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The place of the Shechinah glory during the exodus from Egypt

The God of glory, the mediator Moses and the people of Israel

"He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people".

Exodus 13:22

In this article, we examine the places in the book of Exodus that deal with the pillar of cloud and of fire that accompanied God's people during the wilderness journey. The close connection between the Shechinah, i.e. the divine presence, the people and their leader Moses is highlighted in this way. The position that the cloud occupies in each of these cases is of great importance. Seven different passages are involved:

(1) At the exodus, the cloud went out before them to guide them on the way (Ex. 13:21-22). The Lord went before them in the daytime in the pillar of cloud to give shelter from the heat and at night in the pillar of fire to give light. This speaks of the guidance and the illumination by the Spirit of God in the "wilderness journey" here on earth (cf. Rom. 8:14v.).

(2) At the passage through the sea, the cloud changed its place. God then separated the army of the Egyptians from that of the Israelites, so that the one could not approach the other (Ex. 14:19-20, 24-25). This speaks of protection and deliverance in the conflict with the enemy, of the complete victory achieved in and through Christ. The Lord's salvation is sure and certain. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1-2). The death of Christ separates us from this world, on which God's wrath rests.

The exodus from Egypt also created an indissoluble bond with Moses, God's servant (Ex. 14:31), so that the Israelites could join him in singing the song of redemption across the Sea (Ex. 15:1ff.). This song also echoes in Romans 8. The Lord Jesus now sings the song of praise in the midst of His own. Through the Spirit of sonship that we have received, we now cry, "Abba, Father!"

(3) The practical experiences in the wilderness were not always uplifting. There soon arose a murmuring against Moses and Aaron, in fact against God Himself (Ex. 16:2-12). This is a picture of our grieving and resisting the Spirit of God (cf. Acts 7:51; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). However, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud at the edge of the wilderness, and God opened the floodgates of heaven. He gave His people meat and bread.

Nehemiah 9 refers to Exodus 16 and connects the guidance of the cloud and the Spirit with the gift of the manna, the bread from heaven: "You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth" (Neh. 9:19-20). There remains, however, a Sabbath rest for the people of God, as already indicated in Exodus 16.

(4) In Moses on the mountain we have a special picture of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Ex. 24:15-18; cf. 2 Cor. 13:13). For he entered the cloud that covered Mount Sinai. This is a picture of the present position of our glorified Lord in the immediate presence of God. God has "glorified Him in Himself" (John 13:32).

In the New Testament, by the way, this is also the position of Moses on the Mount. Luke 9:34 says: "when they entered the cloud". It speaks to us of the Christian position, for by grace God has made us accepted in the Mediator, in the Beloved (Eph. 1:3-6).

(5) After the idolatry with the gold calf, however, the place of Moses, as well as of the pillar of cloud, was *outside the camp*. For the fellowship of the Holy Spirit leads to separation from evil. Moses distanced himself from the iniquity

of the people and pitched a tent before them far from the camp. There the pillar of cloud descended, at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And there the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a person speaks to his friend.

After the rejection of the Messiah, the place of the believing Hebrews was likewise outside the gate of Jerusalem, i.e. outside the Jewish camp (Ex. 33:7-11; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Heb. 13:13).

(6) The place of meeting with God, in separation from evil, is a very special place – both on the mountain and in the tent of meeting. For there He displayed His great

glory. Moses' face shone and reflected God's glory each time; for the conclusion of Exodus 34 clearly refers to the events in the tent of meeting. The pillar of cloud descended and remained at the entrance of the tent.

Moses here represents the New Testament believer, who has free access to the heavenly sanctuary. For all of us now, who like Moses may behold God's glory with uncovered face, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord, the Spirit (Ex. 34:33-35; cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-18).

(7) Finally, at the end of the book of Exodus, we have a beautiful picture of the fulfillment by the Spirit. Indeed, the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:33-38; cf. Eph. 3:16ff; 5:18-19). The filling with God's Spirit is both a gift and a commission (cf. Col. 3:16).

And there is both a collective and a personal aspect: the Spirit fills the whole house (the church), whereas the individual believer is also a temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).
