

## PREFACE

In our last session we reviewed the historical basis for this opening passage of Chapter Ten, and I pointed out that Paul is not setting up some specific equivalency between the exodus events and the Corinthian church. 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.

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-6.**

In v1 Paul references the protective and guiding cloud that accompanied Israel during its sojourn and their miraculous passage through the Red (or reed) Sea. 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 to see how all of these miracles are evidence for the gracious care of a loving God, protecting Israel through the wilderness. That “all our fathers were under the cloud” just means that during the exodus, from beginning to end, Israel was being protected by God—they were “under” His care.

In v2 the apostle mentions the same two events, but now relates them to Christian baptism. This, in one sense, has reference to our redemption in Christ, as Moses, leading Israel through the sea, was a type of Christ redeeming Israel. But more pertinent 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. **Now we are ready for v3.**

## v3-4A

*and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink...*

Just as the Israelites in the exodus had something analogous to the ordinance of Christian baptism, they also had something analogous to the Lord’s Supper—Communion. As before (vv1-2), this is not a direct correlation; Israel was not remembering the sacrifice of Jesus. Paul mentions this to reinforce his point that *all* Israel shared in Yahweh’s blessings, in this case the manna from heaven, quail, and miraculous water.

There are three problematic, or at least challenging elements in v3 and v4. The first is the word “spiritual,” used three times in vv3-4: “spiritual food,” “spiritual drink,” and “spiritual rock.” Many ideas have been offered over the centuries for just what Paul means by his use of the adjective, but I think the simplest explanation makes the most sense.

In this passage Paul is painting a picture of the sovereign grace and care of God shown to Israel, and then he is going to use that picture to reinforce his position that the Corinthian’s casual and too-friendly relationship with idols is dangerous for them—and even offensive to the same God who graciously cares for them.

His use of the word “spiritual” points them to that gracious God. The manna and quail did not just happen to appear, but were miraculously sent by Yahweh; the water did not just happen to spring out of a rock, but was supernaturally produced by Yahweh. God is spirit-kind, as Jesus told the woman at the well ([John 4:24](#)), thus His acts on our behalf are of a “spiritual” nature.

But the inclusion of this word also suggests that ancient Israel and the more “modern” Corinthians are to view such events from the hand of God from a spiritual perspective—that is, the necessity of living a life of spiritual *discernment*.

### **Read Exodus 16:4-7.**

Israel was to see God and His glory in their daily sustenance. The Corinthians and believers today are to see the hand of God in *all* things. We dwell in His creation; we “live and move and exist” in Him, so we are to see even apparently natural events in the light of His grace. This lesson did not find a purchase in Israel’s sojourn: the food and water the Lord God supplied elicited not gratitude and praise, but complaints. They failed His test.

#### **4B**

*for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them;  
and the rock was Christ.*

The second and third problematic words are found in the second part of v4. Paul says that the rock from which their thirst was slaked “followed them.” There is indeed a Jewish legend that describes “Miriam’s well,” shaped like a rock, as miraculously and literally traveling with them throughout their journey.

Just as he wants the Corinthians to think spiritually, Paul is thinking spiritually. He is not making the mistake of perpetuating a Hebrew myth that there was a desert rock that traveled along with Israel, miraculously dispensing water like a granite *igloo* cooler. He is thinking spiritually, and perhaps remembering the Song of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 32.

## Read Deuteronomy 32:3-4

Here we have the “rock” imagery voiced by Moses, a most pertinent euphemism for those who have been traveling the desert waste, representing the ageless, solid, dependable Yahweh who had been with them from the beginning—or as described in our passage, “a spiritual rock which followed them.”

## Read vv10-11.

But if we read on in the Song of Moses, we discover another reason it may have come to Paul’s mind.

## Read Deuteronomy 32:15-18.

Here again we have the warning from antiquity—even the antiquity of the Corinthians. *God has been your Rock—and for you, Corinthians, the Rock is (and even “was”) the eternal Christ Jesus. Don’t follow the path of Israel who turned from their faithful God to worship “strange gods”, “abominations” and “demons.”* And what happened to them?

v5

*Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased;  
for they were laid low in the wilderness.*

Notice first the contrast: Up till now Paul has been emphasizing that all of this happened to “all”—the care and protection, the generosity with food and drink, the grace was to “all.” But not all rebelled; “with *most* of them God was not well-pleased” (emphasis added). This is a bit of an understatement by Paul, that “God was not well-pleased.” The words *ouk eudokeo* (not well-pleased) means that the Lord did “not think well of,” did not approve of the behavior of most of Israel. Indeed. **How many men from the original group made it to the Promised Land?** Just two: Caleb and Joshua ([Numbers 14:30](#)).

The rest were “laid low”—which is not the best translation. The NKJV and NIVs are better: “scattered in the wilderness.” YLT is best: “strewn in the wilderness.” It is a graphic picture of a desert landscape strewn with the corpses of the Jews who chose to follow after “demons who were not God” instead of the one true God who had brought them out of bondage and taken care of them through a forty-year sojourn through the desert. They demonstrated their lack of faith and trust in Him by fearing they could not conquer those who were in Canaan. They didn’t trust that Yahweh would fight for them. So all but two—just two—were left to die in the wilderness.

**Sidebar:** One might justifiably point out that the Lord God had to take care of them for all of forty years because it was He who imposed the forty years on them in the first place. True, but one can also see this as an act of grace: He could have destroyed them on the spot; instead he granted them the remainder of their natural lives with family and friends.

#### v6-7A

We don't need to wonder why Paul is telling us all this in the first five verses. He tells us flat-out in v6 and the beginning of v7.

*Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were;*

His underlying purpose was not water baptism, the food and drink of communion, or mysterious rocks that followed Israel through the desert. His purpose was not to regale the Corinthians with the exodus saga. His purpose was—and is—to warn believers of the danger in becoming too familiar with pagan idols.

Don't be too quick to dismiss this as having little relevance for us today, for we are surrounded by idols. I offer as evidence the exalted place organized sports—and, more pertinently, its players—holds in the hearts of many. Take, for instance, the recent tragic deaths of nine individuals in a helicopter crash in California. Here is how one of the initial reports began the story: “Legendary NBA player Kobe Bryant has died in a California helicopter crash, reports said Sunday. He was 41. The retired Los Angeles Lakers star was traveling in his private helicopter over Calabasas when a fire broke out, sending the chopper spiraling from the sky...” ([New York Post, 1/26/2020](#)). One reporter opened his article with, “Kobe Bryant’s death is unique tragedy.” The Lakers General Manager said, the loss of Bryant and his daughter “has been an amputation of part of my soul.”

There is no denying that the accident was a tragedy—not just for the Bryant family, but for the families of all nine aboard (can anyone tell me the names of the others?). But there is also no denying that some are speaking of Kobe Bryant as if he were a god—more than two million have signed a petition to place his image on a new NBA logo. Many speak not just of his loss, but speak of him in *exalting, glorified* terms. This one example reveals that there is little difference between the civilized precincts of Athens or Corinth of the first century and cities today. *All* were and are filled with images and shrines to idols.

The untimely death of Kobe Bryant has brought to the surface just one instance of modern idolatry—just one of too many to count.

In our next session we will revisit vv6-7 as we proceed into the next paragraph. But for now let us close with this:

- Is there on any of the walls of your house a life-sized image of a sports hero? Would you do the same with a life-sized image of Christ Jesus?
- Is there anything in this world more important to you than Christ and His kingdom?
- Is there anyone in this world more important to you than Christ and His kingdom? ([Mark 10:28-31](#))
- Is there anything or anyone in this world that receives a share of your devotion due Christ Jesus?
- Finally, is there anything or anyone vying for room in the God-space of your heart reserved for Lord Jesus?

Only the individual can answer these questions; only each believer can, in the quiet sanctity of the heart, answer the hard questions of lordship we all must honestly address. We are to exalt, to glorify, to bow down before *only* the One described by the apostle Paul to the Colossians, who is

... the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1:15-18)