

LESSONS FROM THE ANCIENT ISRAELITES

Intro: Over the past few weeks we've been reading together about the journey of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. Are there important lessons we could learn from this reading? Indeed there are! In fact, Paul reviews these events before the Corinthians and made this observation:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

What lessons could we learn from the experiences of the children of Israel?

Salvation is not inevitable because we have become God's people.

Paul urges the Corinthians to see that they had a lot in common with the ancient Israelites.

They both experienced a "baptism".

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that 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; (1 Corinthians 10:1-2)
For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, (1 Corinthians 12:13a)*

They both received the word of God to sustain their spiritual life.
and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:3-4)

The reference in these verses was not to the manna that fell from heaven or the water that poured from the rock; but to a spiritual counterpart of which they were a sign.

And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

In the same way, the Corinthians also received the words of God to sustain their spiritual life.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Yet having these experiences with God did not assure salvation.

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10:5)

The Israelites as a people had witnessed some astounding miracles. (the cloud, the pillar of fire, the parting of the Sea, manna & quail from heaven, the miraculous preservation on numerous occasions, signal demonstrations of God's presence, and sometimes wrath)

Surely people subject to such great demonstrations would believe.
And yet Israel disobeyed God!

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)

All of us need to be reminded of this from time to time. Being baptized is not the ultimate requirement to go to heaven. And we could fill our meeting place with the people who once obeyed the gospel and left the faith. The danger is real!

How can we keep this from happening to us?

We need to beware of the temptations Satan can place before us!

Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. (1 Corinthians 10:6)

In every age there are fundamental challenges to faith that can capture our desires and lead us away from the Lord. Paul mentions several besetting sins of the Israelites that were a danger to the Corinthians as well and to us!

Idolatry

And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." (1 Corinthians 10:7)

Paul is referring to the incident of the golden calf! The Israelites quickly abandoned their commitment to serve God alone.

In every age, Satan creates a religion of convenience, a buffet of religions tailored to every taste, a god created for the occasion that lets man profess faith and live as he pleases.

And sometimes things become idols when they get between us and God. So beware when anything has such a grip on your interest or time that it begins to keep you from fulfilling your duty to worship God and serve others. You might just be bowing down in front of your own "golden calf".

Fornication

Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. (1 Corinthians 10:8)

The Israelites had camped near the Moabites and the Israelite men who attracted to the sensuous worship of the Moabite women which involved the worship of Baal in cult prostitution.

Again, in every age, Satan has used fornication as a temptation to ensnare God's people. In our society, there remain such lures for the naïve to lead them to

destruction. The media preaches a doctrine of sensuality.

Testing God

Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. (1 Corinthians 10:9)

This the even recorded in Num. 21 in which the Israelites had lost faith in God's power to provide their needs.

And the people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." (Numbers 21:5)

God's people may fall by losing faith in God's care and protection during trying times. When we question God's provision we are essentially blaspheming God, His love, power, and willingness to bless. Be careful about your attitudes when things are difficult; it may provide fertile soil for seeds of resentment and bitterness toward God that will destroy us.

Grumbling

Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1 Corinthians 10:10)

The reference is to the rebellion of Korah that resulted in the deaths of many of the Israelites because they were not pleased with God's designated leaders, Moses and Aaron.

But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord's people." (Numbers 16:41)

It is interesting that each sin seems less wicked and maybe even more legitimate. It reveals the subtlety of Satan to even use our faith against us when we grumble about our spiritual leadership.

We have the advantage of knowing how Satan may attack! We need to be careful that these sins do not characterize us!

We need to be aware of God's help in overcoming temptation!

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Paul urges the Corinthians to see that all of us must encounter the same tempter and hence the same basic temptations. What the Israelites faced the Corinthians faced. What the Corinthians faced we face.

Our temptations will never be beyond our ability to withstand. God will never put us helplessly into the hands of a being as powerful as Satan. Instead Satan is put under limitations. He cannot tempt us any more than any other human being.

But in addition, Paul says that God will faithfully provide a way of escape from every temptation. What an amazing statement of providence! Even before Satan has finished his snare, God has already foiled his plan. He has already cut a doorway out of the prison in which Satan hopes to keep you. But we must use our faith to look for the way out and take that door!

Conclusion: Paul's words in 1 Cor. 10 were intended to warn us. But they were not intended just to warn us, but to encourage us! The dangers are real; but the "good news" is that with God's help we can prepare for and overcome temptations so that "we may be able to bear it".

If you are feeling unconcerned right now, I would urge you think more cautiously and see the dangers lurking.

If you're feeling weak right now, I urge you to think more boldly and see the "good news" of this verse.

If you're feeling guilty right now, I urge you to step back into God's way.

Or if you haven't yet even obeyed the gospel, I urge you to accept the Lord's invitation.