

The Providence of God (2) Learning from the Record of God's Works of Providence

We read in 1 Corinthians 10 the apostle Paul calling upon the Old Testament Scriptures to instruct New Testament Christians how to live. We read in verses 1ff these words:

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹²Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 10:1-13)

Last Lord's Day we began to address the biblical teaching regarding the providence of God. A simple definition was set forth in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Question #11 reads, "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions." And so, God's providence is God working in His creation through history in order to accomplish His purposes for which He created us. Before God created all things, He had decreed all that would come into existence and He determined the all things that unfold through history. From what might appear to us to be the most insignificant happening was decreed from eternity and it is taking place before us is a manifestation of God's work of providence, bringing to pass what He determined beforehand to take place.

Now one of the important matters that we stressed last week was the mystery of God's providence. Our reflection on God's providential dealings in our lives is not an easy matter. In fact, in some ways it is an impossible task. We should recognize that in assessing God's works in providence, there is an element of mystery that cannot be penetrated in this life. The account of the failure of Job's three friends testifies to the inability we have to interpret fully and accurately with precision what God may be doing through events that are transpiring in our lives. And so, although we are to reflect and attempt to assess the reasons for God's providential dealings with us, there will probably occur events to you for which you will never discover a satisfactory explanation in this life why God had done what He has done in your life. There is a mystery of God's providence that is past our finding out.

There is an exception, however, in that we are given a glimpse into God's works of providence whereby we can know with certainty the kinds of actions of God performs in His world. Much of the contents of the Holy Scriptures is a record of God's providential actions in the past. The apostle tells us that God recorded these in Scripture for us, so that we might know better how we ought to live before Him and that we might be forewarned of the consequences of our failure to do so.

By the way, as an aside, here we see another proof that the Old Testament is authoritative Scripture for New Testament Christians. I stress this once again because there are many sincere Christians who have been influenced by dispensational teaching that has taught that the Old Testament is Scripture of the Jewish people, but the New Testament is Christian Scripture. I know that numbers of our own folks have come out of that background and this is why I press this matter frequently when the opportunity presents itself. Paul had declared in 2 Timothy 3:14ff:

¹⁴But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14-16)

What “Holy Scriptures” was Paul referencing? Timothy had been taught these Holy Scriptures from his youth by his Jewish mother. Paul declared to Timothy with view to his pastoral ministry in the church at Ephesus that Timothy needed to “continue” in the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul declared that these Old Testament Scriptures were able to make Timothy “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Paul declared that these Old Testament Scriptures were useful to Timothy to enable him to know but also teach “doctrine”, “reprove” sinners and opposers to the faith, “correct” errant teaching, and “instruct” Christians in the right way to live as Christians, that is, according to God’s righteousness.

And here in 1 Corinthians 10:1ff the apostle draws attention to the record of God’s providential dealings with Israel as recorded in the Old Testament, as authoritative instruction in righteousness for Christians in the church at Corinth. Paul actually declared that God brought these events to pass in history for the benefit of New Testament Christians. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:6, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.” God caused these very events to occur in order to instruct New Testament Christians how to live.

This is the same idea that the apostle Peter had declared in 1 Peter 1.

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. ¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹²***It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you*** through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Pet. 1:8-12).

That which the Old Testament prophets recorded they had understood to be applied by Christians who had responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The things they wrote were “things that have now been announced to you.”

In another place Paul declared that the Old testament Scriptures not only pointed to Jesus Christ, but that they could not be understood rightly by the Jewish people who possessed the Scriptures unless they read and understood them by seeing their testimony to Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:12ff:

¹²Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech-- ¹³unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

And so here in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul was using Holy Scripture, here the Old Testament Scriptures, to instruct Christians how to live the Christian life. He was practicing here what he proclaimed in Romans 15:4, “***For whatever was written in former days*** (i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures) ***was written for our instruction*** (i.e. New Testament Christians), that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures ***we might have hope.***”

Now, here in 1 Corinthians 10:1ff we have a record of God’s providential dealings with His people. And although we have trouble assessing God’ acts of providence in our own lives as they occur in our experience, we can receive instruction from the record of God’s acts of providence in the past as recorded in the Scriptures. These are lessons for us to take to heart; these are warnings for us to heed. Let us identify some of these lessons for us:

The apostle draws several parallels between the experiences of the Israelites of the Old Testament with Christians of this New Testament era. **First, verses 1 and 2** show that they were in effect baptized as are New Testament Christians. “***For I want you to know, brothers, 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...***” The “cloud” is a reference to the Shekenah glory of God that provided protection for the Israelites in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The “cloud” provided shade protecting them from the harsh heat of the daytime sun. At night it was a pillar of fire to guard the camp and to keep the people of God warm in the cold desert nights. The cloud is mentioned in conjunction with the Red Sea on either side of the Israelites as they passed through the sea out of the region of Egypt as they were led by Moses. The apostle desired to show the Israelites undergoing an initial baptism (and that by immersion), in that they were baptized through water unto Moses while under the old covenant. The parallel is with Christians being baptized unto Christ under the new covenant.

Second, Paul declared that Christians ate the “same” spiritual food as did the Israelites. **Verse 3a** reads, “***and all ate the same spiritual food.***” This is a reference to the manna that God fed Israel with in the wilderness. The new covenant counter is Jesus Christ Himself as the true bread that God the Father sent to feed, and thereby give life to His people.

Third, Paul said that the Israelites also drank the same drink that New Testament Christians enjoy. We read in **verse 4**, “***and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.***” This is a reference to the water that God had miraculously provided the Israelites both at the beginning and at the end of the wilderness journey. There was a common Jewish tradition that the “rock” had actually followed Israel in its journeys providing water continuously for them. When Paul declared, “that Rock was Christ” he was not affirming that the physical rock that gave water had literally followed the Israelites, but rather the spiritual presence of Christ was with them even as He is now with His people under the new covenant. Christ provides “living water” that enables His people to never thirst, but to be always satisfied and refreshed. We read our Lord’s words in John 4 to the Samaritan woman:

¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:10-14)

But after Paul drew these parallels between the old covenant and new covenant people of God, Paul declared in **verse 5**, *“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”* As privileged as these people were, God was not “pleased” with them. That is an understatement stated for emphasis. Although these people were greatly privileged, they had fallen under God’s wrath and had failed to enter the Promised Land.

Beginning with **verse 6** the apostle draws lessons from those in Israel of old and those in Israel under the new covenant. *“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”* The reference to “these things” refer to those things that he had just identified as having parallels with New Testament Christians. Not only was the record of these events for new covenant Christians, but God in His providence had those things take place in the lives of the those Israelites so that benefit would be brought to new covenant believers that they would not replicate their errors. When Paul assigned a reason for these things having taken place in history, He was implying the reality of God providentially governing history.

We read of **the first fault** of these Israelites.¹ **Verse 7** reads, *“Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’”* This speaks of the failure of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses was on the holy mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. The account is in Exodus 32.

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

²And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” ³So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

Then they said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

⁵So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.” ⁶Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (Exod. 32:1-6)

Idolatry is a problem for which the Lord’s people should always be on guard. The apostle declared here in 1 Corinthians 10 that they should watch themselves lest they fall into idolatry. There are other New Testament warnings. We read in 1 John these words,

¹⁹We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. ²⁰And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:19-21)

Idolatry is the devotion to a false god. We know we are from God. The whole world, however, lies under the wicked one, that being the devil. He leads people to turn from the true God in order to worship a false god. An idol may be a distorted view of the true God of the Bible. There are those who profess to be Christian and claim to believe the Bible who have nevertheless so twisted and distorted their understanding of God, imposing unbiblical attributes to their “god”, that their “god” is no longer the God of the Bible. They have fashioned for themselves an idol calling it “God”, perhaps even calling their idol

¹ Some regard the description of verse 6 to be the first evil incident for which Israel was guilty. But it appears verse 7 is the first specific reference to an OT event.

“Jesus”, but it is not the God, not the Jesus, of the Bible. The apostle declared that this kind of error existed in the first century. He wrote to the church at Corinth:

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ²For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims *another Jesus* than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a *different spirit* from the one you received, or if you accept a *different gospel* from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Cor. 11:1-4)

Error of this nature can happen subtly, so much so that otherwise sincere people are deceived and led astray. But one of the common accompanying evidences of idolatry, or the worship of a false god, is behavior characterized by unrighteousness. The fashioning of an idol is commonly done so that “god” can be refashioned so that he will not be condemning of sin. Perhaps the god, or even “another Jesus” may condone or even promote sin. The children of Israel fashioned a golden calf, declared it to be the god that brought them out of Egypt, and then they proceeded to rise up and “play.” The word “play” is of course an allusion to euphemism for sexual immorality.

Generally if you see immorality condoned by a religious group or leader, even though it may consider itself “Christian”, you will discover there a corrupt view of God or of Jesus, or a corrupt view of the gospel. And yet people seem to be all too willing to put up with it.

The **second fault** that Paul identified as characteristic of those apostate Israelites was that they were immoral. We read in **verse 8**, *“We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.”* This is a reference to the event recorded in **Numbers 25:1-9**. It reads as follows:

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. ²They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.”

⁵So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.”

⁶And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. ⁷Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; ⁸and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. ⁹And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand. (Num. 25:1-9, NKJ)

In the first example Paul cited, idolatry led to the sin of sexual immorality. In this second lesson it would seem that the order was reversed in that sexual immorality led to idolatry. The Israelites first were immoral with the women of Moab. Their sin was followed in embracing Moab’s false gods. The Israelites were to keep themselves physically separate from this people, but Israel failed to do so. They did not seem to reject wholly their God, but they added to their worship Baal, the god of Moab.

Much later in Israel’s history we see something similar taking place. We read of the origin of the Samaritans in **2 Kings 17:24-41**.

²⁴ Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. ²⁵And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. ²⁶So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, “The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.” ²⁷Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, “Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.” ²⁸Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

²⁹However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt. ³⁰The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, ³¹and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. ³²So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. ³³***They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods***-- according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

³⁴To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel, ³⁵with whom the LORD had made a covenant and charged them, saying: “You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them; ³⁶but the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice. ³⁷And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods. ³⁸And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. ³⁹But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.” ⁴⁰However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. ⁴¹***So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images***; also their children and their children’s children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.)

There is a great deal of syncretism in today’s “Christianity.” Syncretism is the tendency to borrow and incorporate different views and practices of various religions or philosophies into one’s own. I listened to Joel Osteen the other evening and his “sermon” was no different than the “new age” message of Wayne Dyer on PBS. Osteen proclaimed a self-help message about people “speaking things into existence.” Positive affirmation will result in you becoming better looking, more wealthy, and healthy. When Osteen closed he led all of his listeners to pray a sinners’ prayer and then pronounced them as “born again.” Joel Osteen does not proclaim biblical Christianity. And yet “Christian” people can listen to him as well as anyone else and pull from him things they think will help them.

Recently we visited with a pastor from Uganda. He told of the common practice of people coming to church in the morning but then seeking a witchdoctor for help and counsel that afternoon. He spoke about some who profess to worship Christ on Sunday morning are involved with human sacrifice during the week. Just because someone names the name of Christ, does not make him a Christian. We need to be wise and discerning in these difficult days.

The **third fault** that Paul identified of ancient Israel for which he drew a warning for Christians is putting Christ to the test. We read in **verse 9**, ***“We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents...”*** This is a reference to the event described in **Numbers 21:1-9**.

⁴Then they journeyed from Mount Horeb by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. ⁵And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” ⁶So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

⁷Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” ⁹So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

The apostle sought to show the continuity between Old Testament saints and New Testament Christians by referring their grumbling to have been “against Christ.” When we grumble against God’s providential dealings in our lives, we do test Christ. We dishonor Him and we essentially are accusing Him of mismanaging our lives. This is great sin. Let us not duplicate the sin that resulted in God judging Israelites with death through the bite of poisonous snakes.

The **fourth fault** that Paul referenced is in 1 Corinthians 10:10. Not only are we not to put Christ to the test, but “*nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.*” This would be similar to putting Christ to the test. But perhaps if there is a difference, putting Christ to the test is to question or challenge His wisdom in how He is governing our lives, but to “grumble” is simply to complain about what we are experiencing in life.

The event to which Paul was alluding is difficult to determine precisely. Israel was guilty of grumbling against God on a number of occasions. But perhaps one of two events was in Paul’s mind when writing these words. The first is when the people of Israel “grumbled” against God after the ten spies came back from surveying the Promised Land, giving an evil report and advising that it would not be possible for them to possess the land. We read of this event in Numbers 14. But perhaps this event does not fit quite that easily because the rebellion of Israel resulted in that generation dying over the course of 40 years of wandering. Paul wrote of the grumblers being destroyed by the “Destroyer.”

But perhaps an event that better reflects Paul’s words is the occasion when some in Israel grumbled against the appointed leadership of Israel. The rebellion was led by Korah. We read of this in Numbers 16:28-50.

And Moses said: “By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. ²⁹If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. ³⁰But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD.”

³¹Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, ³²and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. ³³So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. ³⁴Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up also!”

³⁵And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

³⁶Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ³⁷“Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. ³⁸The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and

they shall be a sign to the children of Israel.”³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar,⁴⁰ to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.

⁴¹On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the LORD.”⁴² Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.

⁴⁴And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,⁴⁵ “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.”

And they fell on their faces.

⁴⁶So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun.”⁴⁷ Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people.⁴⁸ And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.⁴⁹ Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident.⁵⁰ So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped. (Num. 16:28 NKJ)

The lesson that the Holy Spirit would have us to take to heart is that rebellion against God and His authority is a very egregious sin. We are to yield to God’s directives and not grumble against God as we experience His providential dealings with us. God’s Word leads us rightly and we should be compliant and pleased that we are being governed by a good and gracious God.

After the apostle set before his readers the failures of Old Testament saints, Paul wrote of the privilege and responsibility that Christians have living in this age of fulfillment. We read in **verse 11**, ***“Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”*** God’s works of providence recorded in the Old Testament were for our benefit, for our instruction. The apostle sets forth us, New Testament Christians, as ones living and enjoying the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. We are living and enjoying the days of fulfillment.

Matthew Henry commented on this verse, and particularly the words, ***“Now these things happened to them as an example.”***

Not only the laws and ordinances of the Jews, but the providences of God towards them, were typical (i.e. “types”, instructions for New Testament Christians--Lars). Their sins against God, and backslidings from Him, were typical of the infidelity of many under the gospel. God’s judgments on them were types of spiritual judgments now. Their exclusion from earthly Canaan typified the exclusion of many under the gospel out of the heavenly Canaan, for their unbelief. Their history was written, to be a standing monitor to the church, even under the last and most perfect dispensation: *To us, on whom the end of the world has come*, including the gracious government over men.²

But then the apostle gives this warning to the Christians in the church at Corinth, and by extension the Holy Spirit addresses us as professing Christians, ***“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall”*** (v. 12).

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Flemming H. Revell Company), vol. 6, pp. 555f.

The people of Israel took pride in their standing with God. They alone were God's people, and they thought that God would always be on their side. They felt spiritually secure because God had made a covenant with their father Abraham, a covenant He promised to keep for generations to come (Gen. 17:7). Yet the Scriptures relate that because of their disobedience to God and His Word, untold descendants of Abraham fell in the desert (see v. 5; Rom. 11:20). Says the writer of Hebrews, "See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart in departing from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb. 3:12-13).³

When the apostle wrote, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall", the idea of falling here suggests the danger of having a false sense of security. It is the thought that one can belong to Jesus Christ and have assurance of salvation even while living in defiance of Him. He is warning against hypocrisy, having faith without accompanying and validating works of submission and compliance to the will of God. To "fall" would be as those Israelites who had experienced so many blessings being numbered among the people of Israel but who encountered God's wrath due to their failures and rebellions. Here again is Matthew Henry's comments:

Note, nothing in scripture is written in vain. God had wise and gracious purposes toward us in leaving the Jewish history on record; and it is our wisdom and duty to receive instruction from it. Upon this hint the apostle grounds a caution (v. 12): *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* Note. The harms sustained by others should be cautions to us. He that thinks he stands should not be confident and secure, but upon his guard. Others have fallen, and so may we. And then we are most likely to fall when we are most confident of our own strength, and thereupon most apt to be secure, and off our guard. Distrust of himself, putting him at once upon vigilance and dependence upon God, is the Christian's best security against all sin. Note, he who thinks he stands is not likely to keep his footing, if he fears no fall, nor guards against it. God has promised to keep us from falling, if we do not look to ourselves: His protection supposes our own care and caution.⁴

But lest his readers be left in despair, the apostle makes a promise in verse 13:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 10:1-13)

God in His providence sets limits so that those who are truly His people will not fall so as to be "destroyed", that is, suffer God's rejection and His accompanying wrath. God is faithful even if at times His people are unfaithful. He will see to it that He keeps His own. Again, God has promised in His providence that He will keep His own. When testing comes, He will provide a way of escape for His people so that they will not experience their destruction. "For every trial God prepares a way out."⁵

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 24f)

³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1993), p. 335.

⁴ Matthew Henry, vol. 6, pp. 555f.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 336f.