

*The Cloud*

**SLIDE: Good Morning, Saints!**

Today, we're going to look at Chapter 9 of the Book of Numbers and how the Cloud led the Israelites thru the wilderness.

This chapter will explain the commandment of God to celebrate the Passover event annually, and in verse 15, Moses explains the operation of the Fire-cloud (the glory of the Lord) and what Israel response to it ought to be.

Before getting into Chapter 9, I want to read from Paul's letter to the Ephesian church:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, **may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.**

<sup>18</sup> I pray also that **the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you,** the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

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<sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."  
Ephesians 1:7-23

We'll see how this fits in as we go along. Ok – on to Chapter 9 of the Book of Numbers:

**READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 9:1-5, 15-end**

<sup>1</sup>"Thus the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Now, let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time. <sup>3</sup> On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall observe it at its appointed time; you shall observe it according to all its statutes and according to all its ordinances." <sup>4</sup> So Moses told the sons of Israel to observe the Passover. <sup>5</sup> They observed the Passover in the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did."

-- skipping down to verse 15...

<sup>15</sup> On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. <sup>16</sup> That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it

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looked like fire. <sup>17</sup> Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. <sup>18</sup> At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. <sup>19</sup> When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out. <sup>20</sup> Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. <sup>21</sup> Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. <sup>22</sup> Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. <sup>23</sup> At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."

After the Fall of Adam in the Garden, God began the long process of restoring His relationship with man – to again enable Him to dwell with men (and women) as Adam and Eve did, but with an even greater degree of intimacy. He carried out this plan in steps.

- First, the Israelites would have to be brought *out of bondage in Egypt*. That was done in the Passover event,

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where the blood of an innocent lamb was placed on the doorposts of the houses. Then, after the Pharaoh ordered the Hebrews out of Egypt, the **fire-cloud** appeared and went before them.

- Then at Mt. Sinai, Moses received the Torah and the instructions on how to set up the sacrificial system centered in the Tabernacle – actually, Hebrew word for Tabernacle is 'mishkan', meaning “dwelling place”. For a sinful people to approach the Holy God, they had to do it His way – an innocent sacrifice was necessary to cover the sins of people.

Notice in the passages of Numbers 9 that we just read that there is an all-important sequence of events: the chapter begins with God commanding the Israelites to commemorate the Passover, and immediately after, the chapter goes into a discussion of the operation of the fire cloud.

- First, the slaying of the lamb.
- Then the deliverance from bondage, and then,
- Discussion of how the cloud will lead them.

This is the exact sequence of events that occurred in Exodus, and – by the way – **the exact sequence of events in the lives of believers coming to Christ**. Coincidence? I think not. The lamb's blood offering always is first.

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RECAP OF HISTORY

OK – remember the history – After leaving Egypt, Israel had followed the Fire–cloud all the way from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. Then, it rose up and rested at the top of the mountain where Moses went to receive the first portions of the Torah from God, and as we find ourselves in Numbers 9, it has been resting there for about 13 months. That was about to change.

The Tabernacle has just been completed; it replaces Mt. Sinai as God's earthly dwelling place, which itself had replaced the Garden of Eden. The Fire–cloud now came down and rested upon the Tabernacle. During the day, the sunlight more or less hid the brilliance of the Fire–cloud so that only the cloud itself was seen; but when it grew dark, the fire within the cloud lit up the night sky. Wouldn't you have LOVED to be there to witness that?

Beginning in verse 17, we get the standard operating procedure: when the cloud lifts the Israelis are to strike the camp, take down the Tabernacle, and move following the Fire–cloud. When the cloud stops, they stop; whether it is overnight, for a week, a month, or a year, they stay put.

- And by the way, this is not saying that the *maximum* time they stopped and camped at any one place was a

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year. It just means that whether for a long or a short time, they followed the Fire-cloud.

**SLIDE:** Remember: at the very **center** of the encampment of the twelve tribes camped in a large square of 3 million people was **the tabernacle**, and above the Tabernacle was this cloud – and as far as we can tell, it appeared somewhat like the shape of an atomic cloud – that is, a great umbrella – that was over all the people.

If you were approaching the camp, you would see this **vast** area of tents. At nighttime, it had the **appearance** of fire at night. Note that it says "appearance" – **it doesn't say that it was fire**, but that it "*appeared to be fire*".

That cloud was sometimes called "The Cloud of Glory". In the Holy of Holies with the Ark of the Covenant, it was called the Shekinah glory – which was another word for The presence – the IMMEDIATE presence – of God.

- It **was the sign of God dwelling among His people**. That cloud was a DECLARATION OF HIS COVENANT – God was among His people.

It was a declaration that **Yehovah was King**. Remember, there was never a democracy among the people in the O.T. It was a Theocracy – Government by God. Democracy is Government

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by the People. It's not that democracy is wrong, it just wasn't the way it was done in the Bible. When you come to Covenant people, never expect a democracy.

✓ If there had been democracy at the Red Sea, they all would have gone home. Evidently, they didn't believe in Congregational voting – otherwise they would have voted Moses out of being the pastor and elected someone else, who would have led them back to Egypt and they all would have been dead.

WHO/WHAT WAS THE CLOUD?

In the Book of Exodus, it states: "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night."<sup>1</sup> The LORD here in capital letters indicates the Name of Yehovah Himself in Hebrew. Note that it says that He was 'IN' the cloud, which suggests that the cloud was a manifestation of God's presence (similar to fire in burning bush). The Prophet Nehemiah suggests that the Cloud was the Holy Spirit that led the Israelites thru the wilderness, similar to how the Holy Spirit led the prophets through their lifetimes.<sup>2</sup> Others see the Cloud as Jesus, the Word of God,

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 13:13

<sup>2</sup> Nehemiah 9

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leading them through the desert. Exodus 14 also suggests that the cloud was an angel of the Lord.

Whether it was the Father, the Son or the Spirit Personally, or a manifestation of God, or an angel following His instructions, it was God Who was leading them. I myself believe it was the Holy Spirit

**SLIDE:** Remember in the Gospel of John when Jesus was in the Upper Room on the night before His death; He was speaking to disciples who were STILL living under the Old Covenant. The New Covenant didn't happen until Jesus died and rose again. As such, the disciples were exactly in the same position – SPIRITUALLY – as the Israelites that we're talking about. I know that the Gospel of John is in the portion of the Bible labeled the NEW Testament, but actually the disciples were still living in the OLD Testament at this point – before Jesus died and rose again. The NEW Covenant didn't come about until Jesus rose again.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and **will be in you.**” John 14:16–17



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Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was already WITH them and He *SHALL BE IN* them! Jesus is saying: *The old way of doing things is that the Holy Spirit is WITH you – but there's a new day coming and a new way of doing things that will be characterized by the Holy Spirit being IN you.*

So, here in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit was WITH them. They could look to the Tabernacle and say "There is God's Presence With us." They had no concept of the Holy Spirit being INSIDE of them. There was no point in even talking with someone under the Old Covenant and asking them "How would you like if the Cloud of Glory would be INSIDE of you?" The greatest thing that Israelites knew was that the Spirit was with them; Jesus pointed out to the disciples that the Spirit would soon be IN them!

WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them *divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.* And they were all filled with the Holy

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Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."<sup>3</sup>

Notice – *multiple* tongues of fire; instead of one fire–cloud over the Tabernacle leading the community, now there were hundreds of small fire–clouds over the tabernacles of the individual disciples. **God's promise!**

And, many Biblical scholars believe that the disciples were not in some upper room at this event. Rather, they were in the portico of the Temple because it was Pentecost, a major Jewish holiday – feast of first fruits. **It's fitting**; tongues of fire appearing on the Temple grounds, but then walking off with individual people.

DARKNESS – LIGHT

I want to go back to a little noticed statement that Scripture records when it talks about the fire–cloud as the Israelites were leaving Egypt and being chased by Pharaoh.

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"The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:1-4

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moved from before them and stood behind them.<sup>20</sup> So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and **there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night**. Thus the one did not come near the other all night." Exodus 14:19

This event is pictured in drawings and moves as the pillar of fire between the two camps stopping the Egyptians from pursuing. But, the text doesn't say that – it says that the fire-cloud brought light to the Israelites so they could cross the water all night – but it brought darkness to the Egyptians.

- Same cloud – darkness to one group, light to another. Where did we hear that before? Remember when God the Father was talking to Jesus in an audible voice – some say it thundered, some heard His voice!

This also explains what happened in the 9<sup>th</sup> plague a little better. Remember,

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt." <sup>22</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. <sup>23</sup> They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise

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from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings." Exodus 10:21

The Hebrew word here is *Choshek* (*Hoshek*) - and it means “darkness”, but not in the sense of nighttime & last of sunlight. It is a specific work meaning a type of blindness, an evil or obstructing force.....a spiritual darkness.

**SLIDE – ‘CHOSEK’**

Remember back in Genesis 1, when darkness covered the deep. God created light, and then separated the darkness from the light. And, that the words chosen really weren't about nighttime and daytime... or about visual light or visual darkness. The Hebrew word for darkness used there was “chosek”, a very negative word.

For light, the Hebrew was “*owr*”, which referred to enlightenment, a positive spiritual force; something, which emitted truth and goodness. These terms aim towards something that is far more than merely the presence or absence of visible light, like from a light bulb, or an oil lamp, or even from the star that is at the center of our own solar system, the Sun.

Well, here in Exodus we see these same two terms again, only now applied to the fire–cloud. Once again God put

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“chosek” upon Egypt, that is Pharaoh’s armies, and “owr”, enlightenment upon Israel.

- But, what is kind of startling, if we think about it, is that both this spiritual darkness and spiritual light are coming from the same source, simultaneously.

This almost impossible to explain how presence of God, on the one hand, comes as darkness for some, and on the other hand light for His people. For those who oppose Him, darkness and death; for those who are His own, light and life. This is NOT an image of God that we are used to; and frankly, many of us aren’t particularly comfortable with it. But, God NEVER changes.

Yehoveh has determined what belonging to Him actually means, and what it does not. And, whether in the past, present, or in the future, what is NOT His will be eternally destroyed. Ever wonder about hell and outer darkness ? How can that be when God is everywhere? But He is darkness to those who oppose Him. They can't see Him. Furniture in room to help, but if blind...

- What IS His will be eternally existent and present with Him. There is no in between, no appeasement, no compromise, and no changing His mind.

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**SLIDE: Let God arise and His enemies be scattered."**

When the Cloud lifted, immediately the people went to work – Moses stood up on a little podium and shouted: "**Let God arise and His enemies be scattered."**

✓ **The Cloud's moving – Let's GO!**

And the priests would grab two silver trumpets and sound a BLAST that would echo to the ends of the camp. Immediately, it was a bee-hive of activity. Tents coming down, packing up. priests and Levites disassembling the Tabernacle. THE CLOUD IS MOVING – GET THE LEAD OUT – LET'S GO. And in a very short time, three million people fell into line following a moving Cloud of Glory!

✓ **Yu asked no questions, God is moving.**

Under that Cloud is ultimate protection. So, the Israelites would march through the desert following the cloud. Actually, it appears that the cloud was almost in the shape of a mushroom, with the Israelites following the vertical stem, but the cloud spreading out over the entire group as they traveled.

If you were one of the people marching under the cloud–under the CLOUD mind you – **there was manna every morning** at the edge of the camp where the cloud ended – and you would be completely satisfied of your hunger.

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- ✓ Under that cloud, God miraculously provided water.
- ✓ Under the cloud, the Bible says that their clothes never seriously wore out.
- ✓ Under that Cloud, it was the Lord Who healed them.
- ✓ Underneath that Cloud, they were protected from the sun by day and the cold of the desert by night.

God was THEIR ALL UNDER THE CLOUD – they had everything necessary! Outside of the cloud – they were in serious trouble.

Remember, as they came out of Egypt, they could have just turned LEFT and gone very quickly up into Canaan, but the Cloud turned RIGHT and went into the desert. They were led by what seemed to be against common sense. It would be a very roundabout way to getting to the Promised Land.

But God knew what He was doing – if the people went the shorted rout, they would have faced a lot of opposition and would have lost their courage immediately.

- ✓ **Who is a Covenant person? – a person who is led by the Cloud.**

{Following example modified from Malcolm Smith tape series on Numbers and Deuteronomy.}

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The Israelites never knew how long they'd stay at one spot... You can image Mr & Mrs Isaac Shapiro; they have a very comfortable spot – it is so nice. Nice spot next to a big rock near a small grove of palm trees, little tent site with some privacy. And they weren't too far from the edge of the camp so that they didn't have to walk too far to pick up the manna in the morning, so they could get out of bed a little later. All very nice.

- ✓ **And so warm at night and so comfortable in the daytime. Like Hawaii without burning heat.**

The last time they camped, it wasn't so nice – they were next to that rowdy bunch **from Kinderhook** with their multitude of kids and relatives who stayed up all night and played loud music and drank **goat milk beer**.

Now everything was just great, and then they hear Moses cry out: *"let God arise and His enemies be scattered."* Oh NO, NOT AGAIN!

- And so Mrs. Shapiro decided *"I'm not moving this time. There's a limit to my patience."*

So as everyone packed up and moved out, they stayed right where they were – where they were comfortable and thought they were safe.



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- ✓ **THAT WAS THE COLDEST NIGHT OF THEIR LIFE, BECAUSE THE CLOUD HAD GONE AND WITH THE CLOUD WENT THE fire by night.**

And in the morning, they could hardly see as the sweat ran down their faces. And they went out to where the edge of the camp had been but there was no manna. They could now feel the heat of the desert sand through their sandals and they realized that the leather wouldn't last too long in this heat.

And then on the horizon appeared a band of Amalakites, and so the Shapiros packed up ran as fast as they could to catch up to the Cloud.

- ✓ They realized that – outside of that Cloud – they had absolutely NOTHING. But under the Cloud, they had Everything.

Now, the cloud accompanied them in the wilderness for the next 38 years. It was visible outside and over the tabernacle, and remarkably some aspect of God's glory, called the Shekinah glory – was visible INSIDE of the Holy of Holies between the golden angels on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. To see this Glory in an unauthorized manner meant death. This is similar to how God – after He drove Adam and Even out of the garden – had cheribim at the edge of the Garden to keep them away from the tree of life.

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Now, bringing them out of Egypt was marvelous enough – quite frankly, if God just brought them out of Egypt and had dropped down a million maps upon the people and then told them Go find your way – that would have been marvelous enough – that's better than slavery. But, after they came out of Egypt, God announced to them that he was ready to dwell among them and to be their Shepherd. They were give the ultimate blessing of God, which is the Holy Spirit.

A POPULAR SONG from the Passover seder is Dayeinu (Day–E–Nu) means “*it would have been enough,*” and is about being grateful to God for the many gifts bestowed upon us. Retelling the story of our escape from slavery is a yearly tradition.

*It would have been enough if You set us free, led us out of slavery.*

*It would have been enough to part the sea, You got us there with dry feet.*

*Wandering for so long You gave us strength to live on.  
Even though we had it rough, through all the hard times, it would have been enough.*

*Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu  
Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu Dayeinu*

*... Where do we go from here? To live in Your way, Your holy way, Mashiach (Messiah) is near.*

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**SLIDE**

"those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"

Romans Chapter 8:

Led on the inside by the Holy Spirit – **that Cloud of Glory is now on the inside of us!** This is why Paul so frequently calls our bodies *temples – tabernacles – of the Holy Spirit*. The ultimate way for God and man to dwell together – Christ in us, the hope of Glory. How it all connects!!!

Under the Old Covenant, you have to put out a fleece, they drew lots. Dry on ground, fleece wet, then reverse – I had a hunch God was telling me something.

Do you remember the very last time they did something like this in the Church – it was before Pentecost– ACTS – drew lots for replacement apostle

"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. ... Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles."

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- ✓ That's all a religious person can do if they don't have the power of the Holy Spirit upon them – THEY FORM A COMMITTEE MEETING AND PUT OUT A FLEECE.

It's recorded that that's what they *did*, but there's absolutely No indication God told them to do this.

- Apostle Paul wouldn't meet these criteria!

Now, the Holy Spirit is IN people who have accepted Christ. We are led from *within*, to know the mind of Christ from *within*.

That's why I read the great prayer in beginning from Ephesians Chapter 1. That the Spirit would be a Spirit of Wisdom, a Spirit of Revelation in the knowledge of Jesus. That you might KNOW the full knowledge of His will.

You seem the Bible as academic textbook without the Holy Spirit – learned men who can't make the connection between Bible and modern life vs. simple believers who know nothing about Greek and thing 'Hebrew' refers to the fellow who owns the deli on Main Street.

Unless we know H.S., all the church may be is an empty we may have an empty soup can at the dump– picture shown that there was once soup in the can, but you look and all there is now is wither emptiness or maggots!

Unless the Holy Spirit is active among us as a Covenant People and within us as a Covenant People, all we have is a

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theology – TRUE AS IT MIGHT BE – we may have all the right words about God, but God can ONLY be known as a real, living God by the presence of the Holy Spirit!

God's last words to the church in the Book of Revelation – the reoccurring phrase is 'HE THAT HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES.'" You can sit in a Church that is so right, and yet there may be no sense of God speaking. The Church of the New Testament is one in whom the Sprit LIVES!

**SLIDE: CLOUD CAME ONLY AFTER PASSOVER**

ONLY After the Blood of the Lamb is shed can I meet with the Cloud of Glory in the wilderness. This is crucial!!! Many churches want to avoid the cross, avoid telling people that they need the cross, that their own works are absolutely useless!!! Many people would like to experience the goodness of God but don't want to go to the cross.

- Ever though that you don't want to follow Christ's leadings?
- Catholic, Charismatic: suggestion to keep fire in the fireplace to warm whole house vs. Burning Bush experience.

**Follow Christ...**

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As we can see, the phrase *“to go before”* was well known throughout Jewish communities and closely associated with popular messianic expectation for many centuries. In light of this information the angel’s and Jesus’ statement that He would *“go before them into Galilee”* is cast in an entirely new light, abounding with meaning and expectation. Redemption!

Furthermore, the new redeemer who will lead the people will do more than was ever expected to be accompanied by the pillar of fire and cloud that led the Israelites through the desert day and night. The return of this pillar of fire and cloud at the dawn of the messianic era is actually forecast in Isaiah 4:5, and 2 Maccabees 2:8 anticipates the return of “the cloud as in the days of Moses.” This association of the messiah with the pillar of fire and cloud can also cast new light (pun intended) on Jesus words recorded in John 8:12:

“And Yeshua spoke again to the people and said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever *follows* me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”

Amen.