

God Guides and Protects

Bible Passage: Exodus 13:20–22; 14:19–20; Numbers 9:15–23
(Pillar of Fire and Cloud)

REMEMBER VERSE

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5–6

Background for Today's Big God Story

In the Bible, God often made His presence known through fire. For example, in Genesis 15, God made a covenant giving Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. "When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the [sacrifice pieces]. On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land'" (Genesis 15:17).

Perhaps hearing the family story of God appearing to Abraham as a smoking fire was the reason the Israelites seem to have accepted without question that the pillar of fire and cloud was God. The pillar is first mentioned in Exodus 13:21, in a passage naming the first two places the Israelites camped as they left Egypt. No explanation is given other than that the Israelites accepted the pillar of fire and cloud as a manifestation of God and followed it willingly.

Once the tabernacle was completed, the pillar of fire and cloud dwelled there, giving shade by day and light at night (Numbers 9:15–16). When the pillar rose from the tabernacle, it was time to move. When it stopped, it was time to camp—whether it was to camp overnight (v. 21), camp for a few days (v. 22), or a month or a year (v. 22). "At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out" (Numbers 9:23).

Fire on the Day of Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire, the believers who were baptized in the Holy Spirit were Jewish men and women. They would have recognized the symbolism of God appearing as fire.

- God appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2–6)
- God appeared in the pillar of fire and cloud (Exodus 13:21)
- God appeared as a cloud and fire that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–35; Numbers 9:15–17)
- God appeared as fire and cloud at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 7:1–3; 1 Kings 8:10–12)
- God fell as fire on Elijah's sacrifice on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38)

In each of the above instances, God appeared to His people as fire. But on the day of Pentecost, God filled His people with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Together, we believers form God's temple on earth (1 Corinthians 3:16). On the day of Pentecost, God once more filled His chosen dwelling place with His fire.

Through the pillar of fire and cloud, the Israelites were able to physically see God's presence. Today, we experience God's presence differently; we don't often (or ever) physically see where He is directing us, nor do we always understand how He is protecting us. But God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8; Hebrews 13:5) so He is guiding and protecting us each day.

As believers, God dwells in us. He does not now choose to dwell in a pillar of cloud and fire in the middle of our camp. Instead He chooses to dwell *in us personally*. And if we will let Him, He chooses to baptize us, to fill us to full and overflowing with His Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit brings a new and heightened awareness of God's presence leading, guiding, and protecting us.

EXPLORE**Option 1: Follow the Leader (for younger kids)**

God chose to travel with His people as they left Egypt and went through the desert to their Promised Land. He led them with the pillar of cloud and fire so they would know where to go, where not to go, and when and where to camp. With this activity, help the children begin to think about following.

SUPPLIES

- Baton or wrapping paper tube

RELATE

Have your child be the leader. Have yourself or if you have other children line up behind your child and play **Follow the Leader**. Encourage your child to move in a unique manner that the rest must mimic (skip, baby steps, dancing, etc.) After about a minute, let another child lead. Continue until each child has had a chance to lead.

Our Big God Story today is about following God. That's why we are practicing following a leader.

Option 2: Direction Challenge (for older kids)

Body Copy

SUPPLIES

- Baton or wrapping paper tube
- Four sheets of paper
- Marker
- Tape

PREPARE AHEAD

Label each of the four papers with a compass direction: north, south, east, and west. Tape the papers to the correct walls of your living room or rec room where you are doing this lesson.

RELATE

Choose a leader for a game of Follow the Leader. However, you will direct the leader's movements, using compass-type directions. For example, say, "**Take three steps north, then turn to the west and hop four times.**" Continue in this manner, changing leaders frequently if you have more than one child. If you need to add more challenge, use intermediate compass-point directions such as northwest, southeast, north-northwest, west-southwest, etc.

Conclude by telling your child, "**When you travel in the wilderness where there are no roads, you need to know how to find your way using a compass to point you to the north, south, east, and west. In our Big God Story today, the Israelites are traveling in the wilderness. They had something much better than a compass to guide them.**"

Remember Verse

This week's Remember Verse focuses on a character trait of God that's highlighted in today's portion of The Big God Story.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5–6

The Big God Story

Bible Passage: Exodus 13:20–22; 14:19–20; Numbers 9:15–23

Ponder Point: God Guides and Protects

SET UP/ SUPPLIES

Pillar of Cloud and Fire Visuals

A yardstick, ruler or paint stirrer.

Print the pillar visuals (the Cloud and Fire pictures) and loosely tape* them back-to-back with a yardstick, ruler, or paint stirrer between them to use as a handle. *******NOTE: The two visuals will need to be separated for the Worship as Response time, so make sure they can be easily taken apart.**

RELATE

Pretend that you are **going to hike across a desert**. What do you think you would need in your backpack? Respond to kids' responses. Those are good answers.

But there is one very important thing you are missing. You are missing a friend. If you were going camping in the desert, a place you'd never been in before, would you want to go alone or go with a friend? Allow responses.

Would you want your camping friend to be someone who gets lost easily or someone who can guide you to the best camping spots and who knows the safest trails? Allow responses.

Let's say there are dangerous animals where you're going. Would you like to travel with someone who screams and runs or someone who will protect you? Allow responses. **Would you want to travel with a scaredy-cat? Or a protector?** Allow responses.

Of course, if you're going into the desert, you want a friend who can guide you and protect you. In our Big God Story today, we will discover that the Israelites needed that too. But before we go any further, let's ask God to show us what He wants us to learn today.

Last week we heard about how God brought His people safely through the Red Sea after they left Egypt. But God did not only rescue the people from the Egyptians. He gave them something much more important. He gave them His presence. What does it mean when someone is present? Allow responses. **Yes, they are nearby. You can see and hear and touch them. When a friend travels with you, your friend is giving you their presence.**

But God is not a human being, so God showed His presence to His people in a different way. It was a pillar of cloud and fire. Have children look up and read Exodus 13:20–22 with you. Then display the cloud/fire visual. This pillar looked like a cloud during the day (show cloud side of the visual) and looked like a fire at night. Show fire side of the visual. God was present in the pillar of cloud and fire. He traveled with them on their trip from Egypt to their new land.

The cloud and fire of God's presence didn't just travel with the Israelites. God guided them through the desert.

Who has heard a phone or GPS say something like, "Turn left at the light"? What happens if you do not obey the voice? Allow responses. **Many times a GPS voice will say, "Recalculating" if you miss a turn. Let's all use our best computer voices to say, "Recalculating, recalculating."** Lead kids in saying, "Recalculating."

The GPS voice can direct you because it is connected to up-to-date maps. But God is a much, much better guide than any GPS machine or phone app. God knows everything. He knows where the roads are today and

where they will be 10 years from now. He knows exactly when and where there will be a traffic jam. He never needs to say, "Recalculating." God never, ever needs to stop and think about what to do next.

It must have been wonderful for the Israelites to have God as their guide. God showed them where to camp to find water. He helped them find the best route through the barren desert. Because God knew every last thing about the desert the Israelites were traveling in, He knew every problem and how to avoid it.

The Bible tells us the Israelites moved when the pillar of fire and cloud moved and stayed still when it stayed still. Have your child read Numbers 9:18–23. **Let's pretend we are Israelites. It's morning and we look up** (lead your child in looking up) **and see that the cloud is moving. What do we do?** Allow responses. **We pack our stuff and get ready to move.**

Now it's evening (turn the visual so the fire side is facing your child) **and the pillar of fire is still moving. We're going to march at night.** Lead your child in marching in place as you march across the room with the fire visual. **Wait, the fire has stopped moving. What do we do?** Allow responses. **We unpack and settle down to rest.** Direct your child to be seated. You may repeat the move and stop actions a few times if needed.

When God wanted His people to travel, the cloud and fire would move. When God wanted His people to camp, the cloud and fire would stay in one place as long as the Israelites should camp there. Can you imagine how wonderful it was to know you were exactly where you should be because you could look up and see the cloud and fire and know you were in the right place? Allow responses.

We know God's presence in the fire and cloud guided the Israelites. But did you know that God's presence in the fire and cloud also protected God's people? Do you remember what happened when the Israelites needed to cross the Red Sea? Allow responses. **Pharaoh's army was chasing them and the Israelites were afraid they might be captured or killed.**

But just when it looked like the Egyptians might catch the Israelites, the pillar of fire and cloud moved from in front of the Israelites to behind them. Have kids follow along as you read Exodus 14:19b–20. **The pillar of fire and cloud stood between the Israelites and their enemies. That night the cloud and fire protected the Israelites by giving them light and by hiding them from the Egyptians. God's presence protected the Israelites.**

All during the rest of their trip, the Israelites could look up and see evidence of God's presence. They knew when to rest and when to travel. Read aloud Numbers 9:21–22. **They knew God could protect them when they needed His help. It must have been wonderful for them to know that God was with them.**

Did you know that God hasn't changed? God still lives with His people. When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you become one of God's people. He becomes your Savior, Guide, and Protector. You probably won't see God's presence in a cloud or in fire. But you might—because God hasn't changed. He still wants His people to know that we are not alone. He is with us.

But whether or not you see a fire or a cloud, you will know that God is with you because you have asked Jesus to live in your heart and life. And when you ask Him to come in, He does. Just as the pillar of fire and cloud did not leave the Israelites alone in the wilderness, once you ask Jesus into your heart and life, He will not leave you alone in life.

Craft

SUPPLIES

- **Pillar of Cloud and Fire Visuals** (separated from earlier in the Big God Story)
- 2 pieces of poster board (or use sheets of paper if you don't have poster board) with the following headings written on them (one heading per paper)
"God Is My Guide" and "God Is My Protector"
- Tape
- Cotton balls
- Small pieces of red, orange, and yellow tissue paper (or construction paper if you don't have colored tissue paper)
- Glue
- Markers

SET UP

Separate the fire and cloud visuals and place them on a table. Place the glue, cotton balls, and tissue paper pieces near the separated visuals. Also put the two signs you created- God is My Guide and God is My Protector nearby as well.

RELATE

When God's people traveled through the desert, God's presence went with them in a pillar of fire and cloud. If you have asked Jesus to be your Savior, God's presence is with you as well. Think about a time when you felt God's presence guiding you or protecting you. Also think about things in your life now that make you want to feel God's presence in a special way. Listen to what the Holy Spirit may whisper to you.

Write on the posters about times God has guided you or protected you. You might write, "God helped me get along with my little brother" on the "God Is My Guide" poster or maybe you want to write, "I didn't break my arm when I fell off my bike" on the "God Is My Protector" poster.

Then glue a cotton ball or a piece of tissue to the Cloud and Fire pictures to represent each thing you wrote on the posters; each time God guided you or protected you.

Reflect: God Guides and Protects

Encourage kids to open their Bibles and read the suggested passages.

Questions for Younger Kids

- **How did the Israelites know where to go?** Exodus 13:21–22 (*a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night*)
- **How did the Israelites know when to camp and when to travel?** Numbers 9:17–23 (*they would travel when the cloud lifted and they would set up camp when the cloud settled*)
- **How did the pillar of fire and cloud protect the Israelites at the Red Sea?** Exodus 14:19–25 (*The angel of God moved to the rear of the camp and the pillar of cloud also moved from the front and stood behind them; God protected them from Pharaoh's army*)
- **How is God's Word like the pillar of fire and cloud?** Psalm 119:104–105 (*God's Word helps us understand; it's like a light so we know where God wants us to go and what God wants us to do.*)
- **How has God guided you or protected you?**

Questions for Older Kids

- **How did the Israelites know where to go?** Exodus 13:21–22
- **How did the Israelites know when to camp and when to travel?** Numbers 9:17–23
- **How did the pillar of fire and cloud protect the Israelites at the Red Sea?** Exodus 14:19–25
- **How is God's Word like the pillar of fire and cloud?** Psalm 119:104–105 (*it's a lamp unto our feet and a light for our path; God's Word helps us understand what to do; it gives us guidance*)
- **Who does God give us to guide us today?** John 16:13 (*His Holy Spirit; the Spirit of Truth*)
- **How do we know God will always guide and protect us?** Deuteronomy 31:8; Hebrews 13:5 (*Because God will always be with us; he will never leave us; He goes before us and will not fail us or abandon us*).
- **How has God guided you or protected you?**

Spending Time in God's Presence

How do you get to know a friend? Allow responses. **Those are good answers. If you really want to get to know a friend, you spend time with him or her.**

Guess what? When we spend time with God that helps us get to know Him better. Just as you recognize your friend's voice when he calls to you or as you recognize your friend from the way she walks, when we get to know God, we begin to recognize His voice and how He is moving in our lives. That's why it's important to spend time every day getting to know God as our Friend. We get to know God as our friend by reading His Word, the Bible, and by praying.

BLESS// 5 min.

RELATE

Open a Bible and read Deuteronomy 31:8:

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

May you feel and know God's presence this week. May He help you hear His voice and joyfully follow Him.



