

Moses Lesson 7 Article

Was the pillar of smoke and fire simply the result of an altar fire being burnt by the priests? The Bible does not indicate the physical origin, if any, of the cloud or fire. However, it emphatically claims that throughout the exodus events the cloud was inhabited by God (v. 21) and possessed lifelike qualities. When Israel was threatened by the Egyptians the cloud moved between the Israelites and their enemies, expanding and spreading so as to hide the Israelites (14:19). Whenever Moses entered the sacred tent the cloud would descend and stand at the door (Nm 12:5). It could also come down and rise up again to execute judgment (Nm 12:5–10). These characteristics suggest that the cloud had supernatural origin and control. Even if a natural explanation could be found for it, the Bible makes it clear that this cloud was supernatural, in that God controlled it and His presence resided in it.¹

The entire nation walked through the Red Sea on dry land! Yet the same sea that was salvation to Israel was condemnation to Egypt, for God used the waters to drown the Egyptians and to separate Israel from Egypt permanently. Pharaoh reaped what he had sown, for he had drowned the Jewish infant boys, and now his own army was drowned.

We must grasp the spiritual meaning of this event (1 Cor. 10:1–2). The crossing of the Red Sea is a type of the believer's union with Christ in death to the old life and resurrection to a whole new life. Israel was "baptized unto Moses" (identified with Moses) in going through the waters, and we are identified with Christ and therefore separated from the world (Egypt). The Egyptians could not pass through the sea because they had never been sheltered by the blood.

Passover illustrates Christ's death for us, while the crossing of the Red Sea pictures His resurrection. The blood has delivered us from the penalty of sin and the resurrection, from the power of sin. The first experience is *substitution*, for the lamb died in the place of the firstborn. This is Romans 4–5. The second experience is *identification*, for we are identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection; and this is explained in Romans 6–8. The crossing of Israel through Jordan into Canaan in Josh. 3–4 is a type of believer entering into his spiritual inheritance by faith and claiming it for his own. In each case, it is by faith that the Christian claims the victory.²

To put the happenings of Israel's next few months and years into perspective, we need to shift for a moment to the New Testament. There we read of God's purpose for people who come to know Him. That purpose is expressed in many ways, and yet the thrust is always the same. Ephesians speaks of becoming "mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Romans speaks of being "conformed to the likeness of His [God's] Son" (Rom. 8:29). Colossians talks of putting on "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10). Peter insists that believers be like God (1 Peter 1:14–15), and explains his demand by pointing out that we have "been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable." We have, as J.B. Phillips paraphrases, "His [God's] own indestructible heredity" (1 Peter 1:23). Jesus Himself told His disciples they were to be like "your Heavenly Father" (Matt. 5:48).

The thrust of this line of teaching is clear. For the believer, salvation is the beginning of a process in which the individual is to grow up into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Peter sums it up beautifully:³

¹ Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (106). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Ex 14:13–31). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher's commentary* (90). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.