

## **Bible Study – The Pillar of Fire**

**By William Gavin**

*“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105*

### **Leader Notes:**

*Focus: The story of the Pillar of Fire from the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament. We will look at how God is a light for our path, who always guides us to what is good, true and beautiful. Examining the affection that St. Francis of Assisi had for fire, as well as some selections from the gospels, we will see what it means to follow Christ and live in the light.*

*Instruction: Anything written italics is a direction or suggestion for the leader. Whatever is written regular text should be read aloud. When possible, have the young people in your group do these readings.*

*Preparation: Read through the study ahead of time, familiarizing yourself with its content. Pray with the readings from Sacred Scripture. If possible, print out a few copies of the map to share. Have Bibles ready to go – ask your teens to bring their own and have extras available, if possible. We recommend actual Bibles to be used as putting the Bible in the hands of young people is always preferable.*

Let us begin with prayer:

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit, Fire of Divine Love, teach us to pray. Help us to know and understand Your word, your truth and to see the light that you offer us. We give you thanks for this day and this opportunity to reflect on your Word, which is the source of life. Holy Spirit, come upon us and enlighten the darkness of our minds. And let us now pray together in the words that Jesus taught us. Our Father...

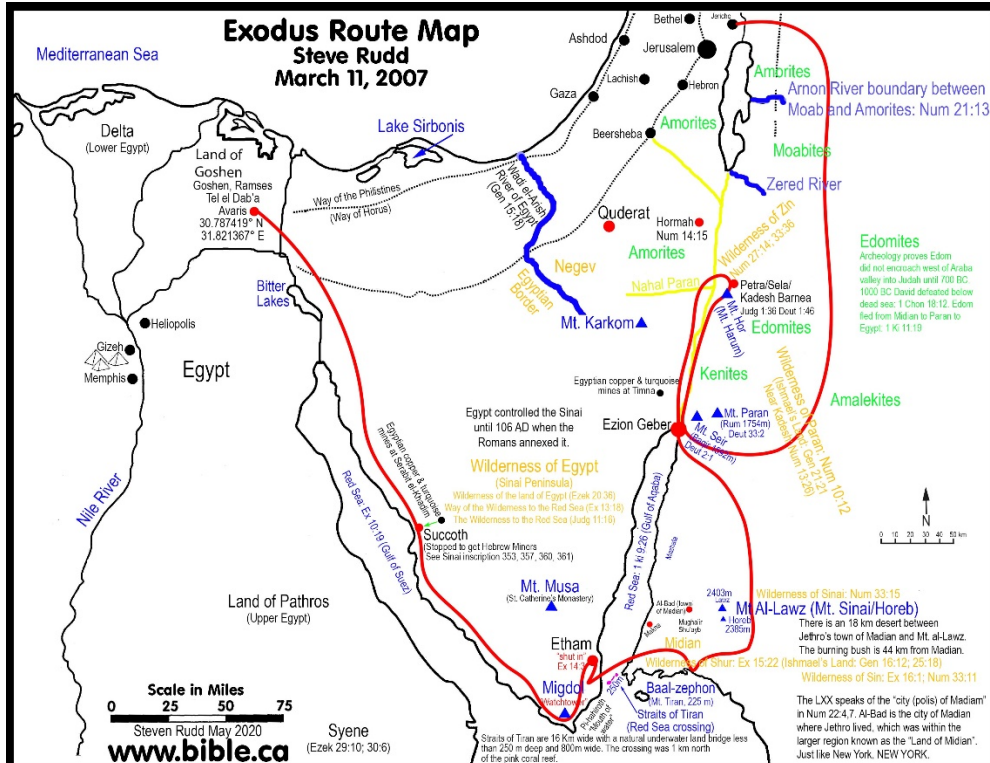
*Close prayer with the Sign of the Cross*

Let's get started with some interesting fire facts:

- The average temperature of a candle flame is 1800 degrees Fahrenheit.
- When you hear cracking and popping from the wood during a fire, that is trapped oxygen being freed.
- Oxygen is essential for fire to burn. This is why, as far as we know, Earth is the only planet where fire can occur. There is not enough oxygen elsewhere.
- It is possible to start a fire using ice! This is done by making an ice lens through which the Sun's rays can ignite tinder.

Can someone share a story from their own lives about fire?

Our main passage comes from the Book of Exodus, chapter 13. In this part of the story, Moses is leading the Israelites out of Egypt, but they have not yet crossed over the Red Sea. They are near a place called Succoth. *Share the map below if you are able. A larger copy for printing is included on the last page of this study.*



We read in Exodus:

“The LORD preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way, and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light. Thus they could travel both day and night. Neither the column of cloud by day nor the column of fire by night ever left its place in front of the people.” Exodus 13:21-22

The Hebrews were being led from what was familiar – slavery in Egypt – to something completely unfamiliar. In the end, God was leading them to a place ‘flowing with milk and honey’. The Scriptures describes the light leading them as a ‘pillar of fire’.

Questions:

1. When was a time when you were somewhere that was very dark, and you could not see where you were going? What was it like to be in complete darkness? How did you find your way?
2. When was a time when you went somewhere for the first time and felt scared or frightened by the experience? How did you get past that fear?
3. The column of fire in the desert was a sign of to the Israelites of God's presence and gave them light for their travels. What do you think this can look like in our lives today? How do we know God's presence?

Fire and light have marveled people for thousands of years. Many have understood the true gift from God that they are. One of our most famous saints, St. Francis of Assisi, had a tremendous love for all of creation, but a particular affection for fire.

There is a beautiful story from the life of St. Francis regarding fire and light. The story is that St. Francis said:

"In the morning when the sun rises, every man should praise God, who created it, for him, our eyes are lit during the day. In the evening, when night falls, everyone should praise God for brother fire, through which our eyes are lit at night. We are all like blind men and the Lord enlightens us through the eyes of these creatures. For these and other creatures which we use every day, we must always praise the glorious Creator" (*The Mirror of Perfection: To Wit the Blessed Francis of Assisi* by Brother Leo).

Legend tells that "Francis never wanted to blow out the candle; lamp or fire ... such was the devotion and affection that led to this creature. Neither did he want one of his brothers to throw away the fire or smoldering embers, as is usual, but recommended that he place it gently to the ground in reverence of Him who created it." St. Francis in his famous 'Canticle' called fire "Brother Fire" (*The Mirror of Perfection: To Wit the Blessed Francis of Assisi* by Brother Leo).

Fire is nourished (or fed) by assimilation. Assimilation for the food - wood for example - becomes fire and flame, the flame goes up and becomes light. St. Francis saw all of this as an image of the human soul being infused by the fire of God's light and consuming us with His love.

For St. Francis, the beauty of fire is the beauty of the material that goes up and becomes light, and illuminates the darkness of the world. The Gospel of John begins by saying,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing

was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the *light of all mankind*.  
***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***”

In the flame, St. Francis contemplates the mystery of love that transforms the human heart, raising it above all fear and doubt. To love is to live in the heart. The mystery of Love, which is the unapproachable light in which dwells the Creator is revealed to Francis in all creatures, but especially in "brother fire" – for, again, fire is what transforms the material into the flame that rises up and becomes light reaching to the Heavens.

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1. What are some ways that God lights our path? How does the word of God light our path?
2. What is a time when you felt that God really helped you to see the truth or the light in a particular situation?
3. The Book of Proverbs says: “The way of the wicked [is] as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.” What do you think that means?
4. Jesus says in Matthew’s Gospel: “If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” What are examples today of those who can lead us astray as Christians - -particularly as young Christians?
5. Take a moment to think about who and what leads you? What truly guides you and directs your heart, your mind and your will? (*silent reflection*)

Who here has played Simon Says? How does Simon Says work?(*Wait for answers*)

In order to win Simon Says, you have to follow the leader. You have to do what they say and do what they do. Right? In a similar way, our eyes are supposed to be fixed on God who leads us. When our eyes gaze in another direction, we can start to drift off course. Jesus says in the Gospel of John: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Some Questions:

1. Can we hide from God? (*of course not*)
2. What is the first example of someone trying to hide from God? (*answer: Adam and Eve*).
3. Why do we sometimes try and hide from God?
4. Psalm 139 says: “If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” yet even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you” – What does this passage mean? (*You may need to read this a second time, slowly.*)
5. What would it mean to live in the light of God every day of your life?
6. What is a great gift we have as Catholics to help us live in the light? (*answer: confession*).
7. How does confession help us to live in the light? What else can help us to live in the light?

*Final thoughts:*

What is one thing you learned this evening or one thing you want to hold onto?

*Discussion*

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Our closing prayer is from St. Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church.

You are **fire**; enkindle in me your love.  
You are **light**; enlighten my mind with the knowledge of eternal things.  
You are the **Dove**; give me innocence of life.  
You are the gentle **Breeze**; disperse the storms of my passions.  
You are the **Tongue**; teach me how to bless you always.  
You are the **Cloud**; shelter me under the shadow of your protection.  
And lastly, You are the **Giver** of all heavenly gifts; animate me,  
I beseech you, with your **grace**; sanctify me  
with your **charity**; enlighten me  
with your **wisdom**; adopt me by your goodness as your child,  
and save me in your infinite mercy;  
so that I may ever **bless** you, **praise** you, and **love** you;  
first during this life on earth,  
and then in heaven for all eternity.

Amen.

St.  **Alphonsus Liguori**

