

THE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE, PART 5

Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (Exodus 13:22, NIV)

PROFESSIONAL GOLF IS PRETTY EASY ON ITS ROOKIES. When you first enter a game as a major league baseball pitcher, for instance, the same fans who have come to see the best players on the field are there to see you. Your first pitches may be thrown against an all-star, and the outcome of the game may rest on your shoulders.

On tour, however, rookies are paired with rookies. You won't have to tee it up with Rory McIlroy or Stacy Lewis your first time out. The big crowds don't follow you. You can warm your way into this. Unless you go low very early in your career, you're not going to face what we have come to call "baptism by fire."

Let's ask a question of origins. Where did we come by this expression *baptism by fire*? How about Luke 3:16: "John answered them all, 'I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'" John the Baptist drew from an Old Testament understanding to point to the work of Jesus.

In Exodus 13, as the Israelites left Egypt and the onerous rule of Pharaoh, God led his people by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. Where? To the Red Sea, where they would cross on dry land to escape into the Arabian desert, a picture of water baptism.

Even the most casual readers of the Bible know this story, maybe from movies more than from Scripture itself. What fails to happen in such casual study is for a connection to be made between these dramatic events of old and the saving events of the New Testament. But in 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul drew a direct line from Moses to us. He wrote that the Jewish forefathers (notice that he called them "our forefathers" even though he was writing to a Gentile-inclusive audience) "were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

Baptism in Christ is no easier than escaping the grip of Pharaoh. Paul told the Romans that it meant being baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6:3). That, brothers and sisters, is fire. It is a trial intended to purify us. When we identify with the cross, we identify with its difficulty. But raised from that baptism, we also identify with its victory.

Opening questions Do you like to play golf in front of others? How does the game change for you when you have an audience? What's a "baptism by fire" experience you've had in life?

READING Exodus 14:10-31, Romans 6:1-14, Mark 10:35-45

The power of God at the brink of disaster
 What parallels do you see between the Red Sea account and the power of God over sin in your life? How does seeing God's power at work in our lives increase our fear of and trust in him?

Death and resurrection
 What understanding does Romans 6 provide about the true purpose of baptism in Jesus? How might we effectively count ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ?

Figurative baptism
 In Mark 10, how did Jesus refer to baptism in a non-literal way? How does this help you understand some of the trials God may walk you through?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2015 Links Players International. A 4-minute video accompanies today's study at <http://youtu.be/Qbc6f9sUx28>