

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART ELEVEN

Many of the problems Paul had dealt with so far in this letter were the result of Corinthian Christians sharing the struggles of the church with him either by letter or visits. In chapter ten, he paused to take a broader look at the situation by reminding them of the problems the Israelites had when they travelled through the wilderness, as described in the books of Exodus and Numbers. There was clearly a very close comparison between Israel then and Corinth in Paul's time - but Paul did not say so. He simply retold the story and let it speak for itself. This is a mark of really effective Bible teaching that the application of the message is self-evident.

First Paul reminds us of how the Israelites entered into a relationship with God. They were guided by God in a pillar of cloud as we are guided by His presence in us.(Exod.13) They crossed the Red Sea behind Moses as the waters parted for them as we go down into death with Jesus Christ and are raised up by His resurrection life.(10:1,2; Exod.14) They were fed with manna from heaven as we are fed with the word of God, which shows us more of the Lord Jesus.(10:3; Exod.16) They drank repeatedly of water which God miraculously provided out of a rock as we drink of the Holy Spirit made available through Christ crucified for us.(10:4; Exod.17; Num.20)

Despite a great start, God was greatly displeased by the way they continued their lives as we too may grieve God by the way we live our Christian lives. The results for them were serious as they will be for us.(10:5) The Israelites became bored with manna and wanted meat, as we may become bored with the Bible and want other teaching.(10:6; Num.11) They made a golden calf and worshipped it as 'god', adopting a wild lifestyle which went with such practices, as we may get drawn back into idolatry and the behaviour which is associated with it.(10:7; Exod.32) The Israelites were lured into compromise by the Moabites, which began with idolatry, and led to intermarriage, as we can be tempted into believing that the Christian family does not matter.(10:8; Num.25) They blamed God for their conditions and suffered the consequences, as we will if we think we know better than Him.(10:9; Num.21) They grumbled against their leaders, Moses and Aaron, and were destroyed as we too will wreck our lives by despising the leadership God provides.(10:10; Num.16)

The failure of men and women in the Old Testament was recorded for our benefit because we make exactly the same mistakes today. Be wary of the traps that await us into which we can so easily fall when we least expect to. All of us face the same temptations. The good news is that God will not allow any temptation for which He does not also provide a way out. And remember, Jesus is the Way out. Trust Him and the Devil cannot hurt us.(10:11-13)

In the light of these Old Testament stories Paul next urged the Corinthians to move away from even the fringe of idolatry. In the next chapter he would explain the communion further. For the moment he pointed out the parallel between communion in which we share figuratively in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and taking part in idol worship by eating the meat sacrificed there. He warned us of the danger of trying to have it both ways. Though the idols are nothing, behind the whole deception of idolatry is the activity of demons, so in effect we would be worshipping them. Would not God see our participation like that of the Israelites in the wilderness?(10:14-22)

Paul went on to relate the lessons of the Israelites to the present dilemma facing the Corinthians regarding meat from heathen temples. He expanded the principles of chapter 8. Of course we are free from the Law having come into a relationship with God through faith in His grace, not through works. However there is a higher good, that of our brothers and sisters in Christ who will be

misled by our example. Love is above liberty. Someone else's salvation is so much more important than my freedom to do what I please. He summed up his advice in this way. Keep out of heathen temples. Buy and eat good meat without questioning where it came from. However if someone else questions the eating of meat from the temples, do not do it for their sake. The gospel is what matters, not meat!

In chapter 11 Paul returned to practical issues in the church.

11:1-7 Q.1 What was the problem Paul was discussing here? What Old Testament teaching or examples might he have had in mind? What was the real issue? Was it just what women had on their heads? What part in worship were women allowed to have, according to this section?

11:8-16 Q.2 What does God intend to be the relationship between men and women? How does the story of creation help us to understand His purpose for both sexes? Where would Old Testament teaching about Nazirites fit into Paul's instructions here? What about Samson?

11:17-22 Q.3 What was going wrong in the Corinthian church in their celebration of communion? What would be the underlying causes? How can we learn from their mistakes? How do we have similar problems today?

11:23-26 Q.4 What instructions had the Lord given Paul about communion? What were they to do, and what did it mean? What are we not told about communion in the church? How does what we are not told cause division?

11:27-33 Q.5 Why does it matter in what attitude of heart we come to communion? How are we to prepare beforehand? How would a right attitude of heart in taking part in communion have solved the problems that were occurring in this church? How will a right attitude of heart change our churches today?