

Exodus 14:19-20, Envision God's Presence

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This is Red Sea Rule #7 in Robert Morgan's book THE RED SEA RULES. The angel of God reflecting God's glory in the cloud went before the people of Israel leading them in the wilderness. Exodus 13:21-22 tells us that "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might travel by night." But in Exodus 14, Pharaoh had a change of heart and assembled his army along with 600 chariots to pursue the Hebrews. God's glory in the cloud led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made camp. When Pharaoh's army arrived, the Hebrews were trapped between the Red Sea and the devil (Pharaoh) behind them. Amazingly, the pillar of cloud with God's glory in it went from before them to behind Israel so that it came between the Egyptians and the camp of the Hebrews. God's glory in the cloud, which had given light to Israel was a cloud of darkness to the Egyptians. In Exodus 14:19, we read that "Then the angel of the Lord who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them...coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel". The angel spoken of here representing God is spoken of in Isaiah 63:9 as "the angel of His presence" who saved them, and in His love redeemed them. This sounds an awful lot like the pre-incarnate Christ. We know that before the incarnation (birth) of Jesus He existed as God in heaven, therefore according to the function of the Trinity, the messenger from God was no doubt the pre-incarnate Christ. John 1:18 refers to Christ by saying that no one has ever seen God the Father, but Christ has made Him known. Jesus is a perfect image here of giving light to those who follow Him, but those (the Egyptians in this case) who reject Him remain in darkness. Jesus comforts believers, but simultaneously condemns those who reject Him. Paul's metaphor in 2 Cor. 2:14 applies here that the Gospel of Christ is a sweet aroma to those who believe, but a stench of death to others. Jesus Christ has our back and He also leads us from the front. He is both our Good Shepherd and our shield.

Psalm 18 and Psalm 23

David did a beautiful job of depicting God's leading from our front and protecting us from behind in Psalm 19 and 23. When Saul and his army were chasing David, he wrote Psalm 18 of God delivering him. The Lord was David's "rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised and I am saved from my enemies." In v. 35 we read, "You have given me the shield of your salvation and your right hand has supported me".

In everybody's favorite Psalm 23, David wrote that God is his shepherd who leads him to all the good things he needs like the green pastures, the still waters, and the paths of righteousness. God also restores his soul, meaning that God encourages and builds him up giving him spiritual life and vitality in the dark days of discouragement and fear. Even though he is facing death, David is so encouraged by the presence of the Lord that he "fears no evil". God comforts him through the hard times. When his enemies surround him, God is there with David meeting his needs. Therefore David can look forward in faith and rest in the fact that God will bring "goodness and mercy" for David in the end and David would "dwell in the house of the Lord forever".

Positive Visualization

Recognizing that God's enveloping presence surrounded and protected the people of Israel, we also need the positive visualization of God's presence with us as both a guide and a guard. I know that all sports psychologists report positive results from positive visualization, especially on the golf course. Many great players are defeated by their own negative images. I asked a guy who normally hit a fade off the tee why he suddenly developed a hook. He said, "There was out of bounds on the right". Anxiety, stress, and fear are not only caused by the reality of circumstances, but the fear of the unknown, and the image of doom and gloom in your mind usually produces bad results. Therefore, what could be more productive than positive visualization of God's presence with you? If God is with us what could overcome us? The next step is to figure out what to visualize. What works best for you, or what do you relate to? David imagined God as his rock, his shield, his refuge, and his fortress. When looking for guidance David envisioned God as his good Shepherd. Isaiah visualized being carried by the wings of eagles, and Moses saw God's glory as the pillar of fire in the cloud. Jacob saw God's ministering angels going up and down the stairway to heaven. The Apostle John saw the glorified Christ as a High Priest, a Judge, and a King in Rev. 1:12-16.

Which is Better: Exemption from the Trial or God's Presence with you in the Trial?

Let's consider three Bible stories—Jacob's fear of Esau in Genesis 32, David's fear of Saul in 1 Samuel 21, and Paul's thorn in the flesh of 2 Cor. 12. Jacob wrestling with God, came away with a limp, but even though he limped for the rest of his life, his name got changed in Genesis 32 from Jacob the Deceiver to Israel. Israel meant striving with God in the sense that he had previously lived only for himself but now he lived for God. David's ten years of running from Saul, found him enduring much hardship living in caves and always on the run. He learned to trust God and live by faith in God's promises of deliverance. All his circumstances turned out for good as he was proven to be innocent and worthy to be Israel's king. Paul had a terrible physical pain that he prayed three times for God to relieve it, but God let him know that the pain actually kept Paul humble and of great use for the Lord's work. Paul had been a proud man, but God found a way to humble him so he could be of great use in taking the Gospel to the world.

One theologian asked his students "Why does God give a dog fleas? To let him know that he is a dog." Through humiliation comes God's blessing. In James 4:6,10 we read, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble...Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you".

Psalm 139, We Are Never Alone!

In Psalm 139, the psalmist makes the point of God's ever-presence. God knows everything that is going on, and no matter where I go He is there. God knows everything about me, and He even knows what I am going to say and do! God is behind me and ahead of me. I can be sure He is there whether I am coming or going. Nothing makes His presence more known to me than crisis situations. When the Red Sea blocks me from going forward, and the 600 iron chariots of Pharaoh threaten me from behind, I must turn to the Lord to save me. As David also said in Psalm 46:1, "God is a very present help in time of trouble". Remember that God's presence with you not only means your protection, but should also be a deterrent from sin.

In THE RED SEA RULES, Robert Morgan offers four suggestions concerning God's enveloping presence: 1. Affirm God's nearness in your heart—dwell on it, be aware of it, remind yourself often, 2. Visualize God's presence in your mind as David visualized God as his refuge or fortress, 3. Access God's nearness through prayer—speak to Him often, communicate, 4. Reflect God's presence in your attitude and activities. As Paul wrote in Col.3:17, "whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God". No matter what you are doing, have the attitude that you are doing it for God's glory.

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