

PREFACE

One more ancient illustration remains for us in this passage. Once we have looked at that, I want to back up and make a more wide-angled, contemporary appraisal of the message God is giving us in the first eleven verses of Chapter Ten. In our last session we made a rather detailed, and alarming, examination of vv8-9; now we are ready for v10.

Read 1 Corinthians:10:6-11.

v10

Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

There is not a lot of difference between “trying” the Lord (v9) and “grumbling” against Him (v10). Both exhibit not just bad manners and a decided absence of gratitude, but no respect for God’s righteousness and majesty.

In contrast to the illustrations in vv7-9, it is not clear to which OT scene Paul refers, for, from our vantage point about three thousand years later, it seems like the Hebrews were grumbling pretty much non-stop since they left Egypt. The reference to “the destroyer” is also not obvious.

The translators of the NIVs add “angel” to the word “destroying” to show that they believe the apostle refers to at least one of several OT references to an angel who destroys: Exodus 12:23, 2 Samuel 24:16, 1 Chronicles 21:15. This is a possible understanding of this verse, but the word “angel” is not in the text.

Another possibility is that the reference is to Satan. The Greek word translated “destroyer” (*olothreutes* [ol-oth-ryoo-tace']) is related to the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 5:5 (*olethros*): “I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the **destruction** of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” But why would Satan be part of punishing people who are grumbling against God? I would think He would rather *applaud* their efforts.

In any case, it is more probable that what is really on Paul’s mind is the grumbling the Corinthians have been doing about *him*. Two likely candidates for OT examples during Israel’s sojourn are Numbers 14 and Numbers 16:41. The entire Chapter Fourteen of Numbers is filled with Israel’s grumbling and complaining—first to Moses and Aaron, then to the Lord. There and elsewhere the Lord makes clear to Moses that when they grumble against him (Moses) they are really grumbling against God, that when they reject Moses’ leadership they are really rejecting the leadership of the Lord God—just as with the situation between Israel and Samuel (1 Samuel 8:7).

Now these things happened to them as an example,

In v11 Paul circles back to wrap up the passage into a neat package. Paul rewords slightly what he said in the first portion of v6, but the meaning, and his purpose, is the same. In v6, as here, he wrote that these ancient events took place so that we could benefit from the lessons. When you think about it, that's a fairly extraordinary statement: The purpose of future lessons was not an afterthought—as an event recorded in a history book accidentally, or additionally, might benefit a contemporary life—but *the event actually took place for this purpose!* This is different from what Paul says in Romans.

Read Romans 15:4.

But here in this chapter, in both vv6 & 11, he is saying that the events themselves actually took place for our benefit. God said, *I'm going to do this to you, Israel, for the benefit of people who will come thousands of years later.* And who can say that He is not doing the same today; perhaps he is putting each of us through certain trials and judgments for the benefit of future generations. Of course He is.

and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

In addition to this, however, they were indeed *recorded* for all time for our instruction, as a warning.

instruction^{nasb,esv}, **admonition**^{kjvs}, **warnings**^{nivb} = *nouthesia* = from <G3563> (nous) and a derivative of <G5087> (tithemi); **calling attention to, i.e. (by implication) mild rebuke or warning** :- admonition.

Then Paul adds a clause further describing his audience: “upon whom the ends of the ages have come,” and Fee seems to capture the essence of this whole verse best.

Gordon Fee: In this sentence one captures a sense of Paul's view that both the historical events and the inscripturated narrative are not simply history or isolated texts in Scripture; rather, behind all these things lie the eternal purposes of the living God, who knows the end from the beginning, and who therefore has woven the prefigurement into these earlier texts for the sake of God's final eschatological people.

From His death and resurrection Jesus Christ marks the turning of the ages; the old is on its way out, the new has begun (2 Corinthians 5:17). He has set the future irresistibly in motion; and the new people of God, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, who belong to God by grace alone, are the people of the End.

RETROSPECTIVE AND APPLICATION

What are we to take home from this extended passage of 10:1-11? We see part of the answer to this in the succeeding vv12-13, which we will look at in our next session: God's faithful attendance and control even in the midst of our temptations.

But that is not all we can glean from vv1-11. If we step back and squint at this passage, looking at vv1-5 and vv6-11 in general terms, in the first portion Paul paints a very descriptive picture of Yahweh's dependable, faithful care of Israel during the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness:

...our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,
and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
and all ate the same spiritual food,
and all drank the same spiritual drink.
For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.
(1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

And in the second portion Paul vividly depicts Israel's rebellious response to God's protection and grace. The two portions stand in stark contrast to each other—and that is precisely the dire warning the apostle is delivering.

The Active Godhead

In some respects, Paul's description emphasizes the *similarities* between OT Israel and today's Christian. He reveals the activity not just of Father God, but the Trinity in the nation of Israel—even placing Christ Himself on the scene as the "Rock" and in the cloud.

Read Exodus 14:19-20. (OT: "*the angel*"; NT: "*an angel*")

Yet even with the similarities, there is a difference. Clearly the Spirit was active in Moses, perhaps even Aaron, and later, Joshua. But He was not active in the individuals of Israel. Christ Jesus, as the pre-incarnate second member of the Trinity (i.e., "the angel of God"), is their protector and guide, but not in the intimate, personal way he is to Christian believers. And even though they are surrounded by His grace and protection, Israel had no supernatural protection, as Christians do in the blood of Christ, when Father God decides to meet out punishment (as we see in vv6-11).

A Stacked Deck

Just as with "our fathers," Israel (v1), we all must contend with a deck that is stacked against us. Paul's first admonition in the second paragraph is that we "would not crave evil things as they also craved." But that craving is built into us from birth, thanks to the rebellion and fall of our first parents in the garden. This is *why* we require the stiff warning of this passage—the detailed, at times horrific stories of Israel's rebellion and rejection of God's leadership, *and* the horrific results of His repeated judgments upon them.

Over time, as we mature in the Lord, and with the requisite assistance of the Holy Spirit, we can learn to resist these in-built, idolatrous urges. But so long as we dwell this side of glory, these urges will never leave us.

The Invaluable Flip-side

Happily, by God's grace we have other "examples." In vv6-11 Paul offers the bad news: the picture of what happens when one rebels against God, when one gives into these temptations and cravings. But we also have in God's word the *good* news: the gospels give us the flip-side of this passage, the righteous example of Christ's life and teachings; these, along with the epistles, offer us a picture of how good life can be living by *His* example, rather than the example of ancient Israel.

God Does Not Change

Our God is a powerful, jealous God who does not abide, or share power with, idols.

Read Isaiah 42:5-8.

He is eternal and unchanging.

Read Psalm 102:25-27.

Not just Father God, but also God the Son is unchanging.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Therefore we cannot dismiss the examples Paul has put forth as simply acts of the wrathful God of the OT. No, the OT God is the NT God, and He still hates idolatry and sin. That same wrath is still there, and we are shielded from it only by the shed blood of Christ. There will come a day, a terrible day when everyone on earth will see firsthand the wrath of God—as well as the awful wrath and judgment of His Son.

Read Revelation 6:14-17.

We dare not quickly dismiss these disturbing illustrations of what happens when one chooses to serve another god.