
Bible Knowledge Commentary - 1 Cor 10:1-13

(2) The Negative Example of Israel ([10:1-13](#)).

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(2) The negative example of Israel ([10:1-13](#)).

10:1. So that the Corinthians might not think God's discipline would be an unlikely eventuality for a people so blessed as they ([1:5](#)), Paul cited the illustration of another group of people who were greatly blessed by God but yet experienced His severe discipline. Israel of old was reckless and unrestrained after her physical and spiritual freedom from tyranny in Egypt. As a result God meted out severe discipline by cutting short the lives of many Israelites. They were all in the "race" ([9:24](#)), but almost all were disqualified ([9:27](#)) in spite of their advantages.

Five advantages were enjoyed by Israel. First, **all** the liberated Israelites enjoyed the supernatural guidance ([Ex. 13:21](#)) and protection ([Ex. 14:19-20](#)) of the pillar of **cloud** in their Exodus from Egypt. The Corinthians had similarly experienced God's guidance (cf. [Luke 1:79](#)) and protection (cf. [1 Peter 1:5](#)). Second, **all** Israelites **passed through the sea** and experienced a miraculous deliverance from those who sought to take their lives ([Ex. 14:21-28](#)). So too had the Corinthians experienced a miraculous deliverance—salvation (cf. [Heb. 2:14-15](#); [Gal. 1:4](#)).

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10:2. Third, the Israelites **were all baptized into Moses**, that is, united with their spiritual head, God's servant, who became the object of their trust ([Ex. 14:31](#); cf. [John 5:45](#)). The Corinthians had been baptized into the body of Christ ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)) of which He is the Head ([Eph. 1:22](#)) and in whom they trusted ([Matt. 12:21](#); [Eph. 1:12](#)).

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10:3. As a fourth privilege, the Israelites **all** enjoyed **spiritual food**, the supernatural bread from heaven ([Ex. 16:4, 15](#)). The Corinthians too had eaten bread from heaven (cf. [John 6:31-34](#)).

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10:4. As a fifth advantage, Paul listed the **spiritual drink** enjoyed by Israel in the desert ([Ex. 17:6](#)). According to Paul, **Christ** was the source of this supernatural water. Since the incident of the rock which produced water marked the beginning of Israel's wilderness wanderings ([Ex. 17:1-7](#)) and happened again near the ending of their wanderings ([Num. 20:1-13](#)), Paul concluded that Christ **accompanied them**. Christ too was the source of supernatural water for the Corinthians (cf. [John 4:10-14](#)).

It is possible that these five blessings were intended by Paul to reflect the two ordinances of baptism ([1 Cor. 10:1-2](#)) and the Lord's Supper ([vv. 3-4](#)) which the Corinthians may have thought communicated a magical protection like similar rites in some of the mystery religions. The

Corinthians did seem to have a distorted view and practice of both of these ordinances (cf. [11:17-34](#); [15:29](#)) which required correction.

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10:5. The presence of supernatural privileges in the lives of Old Testament Israelites did not produce automatic success. On the contrary, in spite of their special advantages, **most of them** (in fact, all but two members of one generation, Joshua and Caleb) experienced God's discipline, were disqualified, and died in **the desert** ([Num. 14:29](#)). In light of this, Paul's avowed need for personal self-discipline ([1 Cor. 9:27](#)) was genuine since even Moses was disqualified for the prize ([Num. 20:12](#)).

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10:6. Since this was so, the Corinthians' complacency in matters of self-discipline and their corresponding penchant for self-indulgence required immediate remedial action. Christian freedom was not meant to lead to self-indulgence but to selfless service (cf. [Gal. 5:13](#)), as the behavior of past Israelites illustrated.

Paralleling the fivefold blessings enjoyed by Israel in their newfound freedom from Egypt, Paul proceeded to recount a fivefold failure experienced by Israel during this time. He began with the Israelites' craving for the pleasures of Egypt, summarized in their plaintive cry, "Give us meat to eat!" ([Num. 11:4-34](#), esp. [v. 13](#)) God gave them what they wanted but while the meat was still between their teeth, He struck them with a plague. The Israelites named the cemetery for those who were killed "Kibroth Hattaavah" ("graves of craving"; [Num. 11:34](#)). The application to the Corinthian situation was obvious (cf. [1 Cor. 8:13](#)).

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10:7. Second, many in Israel failed by participating in idolatry ([Ex. 32:1-6](#)) and paid for it with their lives ([Ex. 32:28, 35](#)). Apparently some Corinthians were interested in more than meat in the pagan temples ([1 Cor. 8:10](#); [10:14](#)). For those who thought they as Christians could take part in idolatry with impunity, Paul intended, with illustrations like this, to knock out the false props which supported their behavior ([v. 12](#)) before God intervened and took their lives.

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10:8. A third failure among the privileged Israelites was in the area of **sexual immorality**. In the Israelites' case the immorality was associated with idolatry ([Num. 25:1-2](#)), which also characterized much pagan worship in the first century. But the Corinthians indulged in immorality in contexts other than idolatry, as the instances of rebuke in [1 Corinthians 5:1](#) and [6:18](#) illustrate. As God had brought death to the immoral among the Israelites ([Num. 25:4-9](#)), He could do in Corinth (e.g., [1 Cor. 5:5](#)), a sobering thought for the libertines who said, "Everything is permissible" ([6:12](#); [10:23](#)).

A possible solution to the apparent discrepancy in the death count found in [Numbers 25:9](#) (24,000) and Paul's figure of **23,000** may reside in the phrase **one day**. Moses and most of Israel were mourning the death of those who had been executed by the judges ([Num. 25:5](#)) or killed by

an ongoing plague. Meanwhile Phineas was dispatching an Israelite man and Moabite woman in their last act of immorality ([Num. 25:6-8](#)), which brought to completion God's discipline of the immoral Israelites and ended the death toll by plague at 24,000, a number probably intended as a summary figure.

Another explanation of the 24,000 in Numbers (contra. Paul's 23,000) is that the former included the leaders (cf. [Num. 25:4](#)), whereas the latter did not.

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10:9. The Israelites' fourth failure was the presuming of some to question the plan and purpose of God on their trek to Canaan. As a result they **were killed by snakes** ([Num. 21:4-6](#)). Did the Corinthians think that they knew better than God the path that would bring them to heaven? (cf. [1 Cor. 1:18-3:20](#))

[10:10](#)

10:10. Israel's fifth failure, which God disciplined with death, occurred when they spoke rebelliously against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron ([Num. 16:41-49](#)). Was Paul facing a similar situation as an outgrowth of the Corinthians' party spirit? (cf. [1 Cor. 1:11; 4:18-19](#)) It is possible that each of these failures found expression in the Corinthian issue of eating food sacrificed to idols.

[10:11](#)

10:11. God's dealings with Israel were more than a matter of historical curiosity for Paul. They were **examples** (cf. [v. 6](#)) and **warnings** for the Corinthians that the God with whom they had to deal, who was bringing His interaction with people to a close in this **fulfillment of the ages**, was the same God who disciplined the Israelites with death and would do so again (cf. [11:30](#)).

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10:12. If the Corinthians believed their **standing** in Christ and corresponding freedom could be exercised in sin with impunity, they were wrong, possibly dead wrong.

[10:13](#)

10:13. After kicking out the props of false security, Paul pointed toward the One on whom the Corinthians could rely. The temptations that **seized** the Corinthians were like those people had always faced. They could be met and endured by depending on **God**, who is **faithful**. Part of the Corinthian problem, of course, was that some in the face of temptation were not looking for a **way out** by endurance, but a way in for indulgence.