

# The Palo Verde

*“She delivered the righteous people and the blameless seed from the nation that oppressed them...guided them in a marvelous way and was unto them a cover by day, brought them through the Red Sea and led them through much water.”*

(Wisdom 10:15-18)



It seems the Lord is awfully fond of symmetry; we run in to it over and over in the gospel narrative. For example: in the beginning there was Eden and in the end-times there is Zion. The two locations being so similar that people will talk about that similarity. (RE Ezekiel 18:10) Or another example: long ago there was a King David that fell, and in the end-times there will be a King David that rises up. (Temples, 1. Pg 5) And, one more example: in the meridian of time the Jews took the gospel to the Gentiles (see Cornelius, RE Acts 6) and in our day the Gentiles will return the favor. (Covenant of Christ 7: III)

These symmetries or semi-demi chiasms happen so consistently in the Lord’s dealings with us that perhaps we ought to be looking for them. As in this case. One year after the Israelites exited Egypt, on the first day of Abib, at Passover, the Lord descended on the newly completed tabernacle in a pillar of cloud. His presence there apparently signaled His acceptance of a new dwelling place — in just the same way as the *shekinah*<sup>1</sup> signaled His acceptance of the Temple of Solomon. And

it was apparently this same pillar (and cloud) that accompanied the Lord’s people and guided them in the way they should go while in the wilderness. (RE Numbers 8:9)

*“(Y)our cloud stands over them, and ... you go before them by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.”<sup>2</sup>*

It seems fitting given the Lord’s persistent use of symmetry that the pillar and cloud that were there at the beginning of Israel’s story should be there again at the end. And Isaiah suggests that they will be.

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<sup>1</sup> Shekinah is an extra-Biblical term derived from the Hebrew word *šākan*, meaning “dwelling.”

<sup>2</sup> Rashi says that the pillar of cloud handed over the camp of the Israelites to the pillar of fire — and vice versa — that before one set the other arose. He and others suggest that the cloud and fire were a dual manifestation of God. Almost as if a Mother and Father were taking shifts watching the kids.

*“And the Lord will establish a glowing cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night over the temple and meeting place on Mount Zion and the glory of Zion will be a defense, and none will go up to battle against Zion because it’s glorious and terrible and we can’t stand against her. And there will be a canopy to protect Zion from drought and storms to make a shelter for God’s people.”* (Covenant of Christ 2nd Nephew 14:2)

If the cloud and pillar are to return one can’t help but wonder how precise the parallel between the time of the Israelites and our day will be. Will the Lord again signal His acceptance of a newly completed tabernacle/temple by personally attending its dedication? Will the visit again take place at Passover? Just as it did 3500 years ago. Will the pillar again show God’s people the way?

And if it does show them the way...where exactly will it lead them?

Isaiah’s description of a “pillar” and “canopy” that provide *“shade from the heat of the day”* (NIV Isaiah 4:5), might bring to mind the form of a tree. The canopy of even a moderate sized Palo Verde is a blessed relief when traveling in the desert. And we are informed that the latter-day Zion, like the Israelite’s wilderness, will also be in a desert. (RE 2nd Nephi 5:8)



If the cloud and pillar were (and will be) in the shape of a tree, it must have been (and will be) a massive tree. One big enough to shade hundreds of thousands of dehydrated Israelites, and the whole of Mount Zion. The gospel is of course chock-a-block with tree-related metaphors. There is the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. There is Aaron’s staff that budded, blossomed, and bore fruit. And there is the mustard plant, which from a tiny seed grows large enough that birds

can lodge in its branches. Etc. So, perhaps the prospect of God’s people being given shade and shelter beneath a cloud-tree that reaches to heaven is one we might entertain.

And if that imagery seems familiar perhaps it is because of the description of the tree of burning incense and smoke found in the Holy Place of the temple.

*“Priests placed incense upon the coals (on the altar of incense), from this a column of smoke would rise. The column would reach the temple ceiling and spread out. It symbolized the Tree of Life, with a smoky column for the trunk, and the spreading cloud: the branches and leafy top.”* (Preserving The Restoration, pg. 110)

After accompanying the Israelites for 40 years, the pillar and cloud apparently left them at the time they entered the promised land. (RE Exodus 20:3) But long thereafter an image of a tree made of fire and smoke was recreated daily when priests lit incense in the Holy Place. Did God organize this ordinance as an homage to the Tree of Life, and to the pillar and cloud? Was the ordinance also a promise of things to come?<sup>3</sup>



Standing just a few feet away from the altar of incense was the table of shewbread, which held 12 loaves of bread made of the finest of flour. (T&C Glossary: Shewbread) as the smoke rose up and fanned out along the ceiling, sitting below it on the table was the shewbread. This also seems to echo the Israelite’s experience in the wilderness.

*“And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, it is manna.”* (RE exodus 10:5)

The cloud-tree and manna of the Israelites also bring to mind Lehi’s dream of the Tree of Life, and the fruit thereof. Lehi describes the fruit as *“sweet beyond measure, better than all that I had ever tasted before. I noticed its fruit was white, brighter than I had ever seen.”* (Covenant of Christ 1 Nephi 2:8) Similarly, manna is described as being *“like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”* (RE Exodus 10:7)

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<sup>3</sup> “See, if God knows all things beforehand, and He does, then He knows how to set out in a ritual all of the details of what it is He’s about to do.” (Temples, part 1. Pg. 6) It is meaningful that the pillar created by the lighting of incense stood at the veil that led to the Holy of Holies.



Were the Israelite's cloud-tree and manna physical manifestations (*manifestations*?) of those things Lehi saw in a dream? A thing can of course be tangible and at the same time a representation of something that is intangible: the tiers of a traditional wedding cake, for example, become ever larger as they descend step-wise from the figures of the bride and groom resting on top, symbolizing the ever larger generations that will descend from the bride and groom themselves.

The Israelites of Moses' day — at least the older generation — are not generally reckoned to have been good guys. Is it reasonable to think that they ate from the “Tree of Life?” Well, Lehi points out that many of the people in his dream pressed forward, partook of the fruit, then because of the scorn of the world fell away. (NC 1 Nephi 2:10-11) The Israelites were invited to “rise up” but (many) longed instead for the flesh pots and servitude of Egypt.



A single wafer of the way-bread of Tolkien's elves gave the traveller the strength he needed for a day's journey, as long as it was kept wrapped and unbroken in a leaf of the heavenly Mallorn tree. In fact if the traveller relied wholly on its merits, it provided *all* the sustenance he needed. (Ref.)

But the Israelites were not content with manna, and clamored instead for flesh. They groused to Moses and the Lord gave them quail — which put an end to their bellyaching, permanently in some cases. (RE Numbers 7:20)

Manna may of course have been produced by a purely physical process, just one currently unknown to science and otherwise unobserved in nature. Or it may have been produced by the power of God, which is kind of saying the same thing. So, we have a pillar and cloud, and we have manna, and both are “supernatural.” In what way (if any) were they connected? Psalms 78 calls manna “*angel food*,” and Psalms 105 calls it the “*bread of heaven*” If bread was literally sent from heaven, it wouldn’t be the only time that has happened.

*“And as (Elijah) lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him and said unto him, Arise and eat, And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a jug of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you. And he arose and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.” (RE 1 Kings 4:24)*



Elijah fasted 40 days following that meal, “*in the strength of that food*,” before ascending Mount Horeb for an appointment with God. Israel was fed “angel food” for 40 years before the younger generation crossed the Jordan and entered the promised land. Another symmetry?

Elijah was miraculously fed by “winged beings” twice in his lifetime. The first time, ravens brought him bread and meat. (1 Kings 4:1-2) The second time, an angel fed him

bread only. Is this a progression? Does Elijah’s story *also* tell us of the need to abandon the desires of the flesh as we approach God? Sounds uncomfortable, but at least as you get nearer to God you get to interact with a better class of winged creature.

In a talk given on March 1, 2023, Tyler proposed the idea that the Lord’s Prayer should be seen as a petition and yearning for the return of God’s kingdom in the end-times. Viewed in that light, what does this supplication mean?

*“Give us this day our daily bread.”*

Will god's people again be given the bread of heaven? And what would be the point? True, we have to eat to keep body and soul together, but is it just about the carbs? There are reasons to believe that eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil may have caused a transformation in the bodies of Adam and Eve, changing them from terrestrial to telestial.<sup>4</sup> Was "angel food" offered to the Israelites in an attempt to reverse the process? Is a sacred meal necessary for ascent?

*"After this Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is an account of that event: There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael from the city of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others, also disciples. Simon Peter said to them, I ascend to the deep. They responded to him, We go with you. They went forth, and entered into the ark; and they could not grasp anything.*

*But at the horizon of the morning star, Jesus stood at the sacred entry; however the disciples could not recognize it was Jesus for the glory about Him. Then Jesus asked them, Children, have you celebrated the ritual meal? They answered Him, No. And He directed them and said, Approach the veil to the east and you will find what you seek."* (T&C 171, 12:14-15)

In the talk *The Mission of Elijah Reconsidered*, Denver draws an equivalence between the fiery pillar and the ladder to heaven.

*"Zion will be overshadowed by the Lord's glory. The fiery corridor, or pillar of fire, or ladder to heaven, or conduit into heaven, or chariot of fire, will be opened by Elijah's descent. It will remain over Zion and will be visible there."*<sup>5</sup>

So if that's right, the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites was a conduit to heaven — the same conduit, or at least the same kind of conduit in which, presumably, the disciples ascended at the sea of Tiberias, and that many years earlier Jacob saw in a dream as he journeyed to the house of Laban.

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<sup>4</sup> Adam didn't die immediately when he ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, even though God warned him he would die in the day that he partook thereof. 12th century Jewish Scholar Nachmanides says that this means that eating the fruit caused Adam's body to change from immortal to mortal. And Adam did die some 930 years later. — just under the deadline, if a day to God is a thousand years to man. See RE Genesis 2:13 and NC 2nd Nephi 1:9,10

<sup>5</sup> Just like the conduit was visible to the Israelites for the forty years they were in the wilderness

*“And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”*<sup>6</sup> (RE Genesis 9:20-21)



Certainly some of the Israelites failed to take full advantage of that conduit, but perhaps we have been too dismissive of the younger generation. If one wanted to communicate symbolically (without actually saying so) that that generation “rose up,” one could hardly do better than to relate the story of the Jordan River miraculously parting to let the children of Israel enter the promised land dry shod.

*“It was you that dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that made the abysses of the sea into a way for the redeemed to walk.”* (Covenant of Christ 2 Nephi 5:9)

There are only two times (that we know of) that Zion ascended in mass to heaven. But is it possible that God established a temporary, earth-bound Zion among the younger generation of Israelites, like the one He established among the Nephites? The story of Christ’s advent in 3rd Nephi uses the same symbols of pillar, cloud, and fire to describe the Nephite interaction with heaven as are found in the Israelite account.<sup>7</sup>

Then there’s this. Joshua, seven priests, *and the people* demolished Jericho with only trumpets and the sound of their raised voices. (RE Joshua 2:3) Does the power they displayed tell us something about their standing with God? And of course in Adam’s day and in the end-times, Zion was/and will be present when a High Priest of the Holy Order finds himself in the company of seven other priests of the Holy Order. (*The Mission of Elijah Reconsidered*, pg. 8, Blog Feb. 24, 2012)

Perhaps the conduit to heaven that accompanied the children of Israel was not unused.

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<sup>6</sup> In reaction to his dream Jacob vowed a vow, saying: “If God will be with me and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I can come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God.” Way-Bread-Raiment-Come again to the Father’s House. Jacob’s vow was about much more than mundane necessities.

<sup>7</sup> Nephi for one clearly believed that the younger generation of Israelites were a righteous people. “Righteous” being a word he probably wouldn’t throw around casually. (Covenant of Christ 1 Nephi 5:18,19)

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If we can emulate previous generations that loved the Lord, we may well look forward to the day that a pillar rests on the temple on Mount Zion. When that temple is complete, we are told that we can learn to walk in the paths of heaven. (RE Isaiah 1:5) Are those paths to be found within that pillar? Will the bread of heaven strengthen us on the way? And does the way take us home to a branch of the Tree of Life?

*“On every high place will I feed them. They won’t be hungry or thirsty. Hot winds and the sun won’t oppress them, for He who loves them will lead them. He’ll guide them to springs of water. I’ll make my temple a path to the heavens, and the roads from it will exalt.”* (Covenant of Christ 1 Nephi 6:7)

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Gordon Platt, July 2024

*She delivered the righteous people  
the blameless seed from the nations  
guided them all in a marvelous way  
and was unto them a cover by day  
She brought them all through the Red Sea  
and leads them still through deep water*

*A cloud by day and a pillar by night  
Our Heavenly Mother and Father*

*On every high place will He feed them  
They won’t be hungry or thirst  
Hot winds and the sun won’t oppress them  
for He who loves them will lead them  
He’ll make His temple a path to the heavens  
He’ll guide them to springs of clear water*

*A cloud by day and a pillar by night  
Praise Heavenly Mother and Father*