

PREFACE

One of the many benefits of reading through the entirety of God's word is that the attentive reader sees clearly the unbroken line from God working in ancient Israel, through the patriarchs—Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David—continuing on through the birth of Jesus, to the birth of the church and the end of all things and the beginning of a new heaven and new earth. There is no place in Scripture where one thing stops and another thing begins out of the blue. It is an unbroken tapestry woven intricately together from beginning to end.

Christianity is not something invented in Matthew Chapter One. Indeed, where does Matthew begin his gospel of the Messiah?

The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers... (Matthew 1:1-2)

It is an unbroken line from Abraham to the One whose death and bodily resurrection are the basis of our faith in this age—and first-century Corinth. So in the first thirteen verses of Chapter Ten, where Paul points the Greco-Roman believers in Corinth to events in the history of Israel and refers to the principal characters as “our fathers,” he means it. The patriarchs of Israel, the forefathers of every Jew, are indeed the “fathers” of every modern follower of Christ. This does not mean, as some say, that the church has *replaced*, or is *the new* Israel, but that the two share a common lineage. The Christian Bible begins with Genesis 1, not Matthew 1.

In the passage before us Paul relates portions of Israel's redemption from Egypt under Moses to the church under Christ. So let's spend a few moments reviewing the pertinent narratives from Israel's ancient sojourn. This will help us understand the imagery of Paul's analogy—as it is described in the exemplary *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (Editors: Beale and Carson, Baker Academic, 2007, p. 723), “The Israelites' experience of redemption, idolatry, and destruction is used as a lens through which the Corinthians are to view and understand their own situation.”

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire

Not long after leaving the precincts of Egypt and entering the wilderness they camped in Etham (*aye-tham*) near the Red Sea. In Exodus 13:21 Moses writes that “The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.” When the Egyptian army showed up in pursuit, the cloud moved to protect Israel.

Read Exodus 14:19-20.

Note v24, where the Lord further protects Israel, already heading through the sea, by throwing the Egyptian army into confusion: “At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion.”

Through the Sea

And of course, from watching C. B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, we all know well how the Lord gave Israel passage through the Red Sea—but let’s read the text anyway.

Read Exodus 14:21-22.

Heavenly Food

Now let’s skip ahead in the narrative ([Chapter Sixteen](#)) to the wilderness of Sin. Here Israel grumbles and complains that their diet of late does not quite stack up to the sumptuous banquets they used to enjoy when they were in bondage in Egypt. So the Lord graciously supplies them with manna and quail, morning and evening.

Read Exodus 16:9-12.

Water from the Rock

Israel moves on and camps at Rephidim ([ref-ee-deem'](#)), where they grumble again because of their thirst, saying, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” ([Exodus 17:3](#)). So once again the Lord suffers their ingratitude and bad manners, and miraculously gives them water.

Read Exodus 17:5-7.

Now let’s read the passage before us in First Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-6.

As we study this passage, especially vv1-13, we need to keep our eye on the ball. Paul is not setting up some specific equivalency between the exodus events and the Corinthian church; for example, he is *not* saying in v2 that Israel was “baptized into Moses” in precisely the same way that Christians are baptized into Christ ([Romans 6:3](#)). All of this is about idolatry; Paul is setting the table with events from the past to illustrate the very real danger in fooling around with pagan idols—even the danger in such seemingly harmless practices as dining in one of their temples. Chapter Ten begins with an explanation, the grounds for his warning at the end of Chapter Nine regarding the possibility of disqualification.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

The “For” (*gar*) that begins v1 gives us a clue that once again we have an unfortunate chapter break. This passage follows on seamlessly from the end of Chapter Nine.

When the apostle writes that “I do not want you to be unaware,” he means that he has something he imagines that some of the readers may know, but may not fully grasp—not unlike our situation of the moment: Verses 1-5 relate OT events with which most of us have been familiar since Sunday School days sitting before the teacher’s flannel graph. But what we may not grasp is how well they illustrate and warn us off everyday evils that could rob us of “the prize.”

We are termed “brethren” because we, as Gentiles (which probably most of the Corinthian church was as well) have been grafted into Israel—as Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. (Romans 11:17-18)

Notice all the “all”s in this paragraph—

- all under the cloud
- all passed through the sea
- all were baptized
- all ate
- all drank

which emphasizes the unity and commonality of the experiences.

Some have taken issue with the prepositions “under” and “through,” pointing out that the cloud went *before* and sometimes *after* Israel, but not over; and that they did not go through the *water* of the sea, but between *walls* of water. But this misses the point; Paul is bringing up all these scenes not as an historian, but as a minister and evangelist concerned about the fate of his flock. He wants them (and us) to see how all of these miracles are evidence for the gracious care of a loving God, protecting Israel through the wilderness. This just means that during the exodus, from beginning to end, Israel was being protected by God—they were “under” His care.

and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

We have a similar situation in v2. Precisely how was Israel “baptized”—even “baptized into Moses”—by the protecting cloud and their passage through the parted Red Sea?

Paul is not drawing an equivalency between the ordinance of Christian baptism and the passage of Israel through the sea, but lifting out elements from the exodus to show how the former illustrates what is accomplished in believer baptism. Let’s deal with the “into Moses” phrase first. The exodus was a redemptive event for Israel, as the Lord explained to Moses.

Read Exodus 6:6-7.

The ordinance of Christian baptism does not save, but it is a public demonstration that one *has been* saved. The act is a picture of the individual believer declaring that not only have his sins been washed away by the blood of Christ, but that his old self has died in/with Christ and that he will one day be raised to resurrection life in/with Christ. It is a picture of the redemption we have in Christ. Moses was a type of Christ who led Israel from Egypt to Sinai, and on to the Promised Land, through *their* process of redemption.

But even more pertinent to the context of Chapters Eight to Ten is the “covenantal separation” aspect of baptism. In Christian baptism we are publicly *identifying* with Christ; it is a visible demonstration of how we have been set apart—sanctified—by Him, and are now beginning our walk *with* Him. And Israel’s passing through the sea was, in effect, a visible demonstration of the Jew’s disengagement from Egypt and the beginning of their life with Yahweh.

Garland: Israel’s deliverance through the sea marked the beginning of their separation from Egypt and their new identity as God’s covenant community, and the term “baptism” fittingly represents that experience.