

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, we want to praise You, and we long to do your will 'on this earth as it is in heaven'. Stay close to us each moment of the day, for You have made us and You know us. Save us from our sins and from anything that forms a barrier between us. Lead us towards the eternal destiny You have planned for us and show us the full extent of Your love we pray, both today and every day of our lives; AMEN!

### Prayer Suggestions

**Prayer ideas\_** *(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)*

*Write down a report about your day as briefly as you can. Read this out as to the Lord, and check out what you feel about this when you do it. Listen, to see if the Lord is speaking to you through this exercise.*

#### **On-going prayers**

- **Pray for Christian youth camps.** *Pray for young people who are taken on as leaders, perhaps doing this work for the first time. Pray that they will be blessed in what they do and become a blessing to others.*
- *Pray for the USA and for the success of the efforts made to stabilise the financial base of its economy. Pray that political leaders will be responsive to the real needs of people both in the USA and throughout the world, because of the international importance of the dollar*
- *Give thanks to God for your sight, and pray for those who are blind; remember that those who have impaired vision often possess*

### Meditation

This is what the Saviour does:

For He loves the people He has made.

He heals the heart,

And releases the soul to claim its liberty.

He heals the body

And breaks the bondages of oppression.

He speaks to the mind

And liberates imagination and intelligence.

He speaks to the soul

And removes the barriers to human potential.

He guides our actions

And opens all concealed avenues of fulfilment.

He guides our feelings,

And cherishes the possibilities of genuine love.

This is what the Saviour does

For He does not condemn, but brings salvation!

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

<sup>1</sup> You must not fail to understand, fellow believers, that our ancestors were all under the cloud; all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that came after them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down and died in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not become idolaters like some of them; as it is written,

'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they got up to dance!'

<sup>8</sup> We must not be sexual immoral as some of them were, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were killed by serpents.

<sup>10</sup> And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the angel of death. <sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as an example, and they were written down as warnings for us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

<sup>12</sup> So if you think you are standing, be very careful that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup> No testing has come upon you that is not common to human experience. God is faithful and he will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear. Together with the test, he will provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

## Review

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians suddenly changes gear, and Paul turns away from analysing the problems of the church, to speak about the perils of the Christian journey. Up to this point, we have followed Paul as writes to the Corinthians to advise them about church divisions (ch 1-4), sexual immorality (ch 5), legal redress (ch 6), marital issues (ch 7), food sacrificed to idols (ch 8), and the thorny issue of paying the preacher (ch 9). In all this, Paul has unearthed a catalogue of sins and failings within the Corinthian church, so he decides now to address the general problem, and to do this, he compares the spiritual journey of the Corinthians with that of the Old Testament Israelites, when they left Egypt for the Promised Land.

To begin with, Paul says that both the Old Testament people of Israel and the New Testament Church are *'under the cloud'* (10:1), meaning that they both come under God's authority. God is described as residing in clouds throughout the Bible, both in the story of the Exodus (Exodus 13,14), and, for example, in the story of the transfiguration (Matthew 17). After this, there are a number of fascinating twists and turns to the illustration.

The famous miracle of the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) is likened to baptism (10:2), and God's miraculous provision of water from a rock is likened to the elements of the Lord's Supper, that is, 'spiritual food', and 'spiritual drink' (10:3,4). Paul then connects the idea of God's provision with the idea of *'living water'* flowing from the 'rock' that is Christ. 'Living water' is the term used by John to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer (John 7:38f.), and the 'rock' refers to the famous miracle of water from the rock in the Old Testament (Numbers 20:1-11). So when Paul says of Israel that *'drank from the spiritual rock ... and the rock was Christ'* (10:4), this is precisely what he wants the Corinthians to do. These examples are a fascinating insight into the way early Christians connected the Old Testament stories of Israel with their faith, using the Old Testament as their Bible.

Paul then reminds his readers that because of sin, the Israelites who left Egypt all failed to reach the Promised Land; except, that is, for Moses and Joshua. They all *'died in the wilderness'* (10:5, Numbers 13,14). It is unlikely that Paul believed that God might wipe out the church, but he certainly believed that Christians should heed warnings like this found in the Old Testament (10:6). He points out a well-known fact that the Israelites sinned largely in idolatry and sexual immorality (10:7,8, Exodus 32, Numbers 21, 25). They had tested God through their unfaithfulness, and reaped the reward of death (10:10), the same punishment that God brought upon the Egyptians on the night he liberated Israel (Exodus 12:29f.). It is a stern warning, and Paul puts it crisply in verse 12, *'if you think you are standing, be very careful that you do not fall'*.

The last paragraph of our passage today is well-known, because it contains what is for many people one of the great promises of the New Testament. After issuing the sternest of warnings to the Corinthians, Paul assures them that God is faithful and He will *'not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear'* (10:13). It is a remarkable and supremely helpful text, and without it Paul's warnings in this chapter sounds so dire it might seem that no one can escape God's wrath. The text is fascinating because Paul does not offer any great explanation of this graciousness of God, he simply states that God is faithful (10:13). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says much more about this, explaining how Christ has endured the full

extent of human life and can therefore *'sympathise with our every weakness'* (Hebrews 4:11f.). Paul, however, is far more practical. He adds the faithfulness of God to what seems to be a very earthly argument, which is that *'no testing has come upon you that is not common to human experience'* (10:13).

Underneath all this lies Paul's absolute belief that the God of Jesus Christ who has offered salvation to all through faith will make sure that the Gospel is secure amongst his people, the church. He will indeed rescue his people and make sure that they are not tested beyond what they are able to bear, as he concludes in this passage, *'he will provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it'* (10:13). So although our passage today arises from Paul's deep concern about the spiritual state of the church at Corinth, it eventually offers us a wonderfully reassuring message about the faithfulness of God to his people.

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of this passage
- Baptism and Moses (10:2)
- Spiritual food and spiritual drink (10:3,4)

### **Notes on the translation of this passage**

#### **V2 *'all were baptised into Moses ...'***

This phrase is translated the same in all Bible versions, but the word 'into' sounds odd, even though it is the correct translation. The Greek word 'into' carries the idea of 'concerning' or perhaps 'with reference to'. Altogether, the verse can be paraphrased like this; *this may perhaps help us understand what Paul is saying here, though there is no easy way of translating into English..* It is not how we would normally speak but there is no clear alternative to this in English.

#### **V4 *'they drank from the spiritual rock that came after them ...'***

Most versions of the Bible and the phrase in this way, *'... that accompanied them'*. However, the Greek verb used here, 'akoloutheo', is the same verb used to describe the disciples 'following' Jesus. Spotting this helps us understand the meaning of the verse, see study.

#### **V5 *'they were struck down and died in the wilderness.'***

I have added 'and died' to this phrase because the verb here 'katastrothen' means stricken, or put to death. The reality is that God allowed them to die in the wilderness as a punishment for their sins. One translation could be this, *'God killed them in the wilderness'*, but such a turn of phrase sounds rather extreme. My translation simply puts together the two words that express the meaning of the original Greek.

#### **V7 *'... and they got up to dance'***

Most Bible versions say this, *'and they rose up to play'*. The, however, Greek word at the end of the sentence also means 'to dance', that is, in the sense of general entertainment. Dancing was a common form of entertainment attached to ritual orgies, themselves associated with various gods. This is why the Bible refers to dance here in a rather negative way.

#### **V9 *'we must not put Christ to the test'***

at this point in the biblical text, some of the ancient manuscripts have 'Christ the Lord' and not just 'Christ'. Together with most translators, I suggest that Paul's original was simply 'Christ'. This is because the oldest available evidence for the original letter is the famous papyri, known as the 'Chester Beatty' papyri dating from the second century AD. This does not have the words 'the Lord'

#### **V10 *'the angel of death'***

The different Bible versions translate the Greek in various ways here, many have the expression 'the Destroyer', but I have chosen to use the term 'angel of death', which ties in closely with the story of the Exodus 12 that was clearly in Paul's mind as he wrote. The term was used as a pseudonym for Satan.

### **Baptism and Moses (10:2)**

The notion of being baptised into Moses is not found anywhere else in Jewish writing before the time of Christ or after. It is only found here, and we may safely assume that Paul coined the expression is simply to explain the difference between what it meant to be a Jew and a Christian.

The impression we gain is that Paul thought of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea as something like Christian baptism; it was the event that defined God's people as a nation, dependent on him for salvation. In

this way, the Exodus of Israel through the Red Sea is as important to a Jew as baptism is to Christian, and all of this is quite understandable before we had even considered the matter of water!

How interesting it is that water is important in both 'sacraments'. Some have argued that there can be no such thing as a baptism into Moses through the Red Sea, because the people of Israel walked through the Red Sea on dry land, they did not get wet. On the other hand, in baptism, people get truly wet, for that is the point of baptism. The water is a sign of washing to get rid of sin, so that the Holy Spirit can come into the life of the believer.

Paul's intention however is not total and exact parallel. He has invented this phrase simply to distinguish Jew and Christian, and to point to an earthly experience that is fundamental to what it means to be one or the other.

### ***Spiritual food and spiritual drink (10:3,4)***

We had spotted in the review of this passage that Paul's reference to a spiritual food and spiritual drink reminds us of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. What's, however, does Paul mean by using these words here. When the people of Israel passed through the wilderness, they were given food and drink by God. The foods they were given was 'manna' (Exodus 16:4,14-18), and the drink God provided them with water, on one dramatic occasion, pouring direct from a rock (Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:7-13). Of course such provision was profoundly earthly and natural, for people could not survive in the desert without food and water. The story of God's people in the desert however, leads us to believe that the provision of manna and water in the desert was more than natural provision, it was spiritual provision. For it to be received, it required faith on the part of those who can eat and drink it, and without that faith in God, the people of Israel were without hope.

This is one of many passages of Scripture in which God blesses his people using earthly means, and this gives special significance to those things; they are said to be 'holy'. This passage of Scripture, amongst others, helps us to understand the real meaning of the Lord's Supper, which like this provision is in the form of 'earthly' substances used for 'heavenly' purposes. Whilst the substances themselves are important, what they signify is even more so. For some this is a sufficient explanation of what we mean by bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

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## **Discipleship**

### **Application**

#### ***Bearing burdens in the Fellowship of the church***

Remember, when Paul said '*no testing has taken hold of you that is not common to human experience*', he was speaking to the Corinthian Christians as a church. Individuals within the church were not functioning as God's people because of their disunity; their party strife prevented them from being a force for the Gospel, and the Lord needed them to be united in Him. It is to such people that Paul said '*if you think you are standing, be very careful that you do not fall*' (10:12). Paul knew very well that if the church was to survive, then its individual members needed to support one another especially in times of trial, and this must surely have been on his mind when he spoke about bearing trials and difficulties (10:12,13).

There are times when each one of us feel that we are being tested beyond what we can bear. It is at such times that we need to know the provision of God, and sometimes this provision is given through fellowship and the life of the church, as Paul suggests in this passage. Our individual need, within the true body of Christ, becomes the need of all, and immediately, we are surrounded by a company of people who will pray for us and help us in whatever way they can. When the church is functioning properly, this should be our experience. If it is not, it is no use looking at each other for excuses and ways to get things better.

### **The Questions for groups**

1. In your group, make a list of the different teaching you find within this passage. Which of these are the most important for the life of God's people today?
2. To what extent can we talk about the sins of the church today? What is a sin of the church? How and why does seem arise amongst God's people?

3. How is the church tested in the world today, and why? To what extent is the promise found in verse 13 applicable to the church, or is it applicable to individuals only?

## Discipleship challenges

- *Let the first part of this challenge you (10:1-11); read these verses over again and measure yourself against what it has to say about sin, obedience and faith.*
- *After doing this, read again the last two verses, which contain the great promise of God that he will not test His people beyond what they can bear. Receive these promises as your own, and praise God. Make an opportunity to talk about this promise of God to someone else who is struggling, and tell them that this text is for them, as well.*

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## Final Prayer

Remember us O Lord, and flood our lives with the joy of Your presence! We praise you for Your abiding presence with us now, but we ask for patience as we wait for You do works of power in our lives. You help us by working in all peace and harmony and also with great power and might. We trust You, O Lord, and believe that You alone know what is right for us in all the circumstances of life. AMEN

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