



*19 And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20 And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. (Ex 14:19-20)*

*23 And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24 And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians (Ex 14:23-24)*

The Providential Hand of the Lord in preserving His people is beyond measure. That is perfectly illustrated in the Pillar of Cloud by Day and Fire by Night that both served as the advance guard of the armies of Israel and as a rear guard as well.

Napoleon led the largest land army ever amassed deep into the heartland of Russia (*le Grande Armée* consisting of more than 500,000 troops). As he moved, the logistics train became more and more cumbersome. The Emperor won a great, but lackluster, battle outside the gates of Moscow at Borodino. He felt confident his battle at Borodino had clinched the long coveted victory over the Holy Russian Empire, but it did not. It simply sounded the death-knell of *le Grande Armée*. The logistics trains of supplies had grown so long and demanding of men and support that they failed to keep the French Army properly resupplied. Moreover, entering Moscow at mid-September, the harsh Russian winter was coming on. The Russian people were willing to sacrifice their own homes and food stores to deprive Napoleon of access, so the Emperor was unable to capitalize on his victory at Borodino. Napoleon deserted his hopeless occupation of the burned and smoldering Moscow in mid-October harassed by Russian army elements. He arrived back in Paris with less than ten thousand of his former army of more than half a million.

How does all of this history of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia relate to our topic today? In many ways it does. To use an old military cliché - “an army travels on its stomach”. That means that it consumes food, ammunition, and means of transport. Not only must it move against the hostile enemy terrain, but protect its source of resupply to the rear. It also must protect its rear elements from any enveloping maneuvers of the enemy against its flanks and rear echelon. This is what makes the provision God made for the protection of Israel so very amazing and miraculous. God was present in the Pillar of Fire by Night and Pillar of Cloud by Day. He was the Guide and Compass for Israel’s advance into hostile territory. He was the Advance Guard of the armies, and He

was, as well, the rear guard. He led the Children into enemy territory and, just in case, He also moved as a trailing element to protect their rear from hostile action. The Pillar of Fire lighted the way by night for Israel, but, as the Rear-Guard, it blinded the enemy behind.

There are only few examples of an army moving without logistical support from the rear echelons, but Israel did so for forty years in the Wilderness. The gallant General Patton attempted to move ahead of his support lines, but his tanks foundered for lack of petrol. The unscrupulous Sherman moved from Atlanta to Savannah without a rear logistics, but fed his army on the meager provender of widows, orphans, and women whose husbands were away. He burned their homes, and ate their livestock. He was successful, but at a heavy moral cost to the men he led and the Republic he represented.

But the armies of Israel traveled without foraging since the desert provides no means for it. So how were millions sustained in a Wilderness area without resupply from the rear? They were sustained by a vertical resupply from ABOVE in the form of Manna. Their water gushed forth from the cleft Rock (Jesus Christ) that Moses struck at the Mountain of Grace (Mt. Horeb). They grumbled and murmured every step of the way as all armies do, but they, at length, arrived at the banks of Jordan Waters beyond which lay the Land of Promise.

Israel was the Old Testament Church of the Wilderness. *This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.* (Acts 7:38) What of the New Testament Church? We are to travel in precisely the same way. When the Army of God launches off into hostile terrain – and the whole world is hostile terrain – it must desert its old base of support in the world and travel alone in its wilderness advance against the enemy. The world will not provide supporting care, so its source of support must come from within its own ranks. The Army of God is surrounded on all sides by the enemy, so it travels light, and it depends upon God as its Guide, Deliverer, and source of provision. Yet, the Army of God is neither a retrograde army, nor a defensive one. God does not desire His Army to ever desert the field to the enemy; and He certainly does not desire that we dig trenches about our outer defenses and simply “hold our positions.” His Army is already a victorious Army. It cowers before no enemy. It must be forever advancing against the mal-appropriated real estate that the enemy has occupied. It is constantly moving forward because it follows the Ensign of its Salvation (and that ensign never leads in retreat, but always attack).

Let us heed the counsel of Hebrews: *6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that*

*is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. <sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, <sup>18</sup>Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: (Heb 11:6-18)*

Does the Church of today fit the description of “*strangers and pilgrims*” upon the earth? Or does the modern church seem to fit right in with the worldly society she builds up within her doors? Does the modern church look back on the glitter of the world that it left behind? I do not think so, because it has brought the world’s glitter with it into its borders. Does the church of today travel with light baggage as does a pilgrim in the land? I do not believe the opulence of modern churches, and the lavish salaries both sought and paid to social preachers points to that pilgrimage described by Paul above. I do not believe the modern church is seeking after a country and a city not made with hands. Instead, it is the city made with hands that they seem to be more focused on. Their pockets are lined with wealth, yet they worry at the sharing of that wealth with poor churches.

Paul continues to describe the wilderness wandering of the people of God: *<sup>34</sup>Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. <sup>35</sup>Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: <sup>36</sup>And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: <sup>37</sup>They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; <sup>38</sup>(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. <sup>39</sup>And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: <sup>40</sup>God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (Heb 11:34-40)* Do you believe our modern class of evangelist (on average) would refuse deliverance by compromise in order to “*obtain a better resurrection*”? A few might, but most would sell their souls first.

The Church is the Army of God, and we must observe an economy of force; but that does not mean that we covet our treasure, but rather share it with other elements in that Army. We have the same Pillar of Fire by Night and Pillar of Cloud by Day to lead us against the foe, and to protect us from the pursuing enemy – it is the Word of God. The Holy Ghost is our constant source of comfort and reminder of the duties we bear as soldiers. Enlistments are open in that Army. Are you on the rolls?