

The Baptism of Moses: 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Corinth was a Greek city probably better described as 'pagan.' Many of the early Christians in Corinth had lived lives of idolatry and immorality. However, some of the Christians must have had a Jewish background. That would appear to be the case based on the number of references to events in the Old Testament found in Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians.

A number of phrases found in 1 Corinthians 10 find their meaning in the events surrounding the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. These references can be puzzling to people today just as they must have been to the Greek Christians in Corinth in the first century. This article will consider the first four verses in light of the Old Testament record.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 NASB

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

Our fathers were all under the cloud.

This statement relates back to the cloud that led and protected Israel after their deliverance from Egypt. The cloud is first seen in Exodus 13 where God led the people in the cloud. At night the cloud was changed to a pillar of fire to give light. In this way they could continue their journey at night. When they arrived at the Red Sea they were trapped between the sea and the Egyptian army. God went behind them in the cloud and stood between them and the army to provide protection from the Egyptians.

All passed through the sea.

This reference, from Exodus 14:1-22, describes Israel's safe passage *through* the Red Sea. God directed Moses to use his staff to divide the waters of the sea. The waters were pushed back on two sides and the people walked across the bottom of the sea on dry land.

All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

This is a figurative use of the term baptism, which means immersion. The people were figuratively

immersed in the cloud as it surrounded them. God was originally in front leading, but later moved behind them to protect them from the Egyptian army. They were figuratively surrounded or immersed in the cloud.

When the waters of the Red Sea were pushed back, the sea was as walls to the people as they passed through. The people were figuratively immersed, being surrounded by the sea.

Coupled with a basic understanding of baptism in the gospel accounts, these two references to a figurative baptism help us to understand Israel's *baptism into Moses*. In the gospel accounts those who were baptized by John the Baptist became disciples of John. Likewise, those who were baptized by the followers of Jesus became disciples of Jesus.

Consider the result of Israel's baptism in the cloud and the sea.

Exodus 14:31 NASB

And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they **believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.**

The Israelites 'believed in' the Lord and in Moses. This statement is parallel to the New Testament examples of John and Jesus. Those who believed were baptized and became disciples of John or Jesus. So, the Israelites believed in Moses, were figuratively baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, and therefore became his disciples.

Spiritual food and spiritual drink:

Israel received manna and quail to eat and water to drink. These were provided directly by God. However, they were instructed to collect only according to their daily needs. (Exodus 16 & 17)

The people were taught to live by faith in God's daily provision. So, while the food and drink nourished their physical bodies, the people learned to rely on the Lord. That reliance produced faith in God and is therefore referred to as spiritual food and spiritual drink.