

# 1 Corinthians

## Bible Study

### Israel as an Example

#### 1 Corinthians 10:1–12

Paul compares himself to an athlete who needs to continually train to perform properly. The athlete's goal is to win the prize, and it should be our goal to do the same, but in a spiritual manner. Our prize is the reward we will receive for proper service (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). Our reward is based on properly building upon Paul's doctrine. If we do not build properly on the doctrine that Paul was given by Jesus Christ, then our work will be burned up. Serving the Lord requires that a person put aside worldly rewards for eternal ones.

The Corinthians had failed at maintaining a proper Christian walk. They went their own way, ignoring Paul's doctrine, seeking their own desires above God's. Instead of running the race to receive the prize, they had fallen and seemed to be clueless that they were in such poor spiritual condition. This was because they had gotten away from God's word as given to them by Paul four to five years earlier when he was with them for 18 months. Paul is now trying to get them on track by writing to them and comparing them to the nation of Israel traveling through the wilderness. By doing so, he hoped that they would come to understand their true spiritual condition.

It seems a bit curious that Paul continually quotes the Old Testament and uses examples from the nation of Israel to help an assembly of Grace believers to get back on track. First, Paul was using what was basically the only Scripture available, since the New Testament books had not yet been written. What this proves is that Paul's writings do not contradict with any other Scripture. Although he is writing about a new dispensation, understanding the Old Testament is necessary to fully understand Paul's 13 books. The whole Bible is written for our learning and understanding (Romans 15:4).

Second, many members of the Corinthian church were Jews who initially worshiped at the synagogue right next door to where they relocated. Even the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, became a Grace believer, which led to many other Jews becoming saved (Acts 18:8). It appears that another important leader of the synagogue, Sosthenes, later became saved (Acts 18:17; 1 Corinthians 1:1). Since many in the Corinthians church were Jews, it only makes sense that Paul would reach out to them by using Scripture and events that they were well familiar with.

#### **Israel's failure**

Paul uses Israel's failures to highlight the failures of the Corinthians church and to show them where their actions will lead them. The first five verses show them identified as a group. Israel was baptized into Moses in that they had all been identified with Moses and were all now all identified as a newly formed nation. God formed the nation of Israel, and then was going to lead them to the Promise Land where they were to be promised to be abundantly blessed. Likewise, the Corinthians church were all united as a common group, an assembly, who were being led by God and highly blessed as a people of God. However, like Israel, the Corinthians church had displeased God and were now following their own desires instead of being obedient to God.

It was very soon after God miraculously brought Israel out of Egypt that they turned away from Him to worship an idol. If Israel had been obedient, they would have been led to the Promise Land instead of wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. The wandering was a judgment upon Israel for not believing God. It was a time of humbling (Deuteronomy 8:2–3). Israel put God to the test 10 times according to Numbers 14:20–23. Paul picks out four of those testings and applies them to the Corinthians.

**Idolaters**—eating, drinking, playing (Exodus 32:1–10)

While Moses was on Mt. Sinai, the people became restless and turned away from God by worshiping an idol made from the gold of their earrings. They were turning away from the God who just led them out of Egypt and back to the idols that they had been comfortable with while in Egypt. Moses had to plead with God to not destroy this new nation.

The Corinthians were turning way from God by turning away from Paul's doctrine and making decisions using man-based wisdom. They were basically creating their own god by following doctrine that they deemed to be correct. This is why they failed to deal with the sin within the church. They thought tolerating the blatant sin of one member was demonstrating godly love when it actually was a stain on the church and detrimental to the whole congregation. This ungodly thinking was perhaps behind the manner in which they observed the Lord's supper. It was each man for himself when it came to eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 11:21). This celebration almost turned into a rowdy free-for-all.

**Fornication** (Numbers 25:1–9)

Toward the end of the 40 years, Israel was drawn into fornication with other gods because they had intermarried with the Moabites. The men of Israel had brought idols into the camp to appease their foreign wives. God's wrath was kindled as He saw Israel worshiping Baal with the people of Moab, and He sent a plague which killed 24,000 Israelites. Again, Paul is warning the Corinthians not to leave the teachings of God's word to follow a different doctrine. Like Israel turning away from God and worshiping other gods, Paul is warning the Corinthians of the dire results of doing the same with the doctrine they have been given.

**Tempting the Lord** (Numbers 21:5–35)

To tempt the Lord is to purposefully and directly go against Him with full knowledge. This is demonstrated in Numbers 21:5 when the people of Israel spoke out against God and Moses. This is another step away from God, not accepting the authority of His word. God responded by sending poisonous serpents to all of Israel. The cure was to look upon a bronze serpent set on a pole, which was a picture of Christ's redemptive work on the cross on our behalf (John 3:14). Paul uses this to warn the Corinthians not to ignore those whom God has raises up as authorities, as they were doing with the apostle Paul.

**Murmuring** (Numbers 16:41; 17:5–10)

Paul finishes these example from Israel's past by showing how she grumbled and complained against God. Korah led a revolt against Moses because he didn't like his leadership. This was also a rebellion against God. When God caused the ground to open up and consume the protestors, the rest of Israel came to Moses complaining that he was the cause of the death of almost 15,000 of "the Lord's" people. They were openly complaining against God because He took corrective action against those who were rebelling. Paul tells this in the hopes that the Corinthians will come to understand that they should not turn their back on God, or His leaders. They needed to pay attention to Paul and follow God's instructions concerning their sin. Grumbling and murmuring against God indicate how far they were from God. If the Corinthians ignored Paul, they would be turning away from God.

The Corinthians needed to humbly accept what Paul was telling them and take corrective action. Paul cautions them that those who think they are standing strong spiritually need to be careful that they don't get sucked up into the sins of those around them and fall into the carnality prevalent within the church.

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