Exodus

Lesson #18

Excursus:

"The Pillar of Cloud and Fire"

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

Review

In Lesson #17, we witnessed the fashioning of the Tabernacle, exquisite in its lapidary beauty and dazzling colors of violet, purple and scarlet; gold, silver and bronze. When Moses erects the Tabernacle, the pillar of cloud and fire settles upon it, filling the Tabernacle with the Glory of God:

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled down upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud rose from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on their journey. But if the cloud did not lift, they would not go forward; only when it lifted did they go forward. The cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire in the cloud at night, in the sight of the whole house of Israel in all the stages of their journey."

(Exodus 40: 34-38)

Logos Bible Study.com

Preview

With the pillar of cloud and fire—the Glory of the Lord—filling the Tabernacle, we completed our study of Exodus. Before we move on, however, Lesson #18 will take a closer look at this pillar of cloud and fire.

What, exactly, is it?

We first encountered the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13: 21 when it leads the Israelites out of Succoth to the Red Sea. There the pillar of cloud and fire moved behind the Israelites, protecting them from the advancing Egyptian army as the Israelites crossed the parted Red Sea. With the drowning of the Egyptian army, the pillar of cloud and fire led the Israelites to Mt. Sinai, where God reaffirms his covenant with the Israelites and gives them the Law and the Tabernacle. Indeed, the pillar of cloud and fire will stay with the Israelites from the Exodus in 1446 B.C. until 592 B.C. when it leaves the Temple in Jerusalem, ascends the Mount of Olives and disappears down the eastern slope toward Jericho, never to be seen again.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

"Theophany"

In ancient literature the gods frequently appear to humanity in a variety of forms. Such an appearance is called a "theophany," derived from the Greek word "*theophaneia*," meaning "appearance of god."

Logos Bible Study.com

Peter Paul Rubens. ***Death of Semele*** **(oil on canvas), c. 1640. Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Belgium.**

[Zeus, in the appearance of a mortal, loved Semele. Jealous Hera, Zeus' wife, convinced her rival to trick Zeus into revealing himself in all his divine splendor. When he does, Semele is burned to ash in the flash of his divine light. Recall God saying to Moses in Exodus 33: 20: "No one can see me and live."]

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

One of twelve tablets of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, discovered in the Royal Library of Ashurbanipal (c. 668-627 B.C.) in Nineveh by the Assyrian archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam in 1853. British Museum, London.

Perhaps the earliest example of a theophany occurs in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, an epic poem of ancient Mesopotamia, its earliest version dating from the 18th century B.C.

In the poem, the goddess Ishtar makes sexual advances on Gilgamesh, who rejects her. In revenge, Ishtar convinces her father, the god Anu, to sent Gugalanna, the fierce bull of heaven, to kill Gilgamesh. In true epic fashion, Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu slay the bull and offer its heart to the gods. Ishtar shrieks, and Enkidu hurls one of the hindquarters of the bull at her!

Logos Bible Study.com

Athena **(marble), 1st century B.C./A.D. after the Greek 4th century B.C. original. Louvre Museum, Paris.**

Both Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain several theophanies.

In the *Odyssey* the goddess Athena famously disguises herself as Odysseus' aged friend Mentes and appears to Telemachus to help him find his father, Odysseus, who has spent a good part of the last decade since the fall of Troy as a (rather willing) sex slave to the nymph Calypso on her island.

The goddess Athena also has a very intimate relationship with Odysseus, protecting him throughout his adventures by appearing in a variety of forms.

Logos Bible Study.com

In Scripture God appears to:

- Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2 & 3)
- Cain (Genesis 4: 9-15)
- Noah (Genesis 6: 9-13ff)
- Abraham (Genesis 19)

Logos Bible Study.com

Arent de Gelder. "God and the Angels Visit Abraham" (oil on canvas), c. 1680. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

Jacob Wrestles with the Angel

Paul Gauguin. ***The Vision after the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*****, 1888, oil on canvas. Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh.**

Logos Bible Study.com

Joseph's Dreams

Susan Govatus. ***Joseph's Dreams*** **(acrylic on canvas),**
http://susangovatos.com/works/195035/josephs-dreams

Logos Bible Study.com

As we move through Genesis God seems to recede. From the intimacy of the Garden of Eden with Adam & Eve to appearing in dreams with Joseph, God becomes more and more remote, less and less tangible. By Exodus—*at least as far as our narrative is concerned*—God has dropped off the radar, fallen silent for 400 years, the entire time the Israelites have been in Egypt. By the start of Exodus, the Israelites no longer even know who he is.

When God does appear in Exodus, speaking from the burning bush, he sets boundaries that Moses cannot cross: *"God called out to [Moses] from the bush: Moses! Moses! He answered, 'Here I am.' God said: 'Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground'"* (Exodus 3: 4-5).

And at Mt. Sinai after the "golden calf rebellion," God's distance from humanity is absolute: "Let no one even be seen on any part of the mountain; even the sheep and the cattle are not to graze in front of this mountain" (Exodus 34: 3).

Only Moses, God's "intimate friend," (Exodus 33: 12) communes with him "face to face" (Exodus 33: 11).

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

From Exodus 13 onward, God's primary theophany is the pillar of cloud and fire.

Logos Bible Study.com

Pillar of Cloud & Fire

- Exodus 13: 17-22
- Exodus 14: 10-22
- Exodus 16: 9-12
- Exodus 19: 4-9
- Exodus 24: 12-18
- Exodus 33: 7-11
- Exodus 40: 34-38

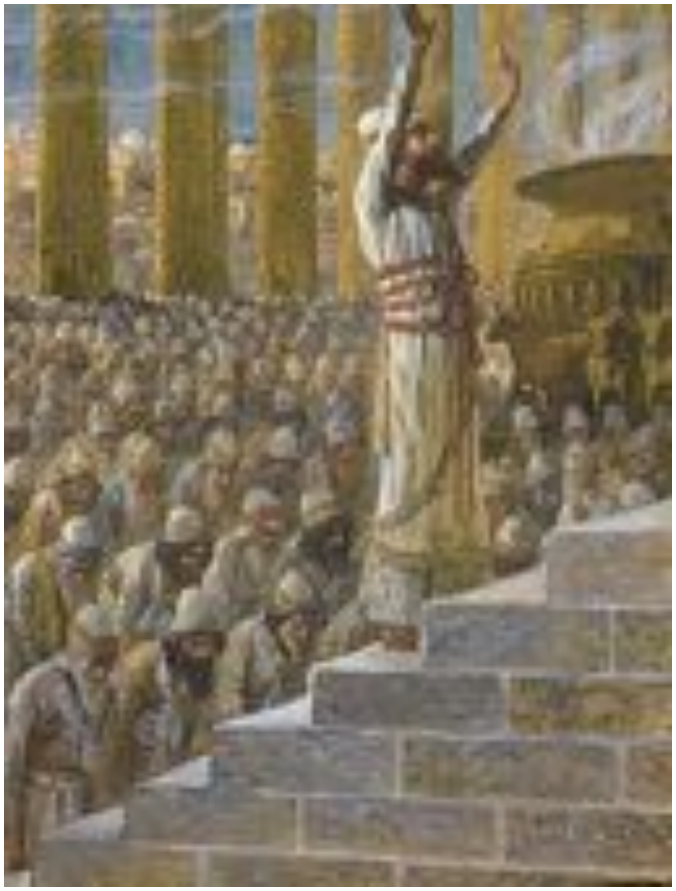
Logos Bible Study.com

Caravaggio. *David with the Head of Goliath* (oil on wood), c. 1607. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

The next major appearance of the pillar of cloud and fire occurs in the story of King David.

After becoming a national hero when he kills the Philistine warrior Goliath, Israel's first king, Saul (1050-1010 B.C.), feels threatened by David's fame and prodigious martial skills, resulting in David going "on the run" as a wanted felon for the next decade, working as a mercenary for Israel's archenemy Achish, King of Gath, one of the five major Philistine cities. With the death of Saul and his sons at the battle at Mt. Gilboa, the door opens for David to become king. But how can he establish his legitimacy?

Logos Bible Study.com



James Tissot. *Solomon Dedicates the Temple at Jerusalem* (Gouache on board), c. 1896-1902. The Jewish Museum, New York.

Toward the end of David's life he wanted to retire the Tabernacle and build a magnificent temple for God, a permanent place of worship in Jerusalem, the "City of David."

David is never able to build the Temple, but his son Solomon does. And when Solomon dedicates the temple in 959 B.C. the pillar of cloud and fire moves in!

Logos Bible Study.com

Solomon's Temple (model), 959-586 B.C.

Solomon's death triggers a civil war in 930 B.C. between the ten northern and two southern tribes. The northern tribes become the Kingdom of Israel with its capital at Samaria and the southern tribes become the Kingdom of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem.

As both kingdoms deteriorate, the Assyrians attack in 722 B.C. conquering Israel, and the Babylonians attack in 605, 597 and 588 B.C., conquering Judah. Jerusalem falls on August 14th 586 B.C.: the Temple is destroyed and the survivors are taken captive to Babylon. The kings, priests and people had become so corrupt during that time that the pillar of cloud and fire at the Temple leaves in September 592, never to return. The prophet Ezekiel reports the departure of the pillar of cloud and fire.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

God's *Final* Theophany

"In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God

and the Word was God

. . .

and the Word became flesh

and made his dwelling among us.

(John 1: 1, 14)

Logos Bible Study.com

As Scripture concludes our narrative comes full circle in Revelation

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away."

(Revelation 21: 1-4)

Logos Bible Study.com

Questions for discussion and thought

1. When the gods appear to humanity, what is that appearance called?
2. The gods appear in many works of ancient literature. What are some examples?
3. The God of Scripture appears on several occasions in Genesis. In what stories does he do so? Why does he do so?
4. As we move through Genesis, God appears to draw back from humanity, appearing to Joseph only in dreams. When we enter Exodus, God overtly reenters our story. What is his primary theophany at that point?
5. The pillar of cloud and fire leaves our narrative in Ezekiel. God does make a final appearance in Scripture, however. What is it?

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com

Copyright © 2014 by William C. Creasy

All rights reserved. No part of this course—audio, video, photography, maps, timelines or other media—may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval devices without permission in writing or a licensing agreement from the copyright holder.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.com