

1. The context of our passage is that Paul is concerned that the church in Corinth might be falling away (9:24-27). So this is a warning passage, but it also contains much that is positive. For his warning, Paul uses the Old Testament: 'Look what happened to Israel!' Paul applies two elements of the Exodus story to the Corinthians: the escape of Israel through the sea (Exodus 13-14) and the miraculous provision of food and water in the desert (Exodus 16-17). And he applies these to both baptism and the Lord's Supper.
2. Note that Paul addresses the Corinthians as descendants of the people of Israel! Of course Greeks and Romans are not the natural descendants of Jews; so they are descendants in a spiritual sense. And so are we. Paul does not say that the church has replaced Israel; the church is now part of Israel, grafted into the old tree.
3. Note also that Paul presupposes that these new Christians with their pagan background know the biblical stories in some detail. (And I am doing the same with you!)
4. Paul draws parallels between the sins of the Israelites and those of the Corinthians. I will not discuss this element of the passage.
5. On the positive side, Paul compares Israel's experience of the cloud and the sea to believers' baptism. The emphasis in both is on the effect: salvation, liberation from slavery! Paul calls this a 'baptism into Moses'.
6. Paul also spiritualises the manna and the water from the rock. He calls God's physical gifts (manna and water) spiritual because they were given in a supernatural way and because of their supernatural effect. Paul even goes a step further: the rock that gave water 'accompanied' Israel, 'and that rock was Christ' (verse 4). How can he do this? The word 'rock' is often used metaphorically for God in the Old Testament: God is 'the Rock of Israel' (e.g. Deuteronomy 32: 4, 15, 18, 30 and 31, Psalm 18:2, 31, 46). If you believe that Jesus is God, it is not a big step to call Jesus our rock. The argument depends on Jesus' pre-existence. Jesus was already there with Israel. It was as Trinity that God was active at the time of the old covenant, although not under the names 'Jesus' and 'Holy Spirit'. So Paul spiritualises every single element of the narrative in Exodus:

Cloud	God's protection
Sea	Baptismal water
Manna	Communion bread
Water from the rock	Communion wine
The rock	Christ

Note that Paul does not deny the historical reality and validity of any of these things, but that he 'merely' gives them an additional 'Christian' meaning. What happened in the wilderness was a type of what is now happening to the Church of Jesus.

7. So Paul argues that both God's blessing and his punishment on idolatry apply to the church as much as to ancient Israel. The blessings are baptism and the Lord's Supper. The punishment happens if they mess up the Lord's Supper or commit idolatry.
8. Baptism is a one-off, a once-for-all, an initiation, just as Israel went through the sea once at the beginning of its existence. The Lord's Supper is repeatable, just as Israel repeatedly received manna and water; we celebrate it twice a month. These two things are called sacraments and they are closely connected. If you take Communion, you should also be baptised. If you have been baptised, you should be present at Communion regularly.

9. To sum up:

- The Old Testament is still important
- The Old Testament has a deeper meaning
- We need to keep Old and New Testament together
- Baptism and Communion matter. We should not treat them lightly