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208 - God & The Elements

1. Introduction

Figurative or symbolic forms aren't always obscure objects or references. In some cases they're things that are all around us and readily understood when their application is examined. In this lesson we'll discuss **God & The Elements** comparing physical processes and phenomena with their spiritual counterparts.

2. The physical world as a mirror of the spiritual

We don't always think of the physical creation in a discussion of symbols. In the Bible as we look at the world around us and study the scriptures we find parallels between the physical and spiritual. In many ways it appears that the physical creation was constructed in a manner that embeds spiritual realities in the fabric of the universe. In our discussion of blood we saw the spirit of life tied to the physical through the medium of blood. The shedding of blood not only represented loss of life but also a separation of body and spirit. The importance of blood was emphasized as we saw that it mirrored the idea of sacrifice and the eventual offering of Christ. The death of Christ, the shedding of blood and salvation are points of study that are so well known that we don't question the relationship of the involved physical and spiritual components. But we can take that further in our study.

An obvious but overlooked point in a discussion of things like blood is the fact that God fabricated creation with physical elements reflecting things that are spiritual. We're told that the plan to save mankind was in the mind of God before the world began (**Titus 1.2**). Its logical to conclude then that physical things were created in a way consistent with that plan.

If we construct a chain connecting the appropriate representational elements we can see how the plan works and comes together as a whole. Let's start at the endpoint and work backward to illustrate this. Starting with the death of Christ we can link elements with each other to examine the relationship between the physical and spiritual.

1. Beginning with the body of Christ we see that God created us with the ability to feel pain and we understand how vital blood is for the continuation of life
2. Shedding blood would be understood as the loss of life and passing of a soul
3. Sacrifices were offered in order to atone for sin but this had to be done repeatedly
4. God called out a particular nation to provide the physical bloodline and later the body of the Messiah that would be killed on the cross
5. Blood was sanctified by God with prohibitions against eating it and taking life. Those who violated this were to have their blood shed as a consequence. This made blood sacred or sanctified in the sight of God.
6. The creation of man, and imposition of death as a consequence for sin, cast a shadow

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over our relationship with the Lord and emphasized the need for salvation.

7. Along the stream of time certain figures, symbols, actions, judgments and the scriptures themselves are revealed and preserved in order to add validity to the plan when its fully implemented.

The sacrifice of Christ is the central point of the Bible and is a well known and understood subject. What we need to consider is that the whole of creation was constructed by God in a way that we could discover the power and presence of the Lord in the world and universe around us. The scriptures speak of this demonstrating that God's power is visible (**Psm 19.1, Rom 1.20, Psm 8.3**). The elements that we can tie directly to Christ in the scriptures are understandable once we take the time to make the connections and study the context. As we look at the scriptures we see the Messianic strain of prophecies and prophetic elements but we don't often understand the role of other things that are equally important. The nature of the world, structure of creation and processes that surround us are prominent figures in the biblical narrative. In this lesson we'll take a look at:

1. Darkness
2. Light
3. Rainbows
4. Thunder and lightning
5. Clouds and
6. Whirlwinds

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. Darkness

The idea of darkness, not to mention its presence in the world, is one that immediately brings a multitude of associations to mind. Its perhaps one of the most well known figurative elements in the scriptures and a familiar concept to just about everyone around the world. Darkness can convey multiple meanings at the same time and is frequently used in stories, songs and other creative expressions. As we turn to the scriptures we find that darkness is one of the first things we're introduced to.

As the narrative opens we're told that "***In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.***" (**Gen 1.1**). This statement of God's being and use of his power is followed by a description of the newly created world. "***And the earth was without form, and void...***" (**Gen 1.2**). Here we have an image that first introduces God, declares his power in the fact that he's created the world and then we're provided with a description of the physical state of the planet. As we continue in the chapter we'll see definition added and items made to live and grow on the Earth

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but at the outset its literally a blank slate.

The next statement provides a description of the environment in which this unformed world existed. "***And darkness was upon the face of the deep***" (Gen 1.2) provides an additional description indicating that the globe was covered by water and enveloped in darkness. The spirit of God moved on the face of the waters and God begins to shape the new world.

The first step in this process is the creation of light which God then separated from darkness (Gen 1.3). This seems to be a simplistic statement but we have to consider what's taking place. God creates light but there's no sun at this time and there won't be until the fourth day of creation. The statement regarding darkness treats it as if it has physical properties. Its separated, or divided, from light which implies form to some degree.

In the modern world we recognize that darkness is the absence of light. Shadows are created by objects interrupting transmission of light from a radiant source but in Genesis chapter one there's no radiant source named. We see that darkness is set in place by God who understands and is able to manipulate its nature. From that point on in the biblical narrative however darkness is present, well known, and at times, a powerful figure symbolically and physically.

In God's restatement of his promises to Abraham when asked about an heir God caused a sleep to come on the patriarch that's described as a horror of great darkness (Gen 15.10-12). It was during this episode that God sealed his promises with Abraham with a solemn vow and foretold of events that would bring his offspring to the land of Canaan and eventually bless all families of the Earth in the coming of the Messiah. God used darkness in this instance as a vehicle to impress on Abraham the seriousness and depth of his power. The ability to induce such a state and then communicate in language and visible forms at the same time is testament to the ability of God to enter even our most private thoughts. While he revealed himself in this state of darkness it created an environment that made the visible and audible elements appear with a show of power that Abraham wouldn't soon forget.

As Moses dealt with Pharaoh to release the children of Israel the Lord demonstrated his authority and power over a hostile monarch. Pharaoh's refusals to allow the Hebrews to leave brought about a series of plagues that began with the water of the land turning to blood. Through a succession of calamities that demonstrated the gods of Egypt were powerless before the God of Heaven. The ninth plague that God brought on the Egyptians involved darkness. "***And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel***

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had light in their dwellings." (Ex 10.21-23).

Notice the description of the darkness given in this passage. This wasn't just a lack of light. Its described as a thick darkness that could be felt and was so heavy that none of the Egyptians attempted to move from where they were. We might have a tendency to read through the account of this event very quickly and by doing so we miss the spiritual and physical combinations that are made here.

1. The darkness was over the Egyptians, not the Hebrews marking a line between the people of God and those who opposed the Lord.
2. The darkness has a tangible almost physical quality to it that the people could feel. We may dismiss this as being a figurative expression but there's a sense in which even darkness, an immaterial intangible state, appears to have both nonmaterial and physical properties. This wasn't ordinary darkness and it was under the direct control of God
3. We also have the number three associated with the plague. We have the presence of an unnatural or supernatural darkness that is placed over a specific area and is done for a specific period of time. As I mentioned in the lesson on the numbers of God, three is a significant expression that denotes God's direct involvement and exercise of his power. The association with the number three, the unworldly nature of the darkness and its confinement to a restricted area all point to a being who is able to control anything in the physical and spiritual realm.

We're well acquainted with the association of darkness with evil, a lack of knowledge or rejection of the Lord. Some examples of this are:

1. Those who walk contrary to God are said to behave foolishly and their path is characterized as being in darkness (**Eccl 2.14**).
2. Darkness is the abode of those who seek to evade judgment. As the people of God continued to sin the Lord allowed their enemies to overtake them. When the Babylonians besieged the city of Jerusalem, there were those who tried to hide themselves to evade capture and judgment. God stated through the prophet Zephaniah that even though they tried to take shelter in the darkness he would search them out with candles and deliver them to their foes (**Zeph 1.12**). Darkness while being seen as the ally of evil won't be able to avoid the wrath of God.
3. Lack of spiritual knowledge and the pursuit of evil is referred to in the scriptures as darkness. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul describes their previous state of not knowing

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the Lord as having their understanding darkened (**Eph 4.18, Eph 5.8**). Paul refers to the warfare of the Christian as being against the power of darkness adding that the struggle isn't just against flesh and blood but against "*spiritual wickedness in high places*" (**Eph 6.12**).

4. John characterizes those who walk contrary to the Lord as being in darkness as well (**1 John 2.9-11**).

5. God sent his son into the world to dispel the spiritual darkness that mankind lives in. Paul describes the spiritual digression of mankind in his letter to the Romans. He states that humans rejected God and "*became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*" (**Rom 1.21**). As the chapter ends this willingness to reject God and live in spiritual darkness caused the Lord to withdraw from them as they followed their evil ways into destruction.

6. John speaks of the world as being in darkness in his description of Christ in his Gospel account. John describes Christ as a light that was rejected because "*the darkness comprehended it not.*" (**John 1.5**). God sent his son into the world to dispel this darkness, so that we could know his will and thus be saved through obedience to him (**1 John 1.5-6**).

7. Punishment by God associates separation from the Lord with fear and being cast into "*outer darkness*" (**Matt 22.13**).

8. God brought darkness over the Earth as Christ died on the cross (**Lk 23.44**). Although Jesus wasn't regarded as being anything but another troublesome Jew by the Romans the events surrounding the crucifixion had an effect. "*Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*" (**Luke 23.47-48**).

There are numerous references and uses of darkness in the scriptures and its not hard for us to understand them. The power in these images is that

1. To God darkness is tangible and has substance
2. It demonstrates the power of God over both the physical and spiritual
3. Represents ignorance and evil in the sight of God and it
4. Represents our spiritual state until we come to a knowledge of God & Christ

Closely related to this is the image of light.

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4. Light

While darkness was the state of the world on the first day of creation, the first thing God did was to create light (**Gen 1.3**) which was then divided from darkness (**Gen 1.4**). The presence of this light was perhaps not what we think of today. We understand that light is a phenomenon which is present but not directly observable. We understand that light is emitted by a transmission source and is composed of things that behave as physical particles and a waveform. We detect light by the effect it has on other things and so can't see light itself but we can perceive the byproduct of its presence. We need to note that the light mentioned on the first day of creation wasn't the light of the sun or moon as these were created on the fourth day. As we saw with the presence of darkness light is a phenomenon and a powerful spiritual figure.

As a figure light is well understood. It represents knowledge, the presence and power of God and that which is good and righteous. It stands as a contrast to the darkness of the world but in a spiritual sense, along with darkness, is under the control of God and is an expression of his power. We can find examples of light as a figure throughout the scriptures.

1. Light was one of the first things made and stands apart from the rest of creation as an intangible quality and quantity. We can also see it as a foundation for life and all that follows.

2. The abode of God is described in terms of light, a fitting analogy for the creator of all things. Speaking of this Paul states, "***Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.***" (1 Tim 6.16).

3. James refers to God as the father of lights (**Jas 1.17**). Paul refers to the followers of God in similar terms stating, "***Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.***" (1 Thess 5.5).

4. God's word is referred to as the light that can lead and guide us in an otherwise uncertain world. David writes, "***Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.***" (**Psm 119.105**). The effect of God's word is to enlighten, teach us of the nature of God and how we can be pleasing to Him.

5. Christ referred to believers who follow him faithfully in a similar fashion. "***Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.***" (**Matt 5.14**). The knowledge of God is such that when one is filled with his word, we're filled with the light that has come from the Lord.

6. Christ's appearance in the world was to complete the revelation of God's word and

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finish his work. This was done through the word of truth which was spoken and recorded for all time. Those who have a good and honest heart will seek the light, the righteousness of God and will find it in the pages of the scriptures. The Devil on the other hand seeks to deceive and cause humans to fail to see this great light. Paul states, "***But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.***" (2 Cor 4.3-4).

Similar to darkness, the idea of light, its use physically and as a figure can be found in a number of passages. We can summarize the importance of light as a figure as

1. A visible, intangible representation of God's power to create
2. A figurative representation of the abode of God and
3. A figure representing goodness, righteousness, truth and the word of the Lord

Light, like darkness is a well known and understood figure in the Bible. There are other ways in which light appears in the text and represents the power of God and his authority. One of the most recognized appearances in the Bible that incorporates light is the rainbow.

5. Rainbows

Genesis tells us that as the population of mankind grew problems emerged that angered the Lord. "***And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.***" (Gen 6.5-8).

The Bible reveals that all life was wiped out by the flood that God used to destroy the evil of the world with the exception of Noah, his family and the animals preserved aboard the ark. Over a year later the family is told to leave the ark as the world is now ready and the water dried. Noah sacrifices to the Lord and God makes a covenant with mankind and the world.

"And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a

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covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." (Gen 9.9-17).

Rainbows are also used as a figure to represent God's majesty and authority. In the revelation that was given to John, he describes God's throne. "*And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*" (Rev 4.2-3).

Later in the same vision, John describes a heavenly emissary sent out from God. "*And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire "* (Rev 10.1). This angel stands on the earth and sea, then signals the start of a judgment from God. The interesting thing about the rainbow is that it's a symbol of goodness on the other side of destruction. The only way that we'll see the throne of God, or be in his presence, is by obeying him through the commands in His word. The rainbow reminds us of his presence and therefore tells us that we're never far from Him, although we might feel isolated and scared. The rainbow represents God's ability to create, sustain and change any thing.

Another interesting fact related to rainbows as a figure is that rainbows appear at the beginning and end of the biblical narrative. It's a figure that's associated with God's faithfulness, power, authority and promises to reassure his people.

Overall rainbows represent

1. The promises of God and his faithfulness
2. God's power over the world, elements and mankind
3. The presence of the Lord and his care for his people
4. Located at the beginning and end of the revealed word denotes that the message is from God and that he'll keep the promises he's made.

In addition to rainbows God incorporates images of other meteorological phenomena as representations of his power. This includes thunder and lightning.

6. Thunder & lightning

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Thunderstorms are awesome displays of raw power and force. Although storms can turn deadly and result in catastrophic damage and loss of life they nevertheless are visual displays of the power of the creator of the universe. Throughout the scriptures God uses these phenomena as a physical and figurative sign. Their usage, as we've seen to this point in the discussion, adds to the many threads that tie the narrative together. One may tend to look at the sky, or the weather report on television, and simply regard a storm as a normal occurrence that imposes itself on outdoor activities. The physical world declares the wonders of God and thunder and lightning are only two examples of the power that created them. Paul stated, "***For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...***" (Rom 1.20).

When God appeared at mount Sinai we have a powerful description of what was seen as the Lord descended on the mountain. "***And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.***" (Ex 19.16). This sight had a tremendous effect on the children of Israel as they watched. "***And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.***" (Ex 20.18).

The children of Israel had been told to prepare for the Lord's appearance. Moses gave specific instructions concerning their personal readiness, conduct and restrictions that had to be observed. Barriers were set up around the mountain and anyone who came in contact with it would die (Ex 19.10-13). The Hebrews had already seen the power of God in action as ten plagues struck Egypt. Now, free of their slavery, they stood at the base of the mountain of God in Sinai where they were to receive a covenant from the Lord. This wasn't just a list of rules that had to be followed. The law delivered to them by Moses gave substance to their newly liberated nation. The appearance of God accompanied by thunder and lightning would impress on their minds that the Lord is a being who could perform what he promised them. The law would then be a binding agreement, or covenant, in which God stated the conditions for the continuation of his blessings on them. They were reminded to keep the law and honor God and remember the great things he had done for them. The display at Sinai would also serve as a warning that if they chose to do evil, the Lord would deal with them according to their rejection and rebellion. A God who had defeated the pagan idols of Egypt and appeared in thick clouds, thunder and lightning was one to be respected.

In the New Testament as Christ was speaking to his disciples concerning the fate of Jerusalem, they asked about his return and what sign they could expect before that happened. Christ answered their questions and employed lightning as a figure of the swiftness of his actions when he came back. Describing his return Christ states, "***For as the lightning cometh out of the***

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*east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matt 24.27). Christ also stated that there would be no sign warning humanity before this took place. Jesus told them, “**But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.**” (Matt 24.36-39).*

We see from Christ’s own words that only God knows when the end will be. Jesus didn’t have this information, nor did the angels. The comparison with the days of Noah are very clear - no warning will be issued to announce the imminent return of the Lord. The speed at which this takes place is accompanied by a fearsome spectacle as the apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians to reassure them. “**And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power...**” (2 Thess 1.7-9). Coupled with the image of lightning one should take note of the importance of preparing for the last day.

Lightning also declares the glory, power and presence of God in the resurrection of Christ. The appearance of the angel that rolled back the stone from Christ’s tomb is described in this manner. “**His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.**” (Matt 28.3-4). We can appreciate the nature of this event. The angel, a supernatural being, descends on the tomb being guarded by Roman soldiers, some of the fiercest warriors on the planet. The last thing they expected was to see an angel or witness the rolling back of the stone on the mouth of the grave. The image depicts power and immediately invoked fear so that these hardened soldiers “**became as dead men**” describing the terror that overwhelmed them. Such a display was so overpowering that the guards were immobilized and unable to challenge who they saw.

Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, and probably the last written at the end of the first century, records a vision that the apostle John had while exiled on the island of Patmos. The opening of the letter reveals that the message is in signs, or figurative expressions revealing the message of God to the seven churches of Asia. Images of both God and Christ are presented and are consistent with the writings of other prophets such as Ezekiel. The throne of God is figuratively represented using images of thunder and lightning. John writes, “**And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.**” (Rev 4.5). The presence of all these elements speaks of the sum total of God’s power, wisdom, knowledge and ability to command both the physical and spiritual worlds. If we see the scriptures as an extension of the

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power and mind of God then we can appreciate the magnitude of God's capability. God has the power to conceal or reveal, and that which has been revealed can be confirmed as we see the power of God displayed in the universe.

Closely related to rainbows, thunder and lightning are clouds.

7. Clouds

In the scriptures we see clouds associated with the power and promises of God. As the Hebrews left Egypt a pillar of cloud moved over them and later guided them as they traveled. At night this became a pillar of fire and provided light and protection from the Egyptians who pursued them. The pillar of cloud indicated when they were to break camp and continue on their way to the promised land serving as a visible reminder of the presence of God with the people.

At Sinai when the Tabernacle was dedicated we find that God manifested his presence and approval. ***“So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”*** (Ex 40.34-38). No matter where they were the cloud was a visible statement to the Hebrews that the Lord was with them, protecting, blessing and guiding them for the duration of their time in the wilderness.

God employed a cloud to confirm the authority of his son on the Earth. Christ took Peter, James and John with him into a mountain where he was transfigured, or changed. Along with Christ, Elijah and Moses appeared and spoke with him. Seeing this Peter stated, ***“Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”*** (Matt 17.4). On the surface this appears to be a recognition of the significance of Christ and two great characters who had gone on before. In his attempt to reverence all three Peter made the mistake of placing Christ on an equal plane with both Elijah and Moses. While he was still talking God gave him a new perspective.

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.” (Matt 17.5-7). The bright cloud announced the presence of God. The text states that the cloud overshadowed them indicating that it hadn't been there before. Such an occurrence could only have been performed by God and one

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statement, accompanied by the cloud, drove the point home that no one was equal to Christ. The greatness of Moses and Elijah paled in comparison to Christ whose word was to be the final revelation to mankind.

Peter later speaks of this event in his second epistle. *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.”* (2 Pet 1.16-18). God himself endorsed his son on the Earth in the presence of those who would be his witnesses leaving no doubt in their minds of who Jesus was or what his authority is.

The ascension of Christ to the Father also incorporates clouds. As the disciples gathered with Jesus forty days after the resurrection, he gave them instructions to remain in Jerusalem until they received the power Jesus promised them. This power, the Holy Spirit, would come to them ten days later and serve as their guide to do the work of the Lord. After receiving these instructions they then saw Christ’s departure. Luke writes, *“while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1.9-11).

The apostle Paul speaks of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* (1 Thess 4.16-17).

Clouds are a statement of the power, promises and majesty of God. In the scriptures they depict

1. A reminder of the promises of God as the rainbow is placed in the clouds
2. The protection and guidance of God’s people
3. A visible reminder of the majesty of God and
4. A statement of the glory of Christ’s return

Another atmospheric image used by God physically and figuratively is that of the whirlwind.

8. Whirlwinds

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From late Spring to mid Autumn, North America is subject to one of nature's most inexplicable phenomena; the tornado. In the Bible these are referred to as whirlwinds and are used to demonstrate the power and might of God. In our time tornadic events are generally unpredictable until right at the time they occur. Even then, armed with sophisticated weather radar and imaging stations, it's difficult to confirm the existence of a raging vortex. Often professional meteorologists must rely on weather spotters and witnesses to determine the location and nature of the storm. Many times it's not until after the storm has struck that its nature and degree are understood. With that in mind, as we look at physical things that speak to us of God's power, we find that this is used in both a figurative and literal manner to demonstrate the nature and ability of the Lord.

We know the story of Job, how he was hated for being righteous by Satan, who accused him of serving God only for the benefits. Satan was allowed to destroy Job's possessions, family, livestock and servants in a variety of ways and then to afflict the man, but not kill him (**Job 1-3**). Accused of deceit, unrighteousness and hypocrisy by his friends it was the appearance of the Lord, speaking to Job from a whirlwind, that turned all human voices to silence and caused even the righteous Job to repent (**Job 38-42**).

As Elijah neared the end of his stay on earth, understanding God would take him soon, his successor, Elisha, asked for a double portion of the prophet's spirit to carry on the work. To this Elijah stated "***Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.***" (**2 Kngs 2.10**). As they journeyed, a chariot and horses of fire came between them and Elijah was carried away in the chariot by a whirlwind (**2 Kngs 2.11**). This is a powerful statement of God's deliverance and ability to save as Elijah, weary of the state of the nation, had prayed to die.

In the writings of Solomon, God speaks of the speed and severity of his judgment against those who wouldn't listen and invokes the image of the whirlwind. "***I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.***" (**Prov 1.26-27**). We understand the brutal nature of the whirlwind and how it can't be tamed or stopped until its energy is expended. God's wrath and judgment against evil share this characteristic with whirlwinds.

God also uses the image of the whirlwind to denote the instability of lives that aren't godly. "***As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.***" (**Prov 10.25**). The power of God's judgment is described in a fashion that should cause dread to rise in the hearts of those who don't obey. "***For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.***" (**Isa 66.15**).

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The prophet Nahum wrote concerning the evil of the Assyrians as well as the patience and power of God. He writes, “*The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.* (Nah 1.3).

A being who can create, control and overcome the whirlwind is indeed one to be loved, feared and obeyed. God has placed his unique signature all around us in the world in the magnitude of creation and the powerful forces that animate it all of which are under the constant control and care of their creator and master.

9. Next

As we travel along the biblical narrative and examine foreshadows put in place by God we can identify certain individuals who serve as representations of the coming Messiah. Join me in the next lesson for a discussion of **Three Types Of Christ.**