

God's Tests & God's Outcomes

From First Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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Our New Testament reading and the Scripture text is 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verses one through 13. Hear God's Word.

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; 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. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 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." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 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. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. 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, so that you will be able to endure it.¹

May God be pleased to bless us with the reading of his Word, amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, again it is our privilege to look into your Word. As we do so, we pray that you would be pleased to visit us with your Spirit, to enlighten our minds, to give us light in

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

our hearts, to give us a quickening by your Spirit that we might be engaged with your Word. That we might learn from your Word, not only intellectually, but, Father, that we might practice that which we read and that which we learn as truth from your Word. So be pleased to bless us now as we look into this portion of Paul's epistle which is, as we understand it, inspired by your Spirit. Bless us, now, we ask, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The text is 1 Corinthians 10 verses one through 13. The text ends with that classic verse which is often memorized, verse 13. "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 that you will be able to endure it."² Or, you will be able to persevere.

This is a text that is often placed on wall hangings. You may remember I mentioned to you once before that Dr. Jay Adams, who is a prolific writer and counselor as well as being a preacher, says that Evangelicals have a disease called plaque-osis. They take texts from Scripture like verse 13 and put them on wall plaques. They hang them on the wall. And Dr. Adams says, "I would like to make contextual wall paper."

Verse 13 is a text in which the context is important. The context has to do with the Church of the Old Testament, the people of God in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul is drawing a comparison between the Church today and the Church in the Old Testament. And he is saying, "You don't want to be like the Church in the Old Testament." Then he comes to verse 13.

And so we need to pay attention if we are going to understand verse 13. We need to pay attention to the Church in the Old Testament. And the lesson, I think, that Paul is giving us is simply this. Learn from the Church in the Old Testament. And then when you tack on verse 13 you understand that you are to persevere in the tests that God brings your way. So here is the lesson once again. Learn from the Church in the Old Testament and persevere in your testing.

You see, Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, goes immediately to the Church in the Old Testament. Look at verses one through four in 1 Corinthians 10. "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers..."³ You notice how he puts it, "our fathers." He is speaking to the Gentiles in Corinth. He connects the Corinthians with that Old Testament church.

... 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 were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.⁴

² 1 Corinthians 1:13.

³ 1 Corinthians 10:1.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.

Paul goes back to that Old Testament Church, redeemed from bondage, the bondage of Egypt. He reminds the Corinthians that that Old Testament Church was led by that man Moses who was, in effect, their Redeemer. He led them out of Egypt. He really didn't want this task. He didn't want to perform this work. He thought he was a man that couldn't speak well and he didn't think he would be a good leader. But God pressed him into this service and so he led the people out of Egypt. He led the people through the Red Sea as on dry land. And Paul says, "All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."⁵ They were united to Moses as Moses led them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea and then into the wilderness.

Paul then says, "All ate the same spiritual food,"⁶ the manna from heaven, "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them."⁷ And Paul has in mind here two incidents. The first is the incident in Exodus 17 where Moses struck the rock and water came out. Then he has the later incident in Numbers 20 at the end of the wilderness wanderings where Moses, commanded to speak to the rock, in frustration struck the rock twice. He was more than a little aggravated because of the grumbling of the people of Israel. Paul has in mind all of these wilderness wanderings from beginning to end. And he is reminding the Corinthians of these wilderness wanderings.

And he says the rock which followed Israel, symbolized by the water that came from the rock in the first place and the rock in the second place, the rock that really followed them was Jesus Christ. So Christ was, as Paul says, with the people. Paul is telling us this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The people in the wilderness is truly the *Church* in the Old Testament.

Now why did God take these people into the wilderness? Why did God take the Church of old into the wilderness? Well, they were disobedient. This is one reason for sure. But God had something else in mind as he took them into the wilderness. Turn back into the Old Testament with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter eight. And notice what God has in mind with regard to the wilderness wanderings. You see, when we read the Bible the main character is God. We want to know what God is up to. And here we get a window, a picture, a view as to what God is up to. Deuteronomy chapter eight verses one through tree. "All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers."⁸

In Deuteronomy the people of Israel have now passed through the wilderness and they are in Moab. They are at the verge of Jordan. They are ready to pass into the Promised Land. And Moses reminds them now in verse two, "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might

⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:2.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Deuteronomy 8:1.

humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”⁹

God was interested in the people’s hearts and he was testing them to know what was in their hearts. Obviously God himself did not need to know what was in their hearts. But the test was to show the people what was in their hearts, that they might see what was in their hearts, that they might understand the nature of their own hearts. And so the Church in the wilderness is a Church that underwent various tests.

Let’s read on.

You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 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.¹⁰

You see, ultimately the tests were to bring the people to an understanding of their own hearts. In their hearts they were to grasp the fact that life is not about material things. Oh, yes, we need bread. We need to eat. We do need shelter. We need clothes. But ultimately life is not centered around these material things. Life is centered around God. Life is centered around his Word and life in accordance with his Word. And this was what the testings were all about with regard to the Church in the Old Testament.

Let’s go back, now, to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Israel’s testings did reveal their hearts, the content of the hearts of the people. This is what took place. And we can say the same thing about you and me. You see, Paul is making a comparison now between the Church in the wilderness and the Church today. And part of the dynamic is that as God tested the Church in the wilderness, so he tests the Church today, so he tests you and me.

Israel faltered. Look at verse five. “Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.”¹¹ They faltered under the testings through which God was pleased to take them in the wilderness. And part of what Paul is anxious about is this. There is this similarity between the Church in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament with regard to testing. Paul does not want the Church in the New Testament to falter like the Church in the Old Testament.

Look at verse 12. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”¹² You see, there it is. The Church in the Old Testament faltered. The people fell. And they fell literally, in the wilderness, because of God’s judgment. And so the apostle

⁹ Deuteronomy 8:2.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 8:3-4.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:5.

¹² 1 Corinthians 10:12.

says to the Church at Corinth and he says to you and to me this morning, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”¹³

You see, if you think you have got it all together and you puff up your chest and beat yourself on the chest a little bit and say to yourself, “I have got it together. I have no cares. I have no worries in this world,” “Take heed,” the apostle says. Watch out. God is going to test you. If he has not already tested you, he will test you.

One of the ways God is testing his people today is with this economic situation, with this economy. This is a test. And part of the way the test comes to fruition is this. As there is the prospect that when you do your taxes charitable giving may no longer be a deduction, will you continue to give a tenth of all as God commands? Will you? Will you do so because God commands it? Or will you adjust your giving because of an adjustment in IRS regulations? This is a test, you see. And as the pressure economically comes down upon us, God is saying, “Look at your heart. Are you my servant in every respect?” Are you my servant with regard to the tithe? This is one test that comes close to home. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”¹⁴

Now, the apostle Paul adds to his argument by telling us that the Church in the wilderness is an example for us. Look, again, at our text, verse six. “Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.”¹⁵ Do you see the connection? Look at the Church in the Old Testament. They craved evil things. These things happened as an example for you so that you would not crave evil things as they did.

Now you might say to yourself, “Well, that was the Church in the Old Testament.” True. But get the connection that Paul is making. The connection he is making is that there is a similarity between the Church in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. They are not disconnected. God deals with the Church in the New Testament in many ways similar to the way he dealt with the Church in the Old Testament with regard to these tests.

Look at verse 11. “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.”¹⁶ Think about this for a moment. When God took the children of Israel out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness and performed these tests, these examinations, so that the people might understand the content of their hearts, God had you in view. He had me in view. He had the Church in the New Testament in view. He was already setting up the people of old as an example for you and for me. I think this is rather startling. This was part of God’s plan.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:6.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:11.

And if you look at verse 11, the word translated “example,” is actually the word “type.” In other words the apostle Paul is saying that the Church in the wilderness is a type of the New Testament Church. It is a picture of the New Testament Church. It is a foreshadowing of the New Testament Church. When we look back at the old Testament Church, we understand that what was to happen to them is being fulfilled in us. There is a connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament in this regard, a vital connection.

And furthermore, Paul says, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction.”¹⁷ As we have already said, the Church in the wilderness was preparing the way for us here today. And then Paul adds the telling words, “upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”¹⁸

The Church in the Old Testament was always looking forward to Jesus Christ. And when Jesus Christ came history was altered. There was a dramatic change that took place. This is why we use dates indicating Before Christ [B.C.] and the Year of our Lord [A.D.]. Everything changed with the coming of Jesus Christ. We entered a new age, a new era. Paul calls this new era the ends of the ages. And we are in the ends of the ages. The Old Testament Church was pointing toward the ends of the ages. But we are now there. And Paul wants us to look back and understand the connection between us and that Old Testament Church. We need to learn from that Old Testament Church. That Old Testament Church is an example for us and a type looking forward to our times.

And so, Paul gets a little bit more specific with regard to this example in the Old Testament. Please look at verses seven through 10. “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.’”¹⁹

In the Old Testament reading we heard Exodus 32 about Moses coming down from the mountain and discovering, to his dismay, the people worshipping a golden calf. And here you get this little quip with regard to Aaron. “Oh, we threw the jewelry into the fire and out popped this calf.”²⁰ Oh really.

You see, when Moses was out of sight God wanted to know what the people would do. Would they remain faithful to his Word? It was a little test. Jesus Christ is out of sight. Are we faithful to his Word? This is part of the test you have and that I have.

Verse eight. “Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.”²¹ Paul has reference here to the children of Israel getting acquainted with Moabites and worshipping Baal and getting caught up in the cult of Baal which

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:7.

²⁰ See Exodus 32:24.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 10:8.

involved sexual immorality. And Paul is saying, “Let us not act immorally as some of them did and 23,000 of them fell.”²² God judged in that situation and thousands died.

Now significantly enough what was Paul dealing with in the Corinthian Church? Earlier, if you read 1 Corinthians, you read about Paul dealing with food offered to idols. And you read about immorality in the Corinthian Church, incest. This was personal for the apostle. And he is saying to the Corinthian Church and he is saying to you and to me, look back at the example of the Old Testament Church. Learn from that example.

Verse nine. “Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.”²³ Paul here has in mind the people challenging Moses after they had been feasting on the manna and the quail sent from heaven. The people say to Moses, “We loathe this miserable food that you have given to us.”²⁴ That surely made the Lord smile. And because the people challenged God and challenged Moses, God sent serpents among the people. Then God said, “Set up a bronze serpent on a pole and anyone who looks on the serpent will live.”²⁵ This is the incident to which Paul refers.

And, of course, there is a reference to Christ here. Christ himself said, “As the serpent was lifted up on that pole, so I must be lifted up so that men will look upon me and women may look upon me and children may look upon me and if they believe in me they will have life.”²⁶ You see, there is a connection between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church. And the connection is with us.

And then we have verse 10. “Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”²⁷ Paul here has in mind the aftermath of Korah’s rebellion. You may remember the story of Korah’s rebellion and God’s displeasure. The whole family was swallowed up as the earth opened. They fell into the earth and then the earth closed up again. Then the people said to Moses, “It is your fault, Moses, that these people died.”²⁸ And the people grumbled against their leadership. They accused Moses. And there was great division in the nation of Israel.

Do you remember what Paul says to the Corinthians? “Some of you are saying, ‘I am of Paul.’ Others of you are saying, ‘I am of Apollos.’”²⁹ He said, “No, no.” You are not to think this way. Remember the example of the children of Israel. You are of Christ. And so Paul is exhorting the Corinthian Church. He is also exhorting you and me to look at the example of the Old Testament Church.

²² See 1 Corinthians 10:8.

²³ 1 Corinthians 10:9.

²⁴ See Numbers 21:5

²⁵ See Numbers 21:8.

²⁶ See John 3:14-15.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:10.

²⁸ See Numbers 16:41.

²⁹ See 1 Corinthians 3:4.

And then we come to verse 13. “No temptation has overtaken you,”³⁰ Paul speaks to the Corinthians—and by way of the Corinthians he is speaking to you and me. “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, so that you will be able to endure it.”³¹

Now when you look at your text, the little word “temptation” may be translated “test.” It is the same word, but it can be translated either way, as “temptation” or as “test.” But because of the context, you see, because of where we find 1 Corinthians 10:13, in the context of the testing of the Old Testament Church, it is a better translation to make it “test.”

“No test has overtaken you but such as is common to man.”³² In other words, God doesn’t give you a test that is unique, that he hasn’t given to someone else. We usually take this posture. “Oh, but you don’t know what I went through,” as though my situation absolute unique. No one else in the universe could have possibly experienced the things that I have experienced. Not so. Just look around a little bit. No test is unique.

“No temptation [or test] has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able.”³³ God will not give you a test you cannot sustain as a Christian man or woman. Do you hear that? No test will come upon you by the hand of God—God is in absolute control of all things—God will not give you a test you cannot sustain. Thus says the Lord. “God is faithful and will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able, but with the test will provide—and the English version says a way of escape.”³⁴ But another way to translate “way of escape” is “outcome.” He will provide the outcome. God knows the end from the beginning. And when he puts you through a test he knows what the outcome is and he has already assured you, people of God, that you are able to sustain the test. Praise God that this is the case.

The text goes on to say, “But with the test will provide the outcome, also, so that you will be able to endure it.”³⁵ You will persevere. This is the perseverance of the saints. You will endure. If you are a saved child of God, if you are justified by grace through faith and you are on the road of sanctification, God will complete the good work that he began in you. He will. You will be able to endure it. You will be able to persevere.

You are, friends, the recipients of a new age in which Jesus Christ has already come and the glory of the new age is upon you. And no test will come upon you that you are not able to sustain. God is faithful and will cause you to endure it. And part of the dynamic is this, that you are to look back at the example of the Old Testament Church because

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ See 1 Corinthians 10:13.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

God is testing. Unlike the Old Testament church, as God tests, you are to persevere in your testing.

This is the message. Looking back at the Old Testament Church and the people, see how they faltered and see how they failed. You can learn from them. And then you can persevere in your testing.

I go back to the current economic crisis once again. And it is an economic crisis. Jobs are on the line. This is the real world. Savings accounts, retirement funds, 401ks have been devastated. Perhaps you are in this situation. God is testing. He is testing the content of your heart and my heart. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the God.”³⁶

Jesus Christ quoted these very words from Deuteronomy chapter eight when he was in the wilderness, put under a time of testing when the devil came to him. Jesus Christ quoted these same words from Deuteronomy, from the *Old Testament*. Jesus Christ knew the stories of the people in the wilderness and the people in the Old Testament. And he taught about them. And as we have seen in the apostle Paul, they were given to us as examples.

When you look at your Bible do you realize that over three quarters of your Bible consists of the Old Testament? Do you realize this? And less than one quarter of your Bible consists of the New Testament. There is a message there. You need to learn from the Church in the Old Testament and persevere in your testing. There is a connection between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church. God tested that Old Testament Church and he is testing you and me, your heart and my heart. What will the outcome of the test be? If you think you stand, take heed, lest you fall. Learn from the Old Testament Church and persevere in your testing.

Let's pray.

Father, we don't always connect the dots. We don't always think about the Old Testament Church in the terms that Paul thinks about that Old Testament Church. Forgive us. And as we ply the pages of your Word may we see how, through the ages, you have been pleased to deal with your people. May we learn from this as we observe how you tested your people to reveal the content of their hearts. May we realize that you are going to do the same thing with us. Thank you for the lesson from Paul that you are not going to test us beyond our ability as Christians. You already have the outcome in mind. And you are going to cause us to persevere. So may we, as your people here today, oh Lord, learn from the Old Testament Church and may each one of us persevere in the testing that comes out way. Hear us we ask in the name of Jesus Christ who is the only Lord and King whom we gladly serve. Amen.

³⁶ See Deuteronomy 8:3.