

Exodus 14:19-21

Verse 19: *Then the Angel of God, who goes before the camp of Israel, departed from his position and went behind them, and the pillar of the cloud left its position in front of them and took its place behind them.*

the Angel of God: The definite article is important here. The “Angel” is a theophany (that is, a visible appearance or manifestation) our Lord. Compare Gen.16:10-14, where the “Angel” appearing to Hagar speaks as God and is referred to by her as such. There are many such occurrences in the Old Testament (cf. Gen.21:17-21; 22:11-18; 31:11, 13; Ex.3:2; Judg. 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; 2Sam.24:16; Zech.1:12; 3:1; 12:8). The theophany, or appearance, of the Angel of the Lord is a representation of the person of Christ before His incarnation in human form (after His birth, *the Angel of the Lord* never appears again). His appearance in the fire of the burning bush at Ex.3:2, and in the fire on the altar at Judg.13:20 serves to prefigure the work of Christ being judged for our sins, enduring the fire of condemnation in our place. His appearance in and identification with the “pillar of cloud by day and fire by night” also served as a visible demonstration of the very presence of God for the Israelites as He led them through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21), and stood guard at the entrance to the tabernacle (Ex. 33:9,10).

the camp of Israel: Unlike the English word, camp, the Hebrew word *machaneh* can refer to the people who populate the camp. Therefore, the camp can be in motion as it is here in this descriptive phrase, following the Angel where He leads.

departed from his position and went behind them, and the pillar of the cloud left its position in front of them and took its place behind them: Here, The Angel (i.e., the Lord Christ Himself) takes up a position first to delay the approach of the Egyptians. The visible symbol of His presence, the cloud, follows presently.

Verse 20: *So He came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. And the cloud was there in the darkness and it lit up the night, but no one approached, one side to the other, all night long.*

So He came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel: The subject of the verb is not the cloud but the Angel of the Lord:

1. The writer is setting up a parallel construction between verses nineteen and twenty. In both verses, the Angel is mentioned in the beginning of the verse, the cloud at the end. In this way,

both the movement of the cloud and the identification of the Angel with the cloud is emphasized and maintained.

2. The cloud was already said to have reached its position, coming to a standing halt at the end of verse nineteen. So it makes more sense to take the two verses as integrally connected, with the “He came” of verse twenty reprising the fact that the Angel, being in, or identified with the cloud, was now in position between the two camps.

3. Understood in this way, verse twenty really is a necessary clarification. Without this sentence, the further activities of the Angel and his position would be unknown.

And the cloud was there in the darkness and it lit up the night: The literal translation of this phrase “and the cloud was [there], and the darkness [was too], and it lit up ...” The phrase is quite difficult, and editors of the Hebrew text often assume some sort of a corruption has taken place at this point. The general sense seems plain. The cloud is still there when darkness falls and yet it still illuminates the darkness. Though the activity of the cloud is unusual (it normally stayed in front of the Israelite camp when they were on the move), the reason is clear enough: The Angel is keeping the Egyptians back until the way of escape is opened up. He (in the cloud) will shield the retreating Israelites and then finally confuse and rout the Egyptians in pursuit (verses 24-25). Some ancient (and modern) versions expand the translation here, suggesting that the cloud gave light to the Israelites while leaving the Egyptians in darkness.

Verse 21: *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord made the sea move with a strong east wind all night long. And He made the sea into dry land and the waters were divided.*

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord made the sea move: Moses stretches out His hand, but it is the Lord who actually makes this miracle happen.

all night long: The wind keeps the waters in place as long as necessary for the Israelites to pass safely through the sea bed.

a strong east wind: The wind would be blowing square into the face of the Israelites as they stood in march formation facing the Red Sea. God’s deliverance is afoot, but note that He instead of instantaneously parting the sea, He allows the process to occur gradually, testing, trying and refining the faith of the fickle Israelites. When we pray to the Lord for deliverance *from* dire circumstances, we must keep in mind that often He delivers us *through* our tribulations instead. If we approach such trials with patience and unflinching faith, the duration of the

deliverance will only serve to strengthen our faith. We may never be able to guess the means God will use to answer us, nor discern the exact time when we will be safely through the dried up sea, but we may be confident that deliverance will come according the promises of and faithfulness of our Lord.