

A PILLAR OF CLOUD AND OF FIRE

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Lessons: Exodus 13: 17-22; Arcana Coelestia 8106: 2

Children: Do you know how close the Lord and His angels are to you? They are so close that nothing could be closer. The Lord is watching over each one of you all the time, to see that you have whatever you really need to make you happy. Of course, the Lord does not *make* you be happy, just as He does not make you do what is right and good. But He is always close, to see that you have the chance to be happy and to go to heaven.

Now we do not see the Lord as we sometimes would like to see Him. If we did, we would feel what He wants so strongly that we would not really be free to follow Him or not to follow Him. This is why He has given us His Word, so that we may learn from it what He says and does, and may learn to love Him. In this way we can learn to see what He is like, and can learn to want to obey His commandments.

But if we do not read the Word, we cannot come to know and love the Lord, and the Lord cannot lead us in the same way. Yet still He is with us, always looking out for us, giving us what we need, keeping us from having what would be bad for us and would keep us out of heaven. He decides when we come into this world, how long we live in it, when we go into the other world. And many other things of our life He decides. We do not see Him doing these things, because His being with us and His leading us is very gentle. He never forces us. But He is always here with us, to help lead and comfort us, wanting to make us ready to enjoy life in His heavenly kingdom. So He is close to all people, everywhere.

So the Lord was close to the Israelites when they were in the wilderness. They had come out of Egypt. Moses had been sent by the Lord to lead them out of Egypt where they had been slaves, and to take them to the land of Canaan. And after much trouble, much argument from king Pharaoh, and many plagues that the Lord brought on the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally let the people go. Then they left their homes, their beds, their food, their work—they left everything and followed Moses into the wilderness.

But it was not really Moses they were following, was it? It was the Lord who had sent Moses to them, and it was the Lord who was leading them. And it was not long before the Lord showed this to them very clearly. For the Lord went before them in a pillar of a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. In the daytime a pillar of a cloud reached up into the sky—and the people could know

that the Lord was in the cloud with His angels, watching over them. And at night this pillar became a pillar of bright, shining fire to give light when the people needed it, and to remind them that the Lord was protecting them.

And this pillar really did protect them. For when Pharaoh and the Egyptians changed their minds about letting the people go, and began to chase after Israel, the pillar moved from in front of Israel and stood behind them, so that it was dark in the camp of the Egyptians but was light in the camp of the Israelites. So the Egyptians could not see to come near, and the Israelites were safe.

Again, when they were in the wilderness, the pillar protected them. And it led them, showing them where to go. When the pillar moved, the Israelites followed it. But when it stopped and did not move, they set up camp, and did not go until the pillar moved. So the Lord led and protected the Israelites as they walked through the wilderness toward the land of Canaan.

So the Lord leads and protects you in your journey through life in this world. He is always near, with His angels, watching over you to see that you have what you really need. And it is important that you read His Word, to learn how He wants to lead you, and the way in which He wants you to go. By the pillar of cloud and of fire He led the Israelites through the wilderness toward the promised land of Canaan. And the Lord leads you by means of His Word. But the path in which the Lord wants you to go leads to everlasting life in His kingdom of heaven. *Amen.*