

WHAT IS THE PILLAR OF CLOUD?

There is a memorable episode in the Charlton Heston movie, the "Ten Commandments", when the Israelites are crossing the Red Sea. A whirlwind appears at the entrance to the Red Sea crossing, temporarily blocking Pharaoh and his army. After the Israelites were safely across, the whirlwind let Pharaoh's army pass and they were subsequently drowned.

Exodus describes this whirlwind as a "pillar of cloud" by day and a pillar of fire by night.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex. 13:21-22)

This is one of those cases where words cannot substitute for a picture. Below (Figure 1) is that pillar. It is a picture of the Milky Way taken from Micarta Encyclopedia. There is your pillar of fire by night. In the pristine sky, 2,000 years ago, it could be seen as a pillar of cloud by day.



Figure 1. The Milky Way Galaxy.

MILKY WAY

From Encarta, we learn that the Milky Way is the galaxy in which our solar system is located. As our planets revolve around the sun along a flat plane, the sun is revolving around the Milky Way in the same plane. It is best seen on clear moonless nights when, because of earth's tilt, it circles the sky in an irregular band from the northeastern to the southeastern horizon. The brightest part extends from Scorpio through Sagittarius.

Milky Way, the large, disk-shaped aggregation of stars, or galaxy, that includes the Sun and its solar system. In addition to the Sun, the Milky Way contains about a trillion other stars. Its name is derived from its appearance as a faintly luminous band that stretches across earth's sky at night. This band is the disk in which the solar system lies. Its hazy appearance results from the combined light of stars too far away to be distinguished individually by the unaided eye. The individual stars that are distinct in the sky are those in the Milky Way Galaxy that lie sufficiently close to the solar system to be discerned separately.

From the middle northern latitudes, the Milky Way is best seen on clear, moonless, summer nights, when it appears as a luminous, irregular band circling the sky from the northeastern to the southeastern horizon. It extends through the constellations Perseus, Cassiopeia, and Cepheus. In the region of the Northern Cross it divides into two streams: the western stream, which is bright as it passes through the Northern Cross, fades near Ophiuchus, or the Serpent Bearer, because of dense dust clouds, and appears again in Scorpio; and the eastern stream, which grows brighter as it passes southward through

Scutum and Sagittarius. The brightest part of the Milky Way extends from Scutum to Scorpio, through Sagittarius. The center is in the direction of Sagittarius and is about 28,000 light years from the Sun.

According to star watcher manuals, to see it you need a clear night on the darkest time of the month when the Moon is near to New. During the dark summer evenings, the Milky Way is oriented in a more or less north-south direction. During autumn it lies more nearly in an east-west direction. It stretches across the Zodiac from Sagittarius to Gemini.

For those interested, [National Geographic](#) sells a star map that shows the Milky Way in detail. If you look carefully, you can see the Milky Way on their website.

Now that we know what the Milky Way looks like, it doesn't take much imagination to see where else it is described in the Bible.

RIVER OF EDEN

In the Garden of Eden creation story, there is a river that flows out of Eden where it divides into four rivers. The main river is called "Pishon" which, according to Strong's dictionary, means "free flowing". Havilah means "sandy stretch", which is a way of describing the abundance of stars around the Milky Way. The names of precious stones describe the color of the stars.

There is a double meaning here. To the ancient Egyptians, the Milky Way was the starry equivalent to their Nile River.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. (Gen. 2:10-12)

JACOB'S LADDER

Jacob saw the Milky Way as a ladder with angels ascending and descending on it and God standing above it. Of course, stars ascend and descend all the time.

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants;" (Gen. 28:12-13)

RAINBOW COVENANT

In the summer when the Milky Way flows north to south, it crosses the path of the sun. Each day, the sun moves in an arc from east to west. To Noah, this pairing was the sign of the covenant.

After Noah's flood, when the waters receded, God made a pact with Noah to never cause a flood again. Commonly called the Rainbow Covenant, this bow in the clouds is usually interpreted as a rainbow. That interpretation has some serious flaws.

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." (Gen. 9:12-17)

The flaw to this rainbow interpretation can be found in Genesis 8. It is an accepted fact that rainbows are produced when light bends through moisture droplets. However, we are told that the waters had dried up and the ground had dried up. In other words, there were no clouds or moisture droplets to produce rainbows. Secondly, cloud formations don't cover all the earth as it says in verse 9:14.

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. (Gen. 8:13-14)

ARK OF THE COVENANT

The bow in Noah's cloud meant the same as arc, and then was symbolized as "ark". It is not much of a stretch to derive "covenant" from "cover". The arc covers the heavens. In the same way, the box Moses called an ark, contained the Ten Commandments.

"They shall make an ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. (Ex. 25:10)

When Moses wrote the law, he gave it to the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

And Moses wrote this law, and gave it to the priests the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. (Deut. 31:9)

MOSES' CLOUD

By breaking down the [life of Moses](#) into twelve sections, it can be seen that Moses was a sun hero whose life tracks the constellations of the Zodiac. There is an important junction when the arc of the sun crosses the Milky Way at its zenith. Follow this sequence.

The cloud is coming.

And the LORD said to Moses. "Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever."(Ex. 19:9)

The cloud is on the mountain (at the junction) waiting for Moses the sun to arrive.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. (Ex. 19:16)

Moses the sun is ascending.

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. (Ex. 24:15)

At the junction Moses enters the cloud.

And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Ex. 24:18)

When Moses enters the tent (covering or covenant), the sun is crossing the Milky Way.

When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. (Ex. 33:9)

SON OF MAN

We know that the Milky Way can be readily seen when the sky is dark. Jesus gives the same advice when he describes the [Son of Man](#) as coming in clouds on a dark night. The Son of man, by the way, is the winter constellation Orion. Star maps show it near the Milky Way.

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. (Mark 13:24-27)

THRONE IN HEAVEN

The book of Revelation is full of astronomical allegory. The sun is on its throne in heaven when it is at its zenith. At the same time Orion, the [Son of Man](#), is in the background. The precious gems depict the color of the stars. There are twenty four thrones because there are twenty four hours in a day. The seven torches describe the planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Uranus, and the sun and the moon.

At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne! And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald. Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads. From the throne issue flashes of lightning,

and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God; and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. (Rev. 4:2-6)

Jacob saw the Milky Way as a ladder where angels ascended and descended. We have a similar description in Revelation. Again, the rainbow symbolizes the arc of the sun.

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. (Rev. 10:1)