say that this was—should have been—a comfort to Israel and a source of strength. All they had to do was turn in that direction and see God as He chose to represent Himself—through cloud and through fire. It is an amazing thing to think about. Just look over your shoulder and there is God! He is there to help at any time.

Now if we go to I Kings 8 we'll see the dedication of the Temple that Solomon built.

I Kings 8:1 Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the City of David, which is Zion.

I Kings 8:9-11 Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place [having put the ark into that place], that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud... [Sounds exactly like what

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happened to Moses.] ...for the glory of the LOORD filled the house of the LOORD.

Notice again. When the cloud filled the house, the glory filled the house.

I Kings 8:12-13 Then Solomon spoke: "The LOORD said He would dwell in the dark cloud. I have surely built You an exalted house, and a place for You to dwell in forever."

So the cloud fills the temple, signifying God dwelling in His own house among His people. And here we have the Shekinah associated with the ark of the testimony. We saw this also in Exodus 40—that the ark and the Shekinah were associated with one another.

This is because the ark has a lid called the Mercy Seat. It is the mercy seat that has the two Cherubim stretching their wings touching in the center. It was on this lid that God was supposed to sit. The ark was the throne. And the mercy seat was the actual seat where God dwelt among His people. From there He would judge, and thus they called it the mercy seat, because they sure didn't want justice which meant they would be totally annihilated; they wanted mercy, which God was free in giving.

And so, the Shekinah, the glory of God, the cloud and fire, sat or rested on the mercy seat. And that's why the ark and the Shekinah are associated with one another. The Jews, then, after a while came to define Shekinah as God's visible presence in the Holy of Holies, sitting between the Cherubim.

So, over time they, in a way, forgot the pillar of cloud and fire that guided Israel very visibly for everyone to see. Soon, it became God's presence just within the Holy of Holies—cut off from the rest of the people.

Let's read Exodus 25. This is talking about the ark. Actually, I believe this is what I was thinking about before, not Exodus 40.

Exodus 25:10 And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height.

Exodus 25:17-20 You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half

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cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.

That is interesting. I've often seen the Cherubim depicted with their wings spread, and their shoulders hunched a bit, and the angels faces not quite facing each other, but facing down looking at the actual mercy seat in humility, and not at each other; a look of humility serving God. They are covering Him with their wings, but they are looking down as if they would not, like a servant, look at their master's eyes, or face. It is interesting, and I thought I'd pass that along.

Exodus 25:21-22 You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.

There we see a synopsis of what the mercy seat and the ark are all about. The mercy seat was on top of the ark, which contained the law, an omer of manna and Aaron's rod, which established two things: The manna symbolized God's providence and grace; and the rod of Aaron symbolized the authority of the priesthood.

So you had those three things, and God sat on them, and judged, decreed, and commanded from there. All of these are symbolic. But, it was the Shekinah—God's visible presence—that rested above the mercy seat between the Cherubim. It was God's throne, as it were.

You will find this continued on in Psalm 132, a later conception of things. This is one of the songs of ascent, thought to be sung as the priests ascended the steps leading up to the temple.

Psalm 132:7-8 Let us go into His tabernacle; let us worship at His footstool. Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.

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Psalm 132:13-14 For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: this is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

So we have the ark in the tabernacle, or the ark in the temple, and God dwelling among His people in that place sitting on or above the mercy seat. However, once the Jews defined it down as closely as this—to God's visible presence between the Cherubim on the mercy seat—they started to define it too closely. What it did was blind them to other possibilities of the Shekinah, or God's presence.

See? The Jews definition of the Shekinah, post-Ezra actually, originated because the rabbis of the time—the lawyers and what-not—desired to actually dehumanize God. They looked back into the Old Testament, and they saw that Moses and the other writers had written of God in terms of men. They said that He had arms, legs, feet and hands. They said He was shaped like a man. For some reason the Jews thought that this profaned God.

So, what they did was tried to mask, or avoid God's corporality (as the scholars would say). They did not want in any way to make God seem like He had substance or that He was anthropomorphic, like a man—shaped like a man. They wanted to make Him an abstraction. Really, in the end, it did a great disservice. Instead of God being real, and personal and shaped like men so we could have a way to associate with Him, they made Him ethereal, and mysterious, and fuzzy like a pillar of cloud or fire.

You can't get much more amorphous on this earth than a cloud and fire. They really hardly have any substance. They seem weightless. They shift their forms and their shapes constantly. That's how they imagined God—something very remote, something that one could not understand, something that a person could not wrap his mind around, or get to know.

He became a Blob—a Voice that spoke out of thin air and not a Person.

I'm sure that they did this in all sincerity, but the end result, when human minds try to define things of God so closely, is that it ends up messing things up. They decided to take certain parts of God's revelation, but ignore others. And they created a god that was nothing.

You can see that in the Jews today. The Jews have a religion of nothing. They have a bunch of rituals that they go through—empty rituals—that they repeat endlessly, but

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they have no relationship with that God that they supposedly worship.

Having a relationship with God is fairly foreign to Judaism, because all that Judaism requires is that one goes through the motions. And so they don't have a personal relationship with a deity as Christianity does, and it is very sad. The rabbis before Christ basically set the course for Judaism as it became by destroying the reality of God, which is very sad.

Now we have already seen (in the scriptures that we've gone through) that the cloud and the fire were not God. We saw that very clearly in Exodus 14, where it said that God looked down through the cloud and the fire. He was not the cloud and fire. He was something else besides. He was in the cloud and the fire. Or He was on them.

They were merely physical representations of Him. You might say that He clothed Himself with fire and cloud to give human eyes the ability to see where He was. They were real things that the invisible God wrapped Himself in, so a human mind could have something to hold on to. So, the human mind could recognize His presence.

But, I want to show you that the rabbis ignored something here in Exodus 24, that showed that the Glory of God, or God's presence, includes His human-like form. Remember we were made in the image of God. And so, human-kind is after the God-kind, certainly, in form and shape. Not in substance. But, we look like God, and He looks like us, relatively.

And so here we have Moses and the other leaders of Israel—70 of them—going up to actually see the God of Israel.

Exodus 24:9-10 Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. [Now notice what they saw:] And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.

They saw His feet. If He was not like a man why did He not have something else? If He was just a blob, why is Moses so confident here that they saw His feet?

Exodus 24:11 But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. [He did not strike out at them. He did not smite them.] So they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Now does this "they" include God? If that is the case, if He ate a meal with them, that means He has a mouth to eat with, and obviously He would have to have hands to feed the mouth. I'm just guessing here, but there is pretty good indication that they saw the same type of thing that Abraham saw when God visited him. They had a meal together. Remember Abraham running around trying to get that bullock, or whatever it was ready for the three travelers who came to visit him, whom he knew immediately to be God, and two angels. And, they were like men. They looked like us.

Exodus 24:15-18 Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud [guess what that was!] covered the mountain. Now the glory of the LOORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the LOORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights [again].

I think that it was again—that is a second 40 days, 40 nights on the mount.

We have here the visible presence of God, the Glory of God being shown with all the sapphire stone and like the very heavens in clarity and such, including His form, shaped like a man.

So the Jews strayed from this revelation of God when they said that God was basically an ethereal, luminous cloud. We can see here that He appeared to them as a man, and it was God's presence right with, and maybe He even ate and drank with them.

So, God's presence is not confined to a cloud and fire. Just think of this. Think about all the times that God appeared in the Bible to human beings. Not physically, I mean not with just their eyes—not just when people saw Him.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve heard the sound of God walking in the garden. And they knew it was Him.

He spoke directly with many people without appearing to them. He gave others visions. He gave still others dreams. He appeared to many in human form. In several places He appeared as an angel. In fact we read one of those. He was called the Angel of the Lord. In another place, He was a priest-king Melchizedek. In another place He was the commander of the Hosts of the Lord. And Joshua fell on his face after saying, "Are you

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with us, or against us?"

He didn't always appear the same way every time. He came in different guises you might say. He wrestled with Jacob. He didn't necessarily speak across a nice table or something with him, but was down in the dirt with him for a whole night! He appeared as a burning bush to Moses. He was in that burning bush. He was a still small voice to Elijah.

Saul felt God's spirit come upon him and he prophesied—he danced like mad! And, we saw a couple of months ago that Balaam did the same thing, that the spirit of the Lord came upon Balaam, and he prophesied. He felt God's presence.

God's presence has been seen, and known through darkness, windstorm, lightning and thunder, earthquakes, radiant light, trumpets, shouting and various other forms.

This is a strange one: He appeared as a tiny sperm cell in the womb of Mary. And she knew it! You can't hide that!

Thousands, or maybe hundreds of thousands, or even millions witnessed his presence as the human Jesus Christ. Over five hundred saw the resurrected Jesus Christ at once, Paul says!

And at least five that I remember: Peter, James, John, Stephen, and Paul saw Him in His Glory. Three of those in the Transfiguration; Stephen at his martyrdom; and Paul, we don't know when, but he said in his story "there was a man taken up to paradise," and heard unspeakable things.

There are probably many other kinds of appearances of God's presence that I haven't mentioned. I just kind of skimmed the top there.

The point to remember is that we should not limit His presence to one particular form or another. His Glory can appear in different ways. We certainly should not confine it just to the cloud and fire. We do not want to be guilty of the sins of the children of Israel in confining God to our own conceptions or our own expectations. That's a serious thing to do.

In Psalm 78 this idea comes out just for times like this when we're talking about Israel coming out of Egypt and such. Verse 12 actually mentions the pillar of fire, and cloud:

Psalm 78:12-14 Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers, In the

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land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; And He made the waters stand up like a heap. In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, And all the night with a light of fire.

Psalm 78:40-42 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited [confined, held back] the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power...

You might ask yourself, "How in the world do you forget God's power when there is a miracle going on 24 hours a day seven days a week for forty years straight, right over your shoulder?"

Well, maybe it is the old saw about being contemptuous of the thing that is so familiar. "Familiarity breeds contempt."

Psalm 78:42 They did not remember His power: The day when He redeemed them from the enemy,

It is just amazing to think about how people's conceptions of God destroy their faith, and make it impossible for God to work. We know that the Israelites confined, at one point, God to a golden calf. And then later on, it happened all through their history—limiting Him, saying that He could not do certain things. Until, finally, the rabbis confined Him to pillar of cloud and fire in one particular place on top of the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. They boxed Him up. They put Him in a nice little 10 x 10, or 20 x 20 room. And that's as far as He went.

We have to make sure that we don't do that. We have to remember verses like I Kings 8:27, not normally a memory scripture, but right there is where Solomon, as he is dedicating the Temple, says, "Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain You."

Our puny little minds love pigeon-holes. We like to organize things in certain ways, and define things so that we can understand them. But, our minds can't understand God and His Glory. So, Solomon says here that not even heaven, or the heaven of heavens, not even the sky, or all of space, not even the 3rd heaven can confine God.

He is something always more and better than we can think up.

So, confining Him and His Glory to something (or someplace) is doing Him a great disservice, because God is so much more far reaching and transcendent than that. If we become too familiar with our own conception of God, we start limiting what God can do, because He then becomes a God only of our imagination, and not the real God who can do whatever He pleases.

Let's go back to one of the times when the Israelites limited God (Numbers 14:1-5, 10-12). This is when the spies had returned from searching out the land. The majority of the spies gave a bad report. Now listen to this, and remember that just over their shoulder was this pillar of luminous, fiery cloud:

Numbers 14:1-3 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. [Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoooo. What were they doing by crying? They were limiting God!] And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! ["Woe is me!"] Why has the LOORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

"Let's go back to that 'sin' that we enjoyed so much back there!" "At least we were alive!"

Numbers 14:4-5 So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

Numbers 14:10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. [They were going to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb for actually speaking up for God!] Now the glory [and this is what I was getting to...] of the LOORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.

I get the impression that Moses understated this a little bit. I almost get the impression that here they had this dark cloud hovering over the congregation, and having cried all night, they came to Moses in the morning. And when they started to pick up stones, we have...whoopf...this tremendous, burning cloud appearing so that all the congregation of Israel could see. Their eyes were immediately diverted to God's presence.

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When God walks in a room, you don't ignore Him. Well, when God walked in among His people, and wanted to get their attention, He lit the place up! People knew exactly where to go.

And this was God's presence among them in anger! Let's read what He says here:

Numbers 14:11-12 Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

This is God spitting nails! He was about as angry as He gets. He was threatening to kill them all. Just send some pestilence through the camp. Just strike down all 2.5 million of them and start over with Moses, and do it better this time.

So, here is an example of God's presence giving stern correction and judgment from His visible presence. And He did. We will find out a little later in the chapter, that He pronounces a death sentence on all of them except Moses (well actually Moses ended up dying too because of something he did later); but basically He said that Joshua and Caleb would live. And everybody else would not enter the Promised Land.

But, He punctuated it with this glorious presence in the tabernacle. So, we have to move beyond the Jewish conception of Shekinah to the true Christian understanding of God's presence, God's dwelling.

Now, as would happen, the true Christian understanding of God's dwelling among His people begins in the Old Testament.

Let's go back just a little bit to Exodus 33. This is the time when Moses is talking to God, right after the golden calf incident, and things are bad in Israel. Moses is trying to understand what is going on. He is asking God something.

Exodus 33:13-14 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way [now listen to that], that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people. And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Exodus 33:17-23 So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that

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you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name. And he said, "Please, show me Your glory. Then He [the Lord] said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LOORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live. And the LOORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.

Now did you notice God's own definition of His glory? Moses asked, "Please show me your glory!" And how does God respond? "I will make all my goodness pass before you." And then He says He will proclaim the name of the Lord as He does so. Very interesting!

How does God define His glory? God's glory to Him is His holy, righteous, perfect character. It is the essential essence of God! That is what is glorious to God: His goodness, His character—that's what makes Him God.

The light show is nice. The thunder and the sound is stupendous. But God Himself is holy, righteous character; ultimate goodness; the perfection of love and grace, and truth. That's why He proclaimed His names. His names tell us about all those wonderful attributes that He has. He is a God that is there. He is a God that heals. He is a God of this, of that. He is our Shepherd, our King, our Counselor, our Guide, our Rear Guard; He is in the Van; He is our Pioneer, our Forerunner; and on and on—those names proclaim what He is, what He does, what His nature is like.

It is the way that God lives that is so glorious.

We'll see more of this. Let's read chapter 34 and see how this comes out. We had all this prelude to get to this.

Exodus 34:5-9 Now the LOORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LOORD. And the LOORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LOORD, the LOORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and

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the children's children to the third and the fourth generation. So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.

So, he saw here, not just the flaming radiance of God on his backside, muted, but he also understood (you can tell by his reaction here—he understood) what God was getting at. That the real glory of God was not the flaming fire, it was all these attributes that God had: the longsuffering, the mercy, the grace, the goodness and truth, the forgiveness.

All these things are a part of God's way. And that's why Moses says, "God I understand this. If I've found mercy in your sight, if I've found grace in your sight, please walk among us so we may have your presence with us, and learn your ways even though we are a sinful and hardhearted people."

They needed God's presence to emulate. Now, only a few did (emulate), but all this mollified God after the golden calf incident. And they went forward.

So, God's glory is not a physical attribute like a light in a cloud, but a spiritual radiance of His character. Now, this is why Isaiah cried, "I am undone!" when he saw God. He was undone as it were because the light bowled him over.

This is why Ezekiel, once he saw the glory of God, fell on his face, and lay astonished for seven days. This is why Daniel, when he saw God in Daniel 10, lost all strength whatsoever, and passed out into a deep sleep.

This is why Peter, when he saw Jesus Christ do a stupendous miracle, said, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinner."

These men were not awed necessarily by what was done, they were awed by HIM! And by what He is. And, that awesome holy, righteous character that just floods out from Him. That's His glory! It is what He is that is awesome, not how He manifests Himself.

The glory of God is His way, His goodness. You can define this goodness as, "everything that is Godly." Which is basically the root of our word "goodness." It means, basically, godliness.

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So, the real glory of God hits a sinful human being like a ton of bricks, totally draining such a person of any conception of personal goodness, or any pride. Before God any human strength or virtue just pales and looks so measly and corrupt.

That's why these men of great faith whose words we follow and quote so often just totally lost it before God. Because as righteous as we think they were, compared to God, like Isaiah said, they were like filthy rags.

David called himself a worm before God. They were nothing and less than nothing, not just in terms of strength, but also in terms of character; in terms of all that is good.

Now let's move on because this is very interesting. We have gone from the fire and the cloud, to understanding that God's true glory is His character. And in the New Testament, this takes an interesting twist or form.

This, I believe, is why John started his Gospel the way that he did. I really truly believe that when he was writing the first paragraphs of the Gospel of John, he was thinking of the Shekinah. And, he wanted us to understand what had happened to the Shekinah. And where it resided now. And what it would do.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

What this does is that it goes back to the Old Testament again. It makes a correlation between the Voice, the Word, that had been given, and the Revelation that had been given in the Old Testament. And John basically says that the Word had always been, the Word had always been with God, and the Word was a part of God.

John 1:2-3 He was in the beginning with God. [This goes all the way back to Genesis 1:1.] All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

So now he begins to bring in the creation. This Word is not only the Revelation, but He is the Creator of all things. He is starting to add attributes to this Word Person so that we get an idea of what we're supposed to connect with here that happened before.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...

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So now he adds on here not only Creator, but Life-giver. He is the one who made life possible for all mankind, and He is the one who provided life, and their living to all of Israel throughout all their history. He made possible all life.

John 1:4 ...and the life was the light of men.

Ah ha! Now we're bringing in light!

John 1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

Now are we seeing a bit of the Shekinah here?

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh [human] and dwelt [tabernacled] among us...

It says dwelt, here. But in the Greek, the word is the definite noun for tabernacle. Now, where was the Shekinah? They said it dwelt in the Holy of Holies, above the Mercy Seat, between the cherubim, in the Tabernacle!

So, what he is saying here is that the Shekinah glory of God, the One that lead Israel through the wilderness, as well as the Creator, as well as the Life-giver, as well as the God who is always with God, the Spokesman who always gave the commands to Israel, and the whole world, is the same One as this Person who became flesh.

The God of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ in the New Testament! And everything that the God of the Old Testament was is in Jesus Christ!

John 1:14 and we beheld His glory,

So, this Light, this Word became a human being, tabernacling among us, and humanity, specifically the apostles here, beheld His glory.

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John 1:14 the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,

Maybe it would be better translated as the glory befitting the only begotten from the Father. And then this, this defines, in a way, the glory of God:

John 1:14 full of grace and truth.

Those words encapsulate everything that the glory of God means to us: the fullness of grace, and the fullness of truth. Grace being the beauty of God's love and goodwill toward us, in addition to all the gifts that He freely gives—all the helps and aids that He allows us so that we can make it through this life.

And then the truth being the sum of God's revelation to us—the whole counsel of God. That covers everything—all of God's gifts, and everything that He gives, and the truth that goes with it. Hand and hand those things in a way are God's Glory.

And what we find is that it is transferred to us. It was not only beheld in the Word who became flesh, but this grace and truth—the glory of God—can be transferred to us.

We'll see that in John 17 in Jesus' prayer. We just read this the other night at the Passover service, but I'll read it again because I want you to hear it from Jesus Christ Himself.

John 17:20-22 I do not pray for these alone [the eleven that were with Him], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word [that's us]; that they all may be one [unified], as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them [He transferred it to us!] that they may be one just as We are one:

When we take on the glory of God, and show it—exhibit it in our lives—what does that do? It unifies us with the Father, and the Son. We have the same glory as they do!

They're in us. God's glory resides in us. The Shekinah is no longer between the cherubim on a mercy seat. We are the temple of the living God.

I Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that

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the Spirit of God dwells in you?

What was that spirit supposed to do? It was to teach us all things, wasn't it? It was a down payment for the fullness of the spirit that we'll get later. And what happens when we get the fullness of the spirit? We're just like God!

We'll have the radiance, and the fullness of that glory that was seen in the Old Testament. But, right now, we have a down payment of the glory of God living in us constantly. That's why the pillar of fire and cloud stayed with the children of Israel for 40 years.

It took them out of Egypt, which God by His Spirit does for us. It took them through the Red Sea, which God by His Spirit does for us. It took them to Sinai where we get the Law, and we learn. And then it took us all over the wilderness wherever God decides to send us in this trek to...where? The Promised Land! And it doesn't leave us until we're ready to receive the fullness of it in the Kingdom of God.

Without that Spirit, without God's goodness and glory in us through the whole trek as mentioned before, we would never make it to the Promised Land—never to the Kingdom of God. That's why it is so important to these days of Unleavened Bread that we recognize that no amount of eating unleavened bread, or throwing out the leavening is going to get us into the Kingdom. We need to have the Shekinah glory guiding us throughout the whole trek.

Now it is not before us, it is in us! It is an amazing thing to think about.

I Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

That is why you are sanctified. You have God living in you. It just ratchets up our responsibility to live in accordance with the holiness that is in us by God's Spirit.

Colossians 1:26-28 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. [That means you and I—the set-apart-ones, the holy ones.] To them God willed [Listen to this!] to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning

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every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [I might add, glorious!] in Christ Jesus.

That's the whole reason why we're here. That's the whole reason for the ministry: To preach the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

What God reveals in Jesus Christ is what gives us glory. That is the essence of His word—the truth—and it comes in us by His Spirit which is Christ living in us. And that is our hope of eternal glory. Christ in us—living His life in us—by His Spirit.

So as we put on Christ, more and more through the teaching that we receive, as we transform with God's help into the image of Christ, the hope of glory just gets stronger and stronger, and stronger, because we're reflecting the glory of God.

And that is our salvation! Is that not what we're picturing in the keeping of the days of Unleavened Bread? Following that glory to the Kingdom?

I Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.